

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a dark, thin branch, possibly a holly or similar winter shrub, covered in a light dusting of snow. The branch is set against a clear, pale blue sky. Numerous warm white lights, likely Christmas lights, are visible, some in sharp focus and others as soft, glowing bokeh circles. The overall mood is serene and festive.

TIDINGS
OF

Joy

Christmas Devotions from Denver Seminary

Bethlehem

Why is the Thing that happened there
Still gladly remembered everywhere?

Why does the Thing that happened then
Still deeply enthrall the hearts of men?

Why does the Birth, to this age without creed,
Still mean what the skeptic is loath to concede?

Why does such glory and radiance cling
About that everyday, commonplace Thing?

Why does that Place with a star poised above
Prompt us by giving to show forth our love?

Immanuel! Yea, the old Story is true
That God in His love was spendthrift too!

Vernon Grounds

Copyright Denver Seminary ©2010
All Rights Reserved

Some scripture taken from the New
International Version, copyright 1978 by
the New York International Bible Society,
used by permission.

Some Scripture taken from
THE MESSAGE. Copyright © 1993,
1994, 1995. Used by permission of
NavPress Publishing Group.

There's nothing quite like Christmas, is there? It's our holiday on steroids. Excess rules the day. Some embrace it; others endure it. America's story-teller, Garrison Keillor, quipped, "A lovely thing about Christmas is that it's compulsory, like a thunderstorm, and we all go through it together."

I happen to love the Christmas season. For me, it's not about the excess. It's all about anticipation. Once the calendar turns to December, each day brings us closer to the day we've been looking forward to. Along the way there are plenty of parties, cookies, concerts, decorations and family time. And finally we wake on that glorious day of rejoicing: *The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born!* (Luke 2:11; NLT)

Denver Seminary would like to give you a gift this Christmas. Our faculty and staff have written these twenty-five daily devotionals to guide you through the days of anticipation leading up to the morning when we celebrate the Lord's birth. Our prayer is that each day these devotionals will help you navigate the excess of the Christmas season by focusing your attention on the excess of God's glorious grace.

Merry Christmas!

Mark Young
President
Denver Seminary

December 1

CHRISTMAS GOD'S WAY INSTEAD OF MY WAY

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

ISAIAH 53:2-3

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord.

ISAIAH 55:8

My way: Jesus would come as a powerful king.

God's way: Jesus came as a powerless baby.

My way: Jesus would conquer evil as a triumphant warrior.

God's way: Jesus was crucified as a silent lamb.

My way: Jesus would attract the strong and powerful by the magnetism of His presence.

God's way: Jesus served the little, the least, and the lost.

God brought about the advent of His Son in a way that was completely different from how I would have done it. The advent was not what was expected, but it was what was needed. God came as one of us into our littleness, our lostness, and our wondering: Does anybody care? Do I matter in any way?

How good it is that He didn't appear as so many anticipated—as a coming warrior—but instead as a child, the little one, the crucified one. Had He come in power and glory, it would have simply reinforced the distance between the divine and the human. Instead, in His very person, Jesus became the bridge between God and humanity. He became like us, so we could become like Him.

One of the beautiful things about Isaiah 53 is that it combines the beginning with the end in terms of Jesus' ministry and His advent—the cradle and the cross. It is also a reminder of the loving understanding Jesus possesses toward us as we suffer, struggle, and endure sorrow. The man of sorrows comforts us in our sorrows so that we might comfort others with the same comfort with which we have been comforted (2 Cor 1:3-6). This is indeed "glad tidings of great joy for all people" and the glorious good news of Christmas: that we, as the recipients of God's self-giving love, can offer that love through selfless and humble service to all the people in this world that God so loves.

Howard Baker
Instructor of Christian Formation

December 2

READY FOR THE LIFE TO COME

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 2:29–32

2

Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches refer to this outburst of praise by the aged prophet Simeon in the Jerusalem temple as the *Nunc Dimittis*, after the two Latin words for “now dismiss,” and often include it as part of the communion liturgy. Simeon had been told by God that he would live to see his people’s Messiah, and as he cradled the Christ-child in his arms, he assured God that now he was ready to die.

A retired colleague and former pastor wryly observed not too long ago that “Christians always say they want to go and be with Jesus, but they’re never ready to do so now!” Of course, I have met some quite elderly and infirm believers who were more than ready to go and uncertain why God hadn’t already taken them. But they are certainly the exceptional individuals.

Tom Sine, Christian future trends watcher and author of books like *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy*, *Wild Hope*, and *Mustard Seed vs. McWorld*, says that he doesn’t think many American Christians really believe in their coming bodily resurrection even though it’s so central to historic Christian faith as to be a part of the Apostles’ Creed. When his audiences look a little stunned from that remark, he explains that it’s because we’re still trying to have it all in this life—health, wealth, long life, interesting travel.

If we really believed that one day the new heavens and new earth pictured in Revelation 21–22 will be ours forever, we’d stop trying to get everything before we die and be content to wait, using our goods in this life to serve the least, the last, and the lost.

How about you? Is this Christmas just another time to overspend on family and hope you get at least as much in return, or is it a time to give up something, to give something away? Can we truly say with Simeon that we’re content to depart this life in peace because we, too, have seen the Christ-child and know our future is secure?

Craig Blomberg
Distinguished Professor of New Testament

December 3

NOT THE WAY IT WAS... OR WAS IT?

... he made himself nothing, by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

PHILIPPIANS 2:7

3

Like many households, among the items we will display in our home this advent and Christmas seasons will be a crèche. I purchased the carved, wooden figures for this set in Israel when I was there for a course as a college student. The figures include Mary, Joseph, some shepherds, some sheep, a donkey, a cow, and of course, baby Jesus. They were a gift for my parents, who bought a structure for the figures from a retired fellow who made things out of scrap wood. It is a simple, rectangular building, with three walls made of square blocks of wood. The roof is plywood, covered with shredded rope (representing, I suppose, a type of thatched roof). Over the years, some of the bits of rope have fallen-off, yielding patches with no rope at all and exposing the wood. The building is surrounded by a wooden fence. It, too, has deteriorated a bit with use, with one rail cracked and tilted.

From that year to this, carefully unpacking and arranging this building and these figures, we always include a bit of straw, and we don't put baby Jesus in until Christmas morning while we sing. It is one of the most meaningful parts of "decorating" our home.

Is our crèche an historically accurate rendering of the original night of incarnation? I doubt it. And, given its deterioration, who would want to display it in their family room or living room? We want things in our homes that are nice and clean and in good-condition, not banged-up or broken.

Neither the circumstances nor the birth of Jesus itself were nice and clean. And His birth was the passageway into a life that took its toll—a life spent in servanthood to both God His Father and to human beings. The toll was nothing other than both His life and His death.

Knowing that our family's crèche is not historically accurate, I am sometimes a bit self-conscious when I unpack it and I am sometimes tempted to repair the roof and the fence. But the more I think about it, the more I realize that, in other respects, this crèche serves as a very fine symbol of what that first advent, and the life which followed, was really like—that is, not only supernatural, but genuinely earthy and earthly.

David Buschart
Associate Dean and Professor of Theology and Historical Studies

December 4

THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INCARNATION

4

During the Christmas season, we celebrate our Lord's incarnation—His taking upon human nature, His becoming like one of us. He entered the sinful world by taking upon human flesh. What then is the theological significance of the incarnation?

First, the incarnation was about bridging the moral gap between a holy God and wicked sinners. By becoming a human being, Jesus Christ became the only mediator—the God-man—between God and us, paying the price for the sins of the world.

Second, the incarnation was about God's self-humiliation. Through the incarnation of the Son of God, God put Himself in a humble and vulnerable place. In this way, the triune God demonstrated His serving heart, mercy, compassion, and humility toward the dead, enslaved, poor, cursed and wicked.

Third, the incarnation was about God's self-revelation—the triune God manifested His sacrificial love, amazing grace, almighty power, and infinite wisdom. The Lord Jesus said that when we see Him, we see the Father. In other words, God is Christlike and the incarnation affirms this truth.

Fourth, the incarnation was about God's redemption. God the Son came to the world to save sinners, to redeem the fallen world, to crush the head of the Devil, and to establish the Kingdom of God. In His person, ministry, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ embodied the Kingdom and its values.

Fifth, we affirm that the Christian faith has an inherently supernatural character by confessing the incarnation as a divine miracle. Thus, a naturalistic world-view is opposite to the Christian faith.

These are major reasons why we should celebrate God the Son's incarnation. Hallelujah!

Sung Wook Chung
Associate Professor of Theology and Director of Korean Initiatives

December 5

JESUS' BIRTH IS FOR EVERYONE

A man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout . . . said:

“Sovereign Lord . . . , you may now dismiss your servant in peace. My eyes have seen your salvation” There was also a prophetess, Anna . . . 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 2:29–31, 36–38

What begins as an ordinary day for Simeon and Anna turns into an extraordinary one. As usual, Simeon rises up early and prepares to spend the day serving God. Led by the Spirit, Simeon makes his way to the Temple, and as he looks at Mary and Joseph entering the building to dedicate baby Jesus and to offer a sacrifice, his heart bursts with joy. Simeon lovingly welcomes them and declares, “My eyes have seen your salvation.”

Coincidentally, the prophetess Anna happens to walk by. Moved by the Spirit, she breaks out in praises to God, proclaiming boldly that the long awaited Messiah has finally come, the one whose advent had been foretold by prophets long ago (Isa 9:6–7; Mic 5:2; Isa 53; Zech 12:10). A reader of the text can easily imagine Simeon and Anna, two very old people, dancing for joy in the Temple court!

This story reveals a number of interesting contrasts and insights:

1. Simeon and Anna were advanced in years. Jesus was a little baby. Salvation is for the young and the old.
2. In the Mosaic Law, a woman who gives birth is required to offer a purification offering. In Luke, the Spirit orchestrates the events of the day. God gives the Law and the Spirit.
3. Simeon, a righteous and devout man receives confirmation that Jesus is the awaited Messiah. Prophetess Anna, a woman, receives the same message. Men and women are welcome in God's presence.
4. Simeon makes his declaration inside the Temple. Anna proclaims the Good News outside. The gospel is for everyone, inside and outside.

May we join in celebration with Simeon and Anna, proclaiming boldly that the Messiah has come to redeem men and women, young and old, rich and poor, strong and weak. A Merry Christmas to all who will welcome Him into their lives!

Hélène Dallaire
Associate Professor of Old Testament

December 6

THE REIGNING BABE OF BETHLEHEM

As we survey the world scene today our inclination may be to become discouraged, perhaps even depressed. Rogue nations threaten the destruction of God's people Israel, support ruthless terrorist groups, threaten nuclear weapons, and spread false ideologies. Political leaders at home prove to be self-serving, often corrupt, and with little fear of God in their hearts.

God's prophet Micah lived in an even darker day, when pagan nations threatened to invade Israel and Judah and carry them into captivity. Underlying this national threat were the callous sins of the house of Israel, the rebellion of their leaders, the injustice of their judges, and the false teachings of many priests.

Amidst such dark days, faithful prophets in Israel, such as Isaiah and Micah, announced the coming of a Deliverer who would be no worldly military or political leader, but who would be born in a simple inn in the humble town of Bethlehem (Luke 2:4–7). This ruler would be unlike any child ever born, for God declared,

*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the
clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times. (Mic 5:2)*

The coming Messiah, who would bear the name Jesus, is none other than the everlasting God Himself in human flesh. At His second coming, the promised King in the line of David would gather up and shepherd His faithful flock (Mic 2:12; 5:4), implement peace by destroying all weapons of war (5:10), eliminate all idolatrous worship (5:12–14), and execute vengeance upon the God-defiant nations (5:15).

The hope of the world this advent season rests squarely on the promise of the soon coming Messiah, born in humble circumstances, who will finally redeem His faithful people and reign in righteousness forever. This Christmas season, let us be fully assured that through God's grace we who believe on Him are on the winning side in the age-long struggle between good and evil. As Micah, guided by the Spirit, put it:

*In the last days
The mountain of the Lord's temple will be established
As chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills,
and peoples will stream to it. (Mic 4:1)*

December 7

PEOPLE GET READY

And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

LUKE 2:48-49

In her stirring song “People Get Ready,” Misty Edwards reminds us that Jesus is no longer a baby, nor broken on a cross—He is poised to return from heaven at any moment. Her message is good, and much needed. Still, I’m sure she would agree we must not get ready at the expense of the abject self-limitation of the incarnation. The Majestic King for whose second advent we prepare had a remarkably unassuming first advent.

Reading in Heb 5:8 that Jesus learned obedience through what He suffered, we think of His passion and death, His birth a remote prerequisite. But could He have learned the obedience necessary to His mission as Savior had He sidestepped childhood? Our faith affirms that from His conception on, our Divine King has been fully human. Since Adam and Eve, the norm has been that after humans are born, they grow and learn. While we know little about Jesus’ childhood, Luke 2:43–52 is illuminating. Jesus had the choice whether to dismiss His earthly parents in favor of His heavenly Father. He increased in wisdom and stature, among other reasons, because He went with Mary and Joseph and was submissive to them (v. 51). He pleased God by perfectly obeying the fifth commandment. He’s not a baby anymore, but His infancy and youth are as essential to our salvation as His ministry and crucifixion.

It is important that we consider the descent God made on our behalf. It isn’t just that He became a man, but that omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence encumbered Himself with finiteness and the need to learn obedience. The greatness of our God was for a time wrapped in swaddling clothes. The One who spoke the universe into existence was reduced to wordlessness. The Lord at whose feet every knee will bow was subjected to human parents. Had there been another way, I imagine God would have taken it. There wasn’t; He didn’t; so let’s take the time to celebrate it with due amazement and a renewed commitment to learning obedience ourselves.

Elodie Emig
Instructor of Greek

December 8

THE WORD IS JESUS: LISTEN TO HIM

JOHN 1:1-18

8

John begins his Gospel with a profound statement about the truth that matters most: “In the beginning was the Word” and this Word was “with God and was God.” The Word came to earth as Jesus Christ, “full of grace and truth.” But every day we are bombarded by other words, written and spoken—in newspapers, magazines, and books; on television, radio, and iPods. Words come at us from every direction. People speak to us, whether face-to-face or by telephone, email, text messaging, or other media. But many of these words miss the truth. How is “the Word” different?

John stresses that Jesus is no mere man. He is eternal and fully divine. He created the universe and “all things were made through him.” But He did more than create the world. He became flesh in order to communicate truth to human beings. Jesus spoke nothing but truth, lived life according to the truth, and left an indelible mark on time and eternity. Jesus is so full of truth that the darkness of ignorance and deception cannot overpower Him. He is the voice of God calling out to a world tired of spin, lies, and confusion. His Word needs to be heeded and trusted, because He alone is the eternal Word.

The idea that God Himself invaded earth through Jesus is no religious cliché. It is earth-shaking and life-changing truth. God has spoken through His own Word. This truth sets Christians apart from all other religions and philosophies. The incarnation was a visitation like no other—and one that leaves nothing the same. The darkness of humanity was exposed by the glorious light of “grace and truth” (v. 14). What kind of light could make this happen?

Before the creation was “the Word,” who was in an eternal relationship with God the Father. This divine Word was the agent of creation and the source of its life. The Word was no mere philosophical principle or heavenly being content to bask in divine glory. No, the Word made His dwelling in our midst by coming to earth as Jesus of Nazareth. The Author of the cosmic story of redemption and judgment became one of its characters—the lead Actor. He did so by living a matchless life, dying a matchless death to atone for our sins, and by rising again as Lord of the universe.

Although He created the world, many of His own creatures rejected Him, loving their familiar darkness more than the wild and radical radiance of “the Word made flesh.” But others, by the grace of God, exchanged their darkness for His Light, and became children of God. Have you done so? If so, have you made it your earnest desire to reflect through your own life the light that shines in the darkness?

Douglas Groothuis
Professor of Philosophy

December 9

THE PIERCING SWORD

“And a sword shall pierce your own soul too.”

LUKE 2:35B

9

I wonder how Mary reacted to Simeon’s prophesy that not only would her infant child be subject to rejection and pain, but that she too would suffer? Did she even hear these words? After all, Simeon had just held Jesus in his arms and praised God for this child who was to be the salvation of humankind: A light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel (Luke 2:32). We are told that she marveled at what was said about him (vs. 33). Surely it was easier to focus on the exciting part of this prophesy, as no mother wants to accept that bad things will happen to her child. Yet Jesus did suffer, as did Mary.

I found myself especially identifying with Mary over the past couple of years as our teenaged son, Nathan, endured a continual, severe migraine headache for 21 months straight. I felt totally helpless as medications, specialists, chiropractors, acupuncturists, naturopaths, and much prayer did nothing to alleviate his pain. Unlike Jesus, no direct prophesies were made over Nathan as an infant, but the miraculous way God dropped this adopted child into our lives led me to believe that God had His hand on him. So my initial pleas for God to take Nathan’s headache away began to shift to, “God, use my child’s suffering to somehow further your purpose for him, to make him into the man you would have him be.” The pain of the “sword in my soul” became more bearable as God reminded me that He can redeem even that which Satan intends for harm.

Much to my relief, Nathan’s headache inexplicably disappeared one day and he has been pain-free for several months. I have yet to see the redemptive side to his pain; the emotional and spiritual scars are more apparent. I also know that Nathan will inevitably suffer in other ways throughout life; suffering that even a mother’s love is not powerful enough to make go away. I realize that when my son hurts, no matter how old he is, I will likely also suffer. I trust, however, that we will all be able to take on Mary’s perspective; to marvel at God’s great gifts while trusting that even suffering fits into His overall plan for both us and our children.

Heather Davediuk Gingrich
Associate Professor of Counseling

December 10

HOPE IN THE MIDST OF FAILURE

I will make an enemy out of you and the woman and out of your offspring and her offspring.

He will crush your head even as you will crush him in the heel.

GENESIS 3:15

10

This passage of judgment, as God speaks to the snake after Adam and Eve's fall into sin, illustrates the terrible consequence of sin while at the same time promising the hope of something better to come. Sin creates alienation. So the snake is set against the human race, and the natural world that God created no longer provides a safe home and plentiful food. Now people will need to work for their food and fight against the difficulties and dangers of the world. Now the offspring of the snake will vex the human race and its greatest manifestation in the serpent, who is Satan himself, will seek to destroy forever life and hope (Rev 12).

On one level, this is simply a reading of how people will fight against snakes by killing them with a blow to the head, whereas snakes will threaten people with biting them on the heel and foot, where they can reach them. On another level, however, Christians down through the ages have found here the promise of One who will come and destroy the Serpent and the sin that he represents once and for all. In the serpent's injury of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, we may see the death of the Son of God for our sins. In the crushed head of the Serpent, surely a mortal wound, we may find the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and His victory over sin.

This verse opens the door to a hope for Jesus in His first coming, to die for our sins and to conquer sin and death. It also looks forward to a time of the final defeat of sin, death, and Satan in Jesus' second coming. Although we can only read hints of all that is coming in this verse, it is enough to provide hope for generations of the faithful who looked to Jesus' first coming and an even greater expectation for those of us who can rejoice in the meaning of Christmas and look to Jesus' coming again.

Rick Hess

Earl S. Kalland Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages

December 11

A BIRTH OF IRONIES

In Acts 13, Paul visits Pisidian Antioch. As was his custom, he went to the synagogue and, after being invited to speak, stood up and began to explain about Jesus, saying:

God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had accompanied him from Galilee to Jerusalem. These are now his witnesses to the people. And we proclaim to you the good news about the promise to our ancestors, that this promise God has fulfilled to us, their children, by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second psalm, 'You are my Son; today I have fathered you.'

ACTS 13:30-33 (NET)

This power and fulfillment was something Paul was to return to over and over again throughout his life and ministry. The impact of this power in his life was so tremendous that he was compelled to serve the risen Lord no matter the risks. And yet, as his quote of Psalm 2 reveals, he never forgot Jesus' humble beginnings.

Christmas! The first advent of the Messiah. The fulfillment of God's promises and the dreams of God's people. The simple birth of a baby represented the grandest act in the most wonderful story of all creation—God sending His Son because of His deep love for us. It is a story of ironies on so many levels. Jesus gave up His glorious home for a filthy stable. He walked away from incomprehensible joy for the cross and shame. He stepped out of a secure relationship to embrace people deeply broken by sin. He gave up freedom to learn obedience. He exchanged acceptance by God for rejection by people. And, perhaps most intriguing of all, He abandoned independence for complete dependence on Mary.

This Christmas season we will sing the all-familiar Christmas songs. We will be given a break from the labor of work under the curse. We will enjoy family in ways that often seems elusive the rest of the year. We will, for a brief moment, reflect on the birth of Jesus—and we should! But I pray that your reflection and celebration will bring deep encouragement and blessing, knowing that the supreme God of the universe loved you enough to send His only Son. At no other time in history has a simple birth been such a great sacrifice. Merry Christmas!

Jim Howard
VP of Advancement

WHO EXPERIENCED JESUS FIRST?

What do these people have in common?

- A pregnant, unmarried teenager
- Violent and unclean Gypsies of the lowest social class
- Foreigners
- A common laborer
- Refugees
- An old homeless woman and an old man

These were the people who first experienced Jesus. None of them had any kind of special status in the society of that time. They were on the outskirts of society, the marginalized, the overlooked, the despised, the forgotten. Our greeting card images of Christmas blind us to this fact.

Jesus came first to those who were outsiders. Mary was stigmatized as a sinner. The shepherds were despised and unwanted—they probably only spoke the local dialect (Bethlehemish?) instead of standard Aramaic. The magi probably looked weird and spoke with a strange accent, and they obviously didn't understand the local culture (how else to explain such unpractical gifts). Joseph and Mary were homeless and had to flee as refugees to Egypt (which meant that Jesus himself was a refugee). And the elderly Anna and Simeon were in their final days and no longer fulfilled any useful function in society. When Jesus announced His ministry in Luke 4:18–19, He made verbally explicit what He had already demonstrated through His birth:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18–19)

The ones to whom He would minister were the same ones to whom He had first appeared. Jesus came to the poor. He came to the sick—to those who need a doctor, not to the healthy. Jesus came to the prisoners and oppressed and handicapped, because they needed Him.

Does Jesus come to us today? At the beginning we come to Jesus, knowing that we need Him. But later, we try to make ourselves pretty and clean, so that we don't need Him anymore. We think we aren't poor, and so we miss Him. We think that we are healthy, and then Jesus is not there for us any longer. But when we constantly acknowledge that we are poor and helpless, imprisoned and blind—either physically or spiritually—then Jesus can come to us.

December 13

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS AND CHRISTIANS

“I am the Light of the world.”

JOHN 8:12

13

This time of year we join our neighbors (compete with some) in the tradition of hanging lights on our house. As I have labored in this endeavor, I have realized that Christians are much like Christmas lights. Christmas lights get all tangled up! We are of little use to God and this world when we are so busy and tangled up in the world and the busyness of the world. Our relationship with Christ is often only a small part of this tangle.

Remember the BIG colored lights? They aren't quite as popular as they used to be, but they are still around. These are the more mature saints in the Body. They've seen more Christmases come and go and they've learned the true value of the season. Some of the color may be chipped away, but they still work and bring back lots of great memories.

Some lights are really flashy and “traveling.” They are attractive, fun, exciting, and enthusiastic! Unfortunately, at times we tend to only notice the flashy things and miss the important things. The traveling lights look like they're going somewhere when they're not. Some who claim to follow Christ are like traveling lights—lots of talk, little movement.

Basically there are two ways Christmas lights are wired. First, when one burns out, the others are not affected . . . no one really notices. Similarly, if someone has a problem, does anyone notice? Secondly, when one light burns out, they all go out! We hate it when a whole string of lights quits—we have to pull out each individual light to find the burned out light. Similarly, when one has a problem, we gather . . . this condition gets everyone's attention since everyone notices.

As you enjoy this Christmas season, what type of light do you want to be? What type of light are you?

Larry Lindquist
Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Evangelism

December 14

HUMILITY

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

ISAIAH 9:6

14

Handel's Messiah surely made this passage familiar and memorable. The church has long recognized the fulfillment to be found in the Christ-child.

The four-fold name of the coming King reminds us that He is Immanuel (Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God) and that His rule will be characterized by nurture, discipline, security, and well-being (Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace).

Striking in the passage is that the King would come in humiliation and would be born as a child. Philip Yancey, in his book *The Jesus I Never Knew*, vividly reminds us of the humility of Jesus' birth:

Imagine for a moment becoming a baby again: giving up language and muscle coordination, and the ability to eat solid food and control your bladder. God as a fetus! Or imagine yourself becoming a sea slug—that analogy is probably closer. On that day in Bethlehem, the Maker of All That Is took form as a helpless, dependent newborn.

Humility would characterize Jesus' time on earth from the humble circumstances of His birth and childhood, to His ministry of foot-washing, to His death on the cross.

In what became an elegant hymn of the early church, Paul describes the mind of Christ who *did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness* (Phil 2:6–7).

Both Moses (Num 12:3) and Daniel (Dan 10:12) are commended for their humility. Similarly, Jesus describes Himself as gentle and humble, *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls* (Matt 11:29). The virtue of humility was not valued in the Greco-Roman culture, and yet it was one Jesus longed to see in His disciples. In the concluding words of Peter's first letter, we are charged to *clothe ourselves with humility toward one another, because 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble and oppressed'* (1 Pet 5:5).

What does humility look like? Paul reminds us that, like Jesus, it demands *not looking to our own interests but each of us to the interests of others* (Phil 2:4).

Randy MacFarland
Provost and Dean

December 15

CHANGING JOBS BECAUSE OF CHRISTMAS

(Based on a 2004 sermon by Ken Trivette)

There were shepherds . . . keeping watch over their flocks . . . An angel . . . appeared . . . they were terrified . . . the angel said, “. . . a Savior has been born . . . Christ the Lord . . . You will find a baby . . . lying in a manger.” . . . “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see . . . which the Lord has told us . . .” So they hurried . . . and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby . . . When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them.

LUKE 2:8-17

Things are difficult this Christmas with our unstable economy. Some are out of work, some underemployed, and others overworked as they assume responsibilities that belonged to those who were laid off. Similarly, this passage reveals that on that Christmas night the shepherds willingly left their jobs for an unknown mission.

Many biblical leaders were shepherds and Jesus likened God to a “good shepherd;” still the job was often looked down upon as a lowly occupation for simple, unlearned men. How amazing that angels announced the birth of Christ, not to religious leaders or the wealthy, but to commoners. As you’d expect, the shepherds were “terrified,” but the angel assured them that this announcement was good news—the Messiah their faith had longed for was born!

We can speculate that dialogue might be missing from this passage as it would be normal to question the visitation and message. It would even be normal to question their sanity. Maybe some wanted to run away and hide! Still they decided to go and see for themselves even though that meant leaving the only job they knew.

In our context, they chose to walk off their job! Again, we don’t know what they thought or experienced other than having “seen him,” this baby who was named “Savior” and “Christ the Lord.” Yet they decided to leave their flocks and past identities to go and share what they had heard and seen. The Messiah was born!

We too have been told the meaning of Jesus’ birth. Are we to say it’s not our job, or are we ready to take on the privilege of a new calling—to “spread the word” to those who have not yet understood the angel’s message?

Jan McCormack
Director of Chaplaincy and Pastoral Counseling

JOYFUL EXISTENCE

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, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

LUKE 2:28-32

16

For most of us, it is difficult to imagine that there was a “righteous and devout” man called Simeon waiting for the birth of Christ. But in the light of Old Testament prophecy, Simeon was promised by the Holy Spirit that “he would not die before had seen the Lord’s Christ.” Holding the baby Jesus in his arms, Simeon witnessed the fulfillment of the prophecies given hundreds of years ago, and he said, “My eyes have seen your salvation.” Jesus was not merely one child added to the population of the Jews; He was pivotal for faith. Those who believed in Him were transformed from darkness to a marvelous light and were called the children of God. Those who rejected Him were destined to eternal condemnation. As we reflect on God’s goodness during this Christmas season, it is very important to cherish this moment and give gratitude to God for enabling us to see His “salvation” and be a part of His redemptive plan.

Simeon perceived that the true purpose of God was to reach out also to the Gentile—you and me. In case we have forgotten, Paul reminds us:

Remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” . . . remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.” (Eph 2:11-13)

Paul’s use of the word “remember” twice in this passage helps us appreciate the grace that is given to us as we were “without hope and without God in the world.” Jesus Christ changed our status. Christ was not only a “consolation for Israel;” he was also “a light for revelation to the Gentiles.” That is what Christmas is all about.

Alex Mekonnen
Associate Professor of Intercultural Studies

December 17

LET'S BEHOLD THE MANGER AND WORSHIP

Glory to God in the Highest.

LUKE 2:14

The empty cross, the empty tomb, and the baby in the manger are telling images of Christianity. These images point to a cluster of events that are considered essential to the history of salvation. If the empty cross signifies the Savior's once and for all sacrifice for our sins, and the empty tomb His triumph over all our enemies, including death, the baby in the manger symbolizes God's unprecedented entrance into the world through the mystery of the incarnation.

But while Christians enthusiastically embrace the first two images, there is a tendency on the part of some to shy away from the third. But, as far as the meaning of advent is concerned, the sight of the Christ child lying in the lowly crib outstrips all the other images that have come to dominate the Yule-tide.

It is evident that the manger spectacle was not a human invention—it was God's own doing. It is beyond doubt that if the protagonists had any choice in the matter, a crib made of hay would not have been the symbol of God's visitation to planet earth. Because of its divine provenance, reflection on this lowly scene is likely to yield insights that no other culturally-engendered images can produce.

This seems to be the experience of those who were led to behold that scene on that first Christmas Day. Indeed, their gaze not only resulted in deeper insights into the divine mystery, it prompted in them responses that were foreign to the mainstream culture. One response that leaps from their story is the incitement to worship. As the angel broke the news of the birth of Christ to the shepherds and pointed them to the manger, he was joined by a heavenly host, together forming an angelic choir that sang: "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14). The shepherds subsequently joined in the adoration and glorified God for what they had "heard and seen" (v. 20).

Here is the point: The manger evoked adoration in both heaven and earth. The manger thus becomes a call to worship. This is because we come face to face with divine condescension (John 1:14, 18), the utter trustworthiness of God (v. 20b, Gal 4:4), and the unique Son of God: Savior, Messiah, and Lord (v. 11). Like the angelic host and the shepherds, let's behold the manger and worship.

Dieumème Noelliste

Professor of Theological Ethics; Director of the Grounds Institute of Public Ethics

December 18

CHRISTMAS, CONCEPTION, AND A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon 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 1:35

18

There is something puzzling about the emphasis that Christian traditions place on Christmas. It often appears that we consider this to be a celebration of the moment that God entered into history in the person of Jesus. But that can't be right. Prior to the birth of Christ, John the Baptist leapt in his mother Elizabeth's womb when he came close to the unborn Jesus (Luke 1:41). Perhaps John understood something we miss—God's special invasion of history began about nine months before the “first noel.”

We Christians take a special view of the sanctity of human life from the moment of conception onward. If the significance of Christmas is to be fully appreciated, then we must see it in the context of the entire story of Jesus' human life from its beginning to its triumphal end. Christians often think the story begins on Christmas and ends at His ascension. But, Christ was human before his birth; moreover, He remains human—the “God-man” to this day and forevermore. Thus, does the mystery go farther? Did God also occupy the earth as a mere fetus? An embryo? A zygote? A single cell?

It is very difficult to embrace the fact that each of us started from such humble, single cellular beginnings. The idea that I was once a zygote is astonishing. But the question “Did God become a zygote?” seems almost beyond the pale. But once we embrace the fact that God became human, and that life begins at conception, the question is not merely posed but must be answered in the affirmative.

By coming to us in human form, God identified with all of humanity, even the tiniest of us. And when we cease to view Christmas as one bookend of Christ's human life, the larger mystery that Christmas represents, and its implications regarding the sanctity of human life, becomes more vividly apparent to us.

Christmas is a wonderful time for reflection. During this Christmas season, spend time reflecting on the fuller mystery of the incarnation.

Troy Nunley
Assistant Professor of Philosophy

December 19

COMMUNICATION IS A LIFE

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 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 had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

HEBREWS 1:1–3

God “has spoken to us by his Son” who is “the exact representation of his being” (Heb 1:2–3). In Jesus, God said, “This is what I look like as a baby.” And yet, Jesus disturbed a king. No one is too great to be exempt from His effect.

“This is what I look like at twelve.” Jesus followed God first, and then His parents—He was found conversing in the temple rather than going home with them (Luke 2:42–50). What would it have been like to know that every time there was a disagreement with your parents that you were right? Yet He submitted to them (Luke 2:51).

“This is what I look like as an adult.” Jesus could say, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). From the very beginning in a manger God was saying, “This is what I am like.” It was the life of Jesus that gave His words power. He did not tell His disciples that He was the Son of God. His life told them that. He asked them, “Who do you say I am?” He did not say, “This is who I am—do you agree?” They would have thought Him deluded had He begun His ministry by telling them He was God. But His life convinced them—even James, His disbelieving brother. There was no other explanation for His life.

God spoke to us in His Son, and not just in His Son’s words. Jesus’ words explained His life, but His life validated His words. When John sent his disciples to ask if Jesus was the Expected One, Jesus replied that the answer was to look at what He was doing (Matt 11:2–5). Listening to Jesus’ words might make one believe that He was the greatest teacher ever, but His life says that He was God. There is no other explanation.

At Christmas, we celebrate the time when God began to speak by allowing us to see Him through the life of Jesus—not just hear His words. And, as He did through Jesus’ life, God wants to speak through our lives too. He can use our words, but it is our lives that validate our words. It makes them believable.

What are our lives saying to others: that we are deluding ourselves, or that God is in us?

David Osborn
Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program

December 20

THE INCARNATION AND THE MYSTERY OF CHRISTMAS

20

Advent and Christmas are wonderful occasions to ponder the broader significance of the incarnation for our salvation. Certainly, the incarnation was necessary in order for Jesus to provide forgiveness for sin on the cross. Yet, the incarnation was itself one of God's unique acts of bringing something out of nothing: possibility from impossibility, hope from desperation, victory from defeat, freedom from bondage, life from death. What God did with the babe in the manger was the same as what He did with the resurrection and what He continues to do in order to bring us to life.

Scottish theologian T. F. Torrance once observed a theological similarity between how Jesus was "raised up as the appointed Messiah, the anointed Prophet, Priest and King" and how "The resurrection implies the installation or enthronement of Jesus in his office as Christos" (*Space, Time and Resurrection*, 33). Even as far back as creation we see God creating—"raising up"—from nothing. That pattern continues throughout redemptive history. God takes the first step toward us in our sin, blindness, bondage, hopelessness, and death. In Jesus Christ, the Son of God experienced the full effects of our predicament and gave to the Father the faithfulness that we have all failed to give.

The redemption that was accomplished on the cross and at the empty tomb was in motion from the moment of His conception, and even before that! God brought Jesus' human life out of an impossible situation. Then, as the Son of God, Jesus brought back into being an obedient humanity by willingly enduring the limitations, fears, frustrations, and tears of our brokenness without any personal sin. God brought something out of nothing!

At this season we can be profoundly grateful for the gift of the incarnation. We symbolize that gratitude by giving and receiving gifts. A child may experience expanding gratitude toward parents as he or she becomes more aware of all that the parents have given. Likewise, we are enriched to have the dimensions of our gratitude to God expanded by getting a fuller glimpse of the ways God has always been working to give us life—and to give us life again.

Don Payne

Associate Dean and Assistant Professor of Theology and Ministry

December 21

WHAT WILL YOU GIVE?

“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)

21

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, while 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 those words 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 Eph 5:2 remind us that we are to “walk in love” after the example that Christ Himself set for us in the sacrifice of His very life for our salvation. Walking in love with those around us does not have to involve extensive time or financial commitment, as 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 during this Holiday season? Think about the gifts on which you spend so much money and time. 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 the 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.

Ronald D. Welch
Associate Professor of Counseling

THE SIGN OF THE IMMANUEL CHILD

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

ISAIAH 7:14

The sign of the Immanuel child, given to King Ahaz of Judah in the 8th century B.C. from the prophet Isaiah, was a curious one indeed. For King Ahaz was in a serious military, political, and social predicament. What should he do about the advancing Assyrian armies to the north? How should he respond to the problems with Egypt to the south? What action should he take concerning the alliance that his immediate neighbor, the kingdom of Israel, had made with the kingdom of Syria? With a threat on every border, things appeared bleak for the tiny kingdom of Judah. King Ahaz was fearful, like a “tree shaken by the wind.”

Enter the prophet Isaiah who brought a word from God to prompt faith—A child whose name will be Immanuel, God with us. With a pretense of piety, Ahaz refuses the word. He decided to take his chances by forming an alliance with Assyria. Instead of standing firm and believing that God was able to deliver, Ahaz chose to invite the Assyrians, along with their oppression and their pantheon of gods, into the lives of the people of Judah. The decision proved disastrous, as any decision would that gives preference to fear over faith.

Quoting this passage of a coming Immanuel, Matthew applies it to Jesus in his account of Jesus’ birth (Matt 1:23). Once again, we are given a sign that God is with us through the coming of a child. Speaking to a world still full of military conquest, political oppression, and social upheaval, such a sign remains paradoxical. God speaks to us of His presence in the simplicity, the innocence, and the vulnerability of a child.

The Kingdom which the child ushers in is one where the weak are the strong, the humble are the exalted, the foolish are the wise, where loss is gain, death is life, and where the child leads. What a strange Kingdom! It is a Kingdom of an entirely different order than that which Ahaz imagined or into which Jesus was born. This advent season, and every day of our lives, let us ponder the reality of this Kingdom. For God is with us—Immanuel!

Keith P. Wells

Director of Library and Associate Professor of Theological Bibliography and Research

December 23

LIFE'S MYSTERIOUS INTERRUPTIONS

Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid. . .

MATTHEW 1:20

23

For many of us the holiday season is often a time of food, family, and fun. We're often blessed with the delightful tastes of turkey, generous gifts from others, and the warm fellowship of hearth and home. But sometimes our holidays get unexpectedly interrupted. Plans go awry, planes get missed, or someone we love gets sick, perhaps even terminally ill. In what we thought was going to be a season of mirth and joy, we face the reality that we're not in control.

Joseph discovered that fact in a painfully unexpected way. Learning that his fiancée, Mary, was pregnant out of wedlock, he fought to keep his hurt and sense of betrayal from boiling over. What was supposed to be a secure relationship had suddenly become a scandalous disaster.

But instead of publicly humiliating Mary, Joseph decided to divorce her quietly. We can only guess that he thought this might mitigate some of the damage that was sure to follow two young people living in a small, tightly knit Jewish community.

But what broken-hearted Joseph didn't know—and what we don't often know in the midst of difficult interruptions—is that God was at the center of this life-altering event. Not long after Joseph devised his plan of divorce, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream telling him to take Mary as his wife because the child who had been conceived in her by the Holy Spirit would be the Savior of sinners.

Even with this angelic “inside information,” Joseph needed extraordinary faith and courage to take Mary as his wife. The unexpected interruption resulting from her divine pregnancy would most certainly cause him to lose his reputation and, according to Matt 2:13, the comforts of hearth and home. But in the midst of his pain, and some understandably difficult questions, he chose God and His goodness. He legally wed Mary and then named the child Jesus, an action in that culture of adopting the baby as his own.

When Joseph did this, he laid it all on the line for the God he served. He exemplified courageous faith in the face of life's mysterious interruptions. May we, like him, faithfully and courageously obey God, and likewise be used to manifest our Savior to a lost and broken world.

Scott Wenig

Haddon W. Robinson Chair of Biblical Preaching; Associate Professor of Applied Theology

December 24

MOVING INTO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.

JOHN 1:14

24

I'll never forget a life and ministry changing experience I had in my first pastoral role. I had grown up in one of the flagship churches of our denomination. After receiving my seminary degree, my wife and I moved to a small, somewhat backwoods congregation in “the wilds of Washington.” I was going to help bring them into the 20th century, but after three months of ministry ups and downs, the church chairman's wife said to me, “You're going to have to slow down for us 'cause we're not going to speed up for you.”

The light went on. I needed to enter their culture and become one of them. To make a Kingdom impact, I needed to love them enough to move into their neighborhood, become one of them, and walk alongside them. They needed to be my friends, not my project.

This is the miracle of the incarnation. God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, left heaven behind and moved into our neighborhood. He became one of us, even to the point of being born as a helpless infant in a lowly manger to a peasant couple. God, in His wisdom, realized that the best way to connect with humanity was to come personally and live among us. The word “incarnation” literally means God “enfleshed” Himself, taking on the form of humanity in order to effectively communicate to us His person, His love, and His plan. God did not settle for merely sending us a long distance love letter. He did that in the text of Scripture. More importantly, God came to live with us—He inhabited our space as one of us. This brought the transcendent God into an immanent relationship with humanity.

This has forever changed the way I live my life and engage in ministry. We are chosen and called to live in this world as a “second incarnation,” ministering the grace and truth of God to those who need it most. We need to move into the neighborhood.

Bradley J. Widstrom
Assistant Professor of Youth and Family Ministries

December 25

THE INCREDIBLE GOD-BECOMING-FLESH

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

JOHN 1:14

25

The words “flesh” and “glory” just don’t seem to go together. John’s audacious assertion that the eternal Word, the one true God, became flesh slaps us in the face. Flesh. Meat. John had other ways to describe the incarnation. He could have written that the Word became a man, or that the Word took on a human body. But he chose to use the rather crude term “flesh.” Nothing could be less godlike than flesh. In fact, the apostle Paul specifically chose the word “flesh” to provide a stark contrast with the Spirit (Gal 5:16–17).

So why did John choose this almost offensive term to describe the very Son of God? No other term could better communicate the startling reality that the eternal God had become fully human so that we could know Him as no other god had ever been known. He didn’t just seem to become human. He didn’t just indwell a human body. He didn’t take on human appearance for a short period of time before going back to His spiritual state. The eternal Word became human—fully flesh and bone—in order to reveal to us what God is truly like.

But how can flesh reveal glory? The glory of God in the Old Testament was an unapproachable presence in the tabernacle and in the temple, an overwhelming brilliance that none could endure (Exod 40:34–35; 1 Kgs 8:11). Jesus, fully flesh, revealed the glory of God in His miracles (John 2:11), but ultimately it is in His death and resurrection that His glory is fully seen (John 7:39; 12:16; 13:31–32). But the glory revealed by the Word made flesh was not seen by all. As Don Carson has written, “There is a hiddenness to the display of glory in the incarnate,” a hiddenness that can only be penetrated by the light of faith. Without faith, this supreme act of revelation and redemption—the Word made flesh—is little more than foolishness. But to all who believe, it is the very source of eternal life (1 Cor 1:18). God made flesh—accessible, knowable, embraceable, and believable. Behold His glory, the glory of the One and Only!

Mark Young
President



6399 S. SANTA FE DRIVE
LITTLETON, CO 80120

