



*The
Greatest Gift*

Christmas Devotions from Denver Seminary

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 (TNIV)



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This Christmas is going to be different. That's because my wife Priscilla and I are eagerly awaiting the arrival of our first grandchild this December. Somehow I imagine that holding a newborn during the Advent Season makes the idea of the incarnation seem even more absurd, yet somehow more powerful. Could the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the sovereign Ruler over all earthly and heavenly powers, the Savior of the world, truly have been as weak and dependent and vulnerable as the newborn that we will hold in our arms? Yes! As implausible as that thought may be, the Scriptures are profoundly clear that when God "became flesh and made his dwelling among us," He did so through the birth of a baby, Jesus.

While Priscilla and I are trying to avoid grandparent insanity, we do find that our sense of anticipation for the birth of our Savior is heightened by the expectation of the birth of our grandchild. Someday soon we'll announce with great joy to our friends and family that our grandson has been born. That day will prepare us even more for the glorious day of rejoicing on Christmas morning when we join the heavenly host and shout, "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 25 daily devotionals to guide you through these days of anticipation. Our prayer is that with each day's reflection, your sense of wonder and gratitude for what God has done for us in Christ will grow throughout this Advent Season.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Young". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mark" and the last name "Young" clearly distinguishable.

Merry Christmas!

December 1 Christmas Chaos

IN MANY WAYS CHRISTMAS IS, as a favorite carol tells, “the most wonderful time of the year.” The sound of familiar songs combined with delicious food, the joy of giving and receiving gifts and the company of family and friends certainly make it a treasured time of life. And at the heart of this most special season is the birth of our Savior, Jesus.

But when we read the account of Christ’s birth in the second chapter of Matthew’s Gospel we find it tainted by the actions of Herod the Great. Told by the Magi that they had come to worship the newly born ‘King of the Jews,’ Herod eventually ordered the murder of all the babies of Bethlehem, an event rightly labeled ‘the Slaughter of the Innocents.’ Given that many of the other texts describing Jesus’ birth focus on angelic announcements, the faith of his parents and promises of peace, why would Matthew include a narrative about a wicked tyrant bent on the extermination of Jewish children? Why this story of bloody chaos surrounding the Messiah’s coming?

One reason is the apostle’s intention to present Jesus as a ‘new Moses’ to his Jewish readers. Just as God providentially preserved Moses in the face of Pharaoh’s slaughter of the male Hebrew babies (Exod. 1:8-22) so Matthew uses this story to demonstrate God’s sovereign care for His Son in a terribly similar circumstance. And there is possibly another reason for its inclusion as well.

Life for many on our planet is not merely difficult but often times deadly. Many today live with the same incessant violence and bloodshed as those under Roman domination in ancient Palestine. And even for those who don’t, there are still the disruptive threats of cancer, unemployment, divorce and unexpected loss, all of which are felt with greater intensity during the holiday season.

Matthew wanted to let his first readers know that even in the midst of mindless slaughter and death, God is in the process of providing salvation for those who believe. And for the troubled 21st century readers of this Gospel, this story can likewise strengthen their faith in God’s redemption of this broken world by the Incarnation of His Son. At different times and in different ways, Christmas may be difficult and chaotic for us all. But this text tells us that we can find comfort and rest in our loving God—who is always in control—during the holiday season and beyond.

Dr. Scott Wenig, Professor of Applied Theology

“So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night
and left for Egypt.”

Matt. 2:14

December 2 Obedience to God

JOSEPH WAS A REMARKABLE MAN, but is often relegated to the background in our depictions of the Christmas story. He is always there in the manger scene, but the baby Jesus, his mother Mary, the angels, the shepherds, and the wise men, all seem to be more prominent figures. Yet Joseph is integral to God’s plan for the salvation of humankind.

What kind of person was Joseph? Scripture gives some indication of his character and relationship to God. For example, he must have been devastated to find out that his fiancée was pregnant, knowing that he was not the father of the child. His male ego had to have suffered a huge blow. But rather than becoming enraged and retaliating against Mary as other men may have done, “he had in mind to divorce her quietly” because “he did not want to expose her to public disgrace” (Matt. 1:19).

Although the idea of divorcing Mary was born of compassion, Joseph did not follow through after an angel informed him in a dream that the baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit, was the Messiah, and that he should take Mary home as his wife (Matt. 1:20). Wow! How hard would that message have been to believe? Mary knew that she had not slept with anyone, and had the growing fetus within her body to confirm the angel’s message to her. But Joseph had to blindly accept that the angel was real and not merely a figment of his imagination, and that the message really was from God. Additionally he had to be willing to face accusations that he had let his lust get the better of him as well as raise a child who was not his own.

Joseph’s obedience to God continued. When the infant Jesus was in danger of being murdered by Herod, an angel again appeared to Joseph, telling him to escape to Egypt with Jesus and Mary. Without hesitation he got up, gathered his family, and left in the middle of the night (Matt. 2:14). This was a huge move! They left their country, friends, family, and source of income, staying away until Herod died. Later, God spoke to Joseph through angelic messengers in two more dreams, eventually leading them back to Nazareth (Matt. 2:23).

Some of us draw more public attention through our “angelic” singing in choirs and worship teams, or through intelligence or wealth that are reminiscent of the “wise men.” Others are like the shepherds, humble, but managing to be there when something exciting is happening. But may we all strive to be more like Joseph, content to not take center stage, but striving to live in continuing, faithful, obedience to God.

Dr. Heather Davediuk Gingrich, Associate Professor of Counseling

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

Matt. 2:6 (NIV)

December 3 Imprisoned Town of Bethlehem

IF YOU’VE BEEN TO ISRAEL’S WEST BANK in the last decade, you’ve most likely seen “the Wall.” It’s actually not one wall, but many, surrounding all the West Bank and many of the towns within the West Bank. In some places it’s just a see-through metal fence with lots of barbed wire on top but more often than not it’s giant slabs of concrete, too tall to see over, with barbed wire on top of that. In Bethlehem, it’s particularly large and poignant, sometimes coming so close to the town that it has cut across people’s front yards. The only way to get in or out is through Israeli military checkpoints.

Christians in Bethlehem are doubly marginalized. Almost all are Palestinian, so they are rejected and persecuted by most in the rest of the (Muslim) Palestinian community and, of course, by their Jewish overlords. But there are glimmers of hope.

Musalaha is an evangelical Christian reconciliation ministry, working in conjunction with Bethlehem Bible College, which brings young Jewish and Palestinian Christians together for a variety of activities to try to break down the animosity between them, which often remains even among believers. They try to teach them that unity in Christ transcends national identity, and more often than not, it seems, they succeed. But the price can be steep—rejection by family members and friends and occasionally even death threats from enemies.

Bethlehem was an insignificant town in Micah’s day. Jesus deliberately rewords the prophecy of Mic. 5:2 by adding “by no means.” With the birth of the Christchild, Bethlehem is no longer least or most insignificant. Apart from the reconciliation ministries of Christians there today, Bethlehem might again be insignificant, but with them it is modeling for the world an amazing work of God’s grace.

Have Americans yet learned that oneness in Christ transcends our national and ethnic identities and divisions? Would we do even as well as Bethlehem were we reduced to its living conditions? Various students of world religions have pointed out that loving one’s enemy is one of the biggest distinctives of the Christian faith. Do we demonstrate it? With North Koreans, Iranians, African-Americans, or...?

Dr. Craig L. Blomberg, Distinguished Professor of New Testament

December 4

My First Christmas in a Foreign Country

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HAS BEEN 32 YEARS SINCE I LEFT MY HOME COUNTRY, Ethiopia.

Between then and now, so many things have happened in my life. But I'll never forget my first Christmas in Nairobi, Kenya.

I was 23 years old and it was my first time to be outside of Ethiopia. In the five years before my arrival in Nairobi, I had gone through many difficult experiences, personally and with my family. Due to the radical Marxist revolution, my parents lost their property; my younger brother, whom I loved dearly, died at the age 18 due to an accident and I was not able to attend his funeral; and because of my faith and Christian service, I was imprisoned and tortured.

When I was released from prison I realized that I had no future in Ethiopia as a minister of the gospel and decided to leave the country. The only way to escape was at the border and Kenya was the most appealing and neighboring country to seek asylum. Without going into the detail of my journey from Ethiopia to Kenya, two weeks after I was released from prison I arrived in Nairobi with 75 cents in my pocket.

I was weary, tired of living, lonely, and the future was unknown. Most of all, I was hungry and I had no money to buy food. In Nairobi, it was Christmas time and people were busy celebrating. I was without family, friends, money and country, with an empty stomach. All the difficulties I had gone through and the challenge I was facing in Nairobi overwhelmed me and I cried. Literally, I sobbed. And I asked the Lord, why do I have to go through these trials at my young age?

My life in exile started with an empty stomach and a question to the Lord. In the last 32 years, the Lord has been answering my question. Through the generous financial support of American Christians, most of them anonymous, I was able to get an undergraduate degree, three masters and a Ph.D. I've been married for 28 years and blessed with three children who love the lord. I've been serving God as a pastor, missionary, and a teacher.


The Lord who miraculously provided a delectable meal when I was hungry 32 years ago in Nairobi has led me thus far. Emmanuel, God is with us, is a real life experience to me. Christ is a GOOD SHEPHERD. I am a living witness.

Dr. Alemayehu Mekonnen, Associate Professor of Missions

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah...”

Luke 2:25-35

December 5 Simeon: God’s Watchman

 **ONE OF THE MANY JOBS I HAD** when I was a student at Denver Seminary (many years ago) was working as a guard or watchman for a local security company. I remember sitting one night in the main office of a high school with hall monitors wide open and all the lights turned out. The school had received a bomb threat and I was stationed there as an extra measure of precaution. I couldn’t wait for dawn to come when I would be released from ‘my post’!

Simeon is a watchman in the Christmas story. He couldn’t wait for the day when the Messiah would come. He longed to see the Messiah and to be released from his post. (Nunc Dimitis—Now Dismiss—is the Latin title given to his song of praise.)

Simeon provides in both his character and proclamation an important model for each of us. First, Simeon models a life of faith and hope: “...was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come...” (Luke 2:25 NLT). In addition, he lived a life characterized by integrity, worship, and responsiveness to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. “Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout...Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.” (Luke 2:25, 27a NIV).

Simeon proclaims that salvation is found in a person, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. This good news of salvation is for all peoples “...a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel (Luke 2:32 NIV).

Simeon’s proclamation speaks prophetically of Jesus’ suffering and Mary’s personal sorrow. He anticipates the message of the cross.

His proclamation reminds us, in the midst of all the activity of the Christmas season that our response to Jesus reveals our heart and what we think about God.

As we watch for the return of Christ this little known character in the Christmas story serves as a wonderful mentor. Simeon lived a life characterized by faithfulness and expectancy, as well as proclamation that Christ is the Savior of the world.

Dr. Randy MacFarland, Dean/Provost

“And it came to pass...”

Luke 2:1 (KJV)

December 6

It Came to Pass!

WHEN A CHRISTIAN COMEDIAN was asked for his favorite verse in the Bible, he responded, “And it came to pass!” Seems like an odd choice doesn’t it? He explained that although pain comes into our lives, thank God, “It came to pass!” Even if we encounter unexpected persecution or suffering in our lives, by God’s grace, “It came to pass!”

This phrase is the first thing we see in the Christmas narrative in Luke 2 (*at least in the King James translation*). As I read it again I am reminded of the comic’s twisted perspective and pause, remembering that there are likely many (*possibly even some reading this devotional*) who are really dreading this Christmas season and wish it would not only pass, but pass quickly. Perhaps someone incredibly precious to them has died this year or they have walked through a painful divorce and they will be very alone this holiday for the first time. Every ornament, tradition, and the absence of presents with their name will remind them of the emptiness and pain.

The words of Davis and Smiley in their Christmas song, *Merry Christmas With Love* speak to the heart of those who are alone this season.

She leaned her head on the window
Watching evergreen bend in the snow
Remembering Christmas the way it had been
So many seasons ago
But this year there's no one to open the gifts
No reason for trimming the tree
And just as a tear made its way to the floor
She heard voices outside start to sing

The carolers sang as she opened the door
Faces of friends in the crowd
And all of the shadows of lonely reminders
Were driven away by the sound
Now the heart that for years had been silent
Was suddenly filled with a song

Most of us will hear or read the Christmas story this year and blow right by the first words of that narrative. I encourage you to pause after reading those words and pray for those who wish Christmas would pass quickly. Better yet, give them a call, write them a card, invite them to your home on Christmas or take a group to carol for them. And, if you are the one who is dreading Christmas this year, celebrate the birth of the one who is the Prince of Peace and knows your pain. You can do that. Remember, “It came to pass!” January 1st brings a new year.

Dr. Larry Lindquist, Associate Professor of Leadership

“Glory to God in the highest...”

Luke 2:8-14

December 7 More Than a Story

STUNNED SHEPHERDS BEHELD a fantastic epiphany. “An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.” They were terrified and astounded by the news that a baby, the long-awaited Messiah, was born and lay in a donkey’s feed trough nearby.

As they rubbed disbelief from their eyes and struggled to wrap their minds around their experience, the pronouncing angel was joined by a host of angels that poured out of heaven. One song describes it saying, “The heavens exploded with music in the air.” Together, this great company of angels sang and modeled for us how to respond to the Good News of Jesus’ coming. They praised God singing, “Glory to God in the highest heaven.”

These are familiar details of the account of the Incarnation of our Lord. Rehearsed again each December, it is a well-known story that may have once deeply touched one’s yearning, soul-hunger for a Savior. But the familiar may no longer astound us and the story’s details may be recited by heart without the engagement of the heart. Benumbed by familiarity, we need our imaginations enlivened and our hearts enflamed by the astounding reality—because of love, Christ came to us.

That night during the shepherd’s watch, the angels understood. Their vantage point was unique. They had watched and waited for salvation history to come to this great moment. Like excited children before a gift-strewn tree, the angels knew that ‘this was it!’ Because of the extravagant love of the Father, God had left his throne and had taken on humanity! Trying to maintain an element of angel-decorum was simply impossible. With Divine permission to proclaim and to rejoice, the angels tumbled from heaven and sang and danced for joy before befuddled shepherds who knew their need of a Savior! Selah.

Next to my chair, I have a small angel figurine. Her gown is blue; her white wings are spread wide. Her head and hands are lifted. Daily, she prompts me to remember, to worship, and to lift my life to God, my Savior.

Christmas 2012, may we be swept up into the magnificent Good News of God’s gift to us. More than a fictional story for a season, Jesus is Emmanuel – God with us!

May the angels’ response be ours: “Glory to God in the Highest Heaven.”

Come, let us exalt his name together.

Nancy Buschart, Mentoring Director

December 8

Celebrating Christmas: Heathen or Sacred?

IT SEEMS THAT THE CELEBRATION of Christmas has always been controversial. We don't know when Christians first marked Jesus' birth, but by the fourth century there were as many as six competing dates—at which point Pope Julius I fixed the celebration at December 25. That didn't end the controversies: Puritans in both England and New England outlawed Christmas completely as a “heathen celebration.” There's a lot to be said for separating our celebration of our Savior's birth from the increasingly frenzied commercial holiday that December 25 has become. It's far from a “holy day.” In the Netherlands “Sinterklass” (St. Nicholas) comes on December 5 or 6—when children receive gifts. In Spain, Christmas gifts are exchanged on January 6, Epiphany, in keeping with the Magi's gifts to Jesus.

What stops us from keeping “Christ in Christmas,” as a popular mantra has it? The Puritans knew the persistent danger that Christmas can become “heathen.” Yet, neither our culture nor Madison Avenue advertisers can force followers of Jesus to succumb to the commercialization of Christmas. We have a choice to make. Rather than rail at the culture or the shopping malls to keep Christ in Christmas, we can assure that we do that for ourselves, our families, and our churches. We can't make the culture conform to our values—or even expect it to, but we can be counter-cultural, as Christ's true followers have always been.

Our English word comes from the Latin, *Christes mass* (Christ's mass), denoting a religious service. While we can honor others with gifts, we must honor God for the indescribable gift of his Son, Jesus. One way to celebrate Jesus' birthday might be to give gifts to those in great need so that we model the generosity of our Lord. The Apostle Paul said it well:

“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Cor. 9:12-15 NIV).

Dr. William W. Klein, Professor of New Testament

“...and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.”

Luke 2:7

December 9 Appearances Should Deceive

APEARANCES SHOULD NOT MISLEAD, but appearances should deceive in that there is more to each of us than what we say about ourselves. It is another way to describe humility.

It was true of Jesus. His earthly existence began in a manger—not much evidence of greatness there. Later he would describe himself as poor: “The Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” Isaiah wrote about what He would look like: “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him” (Isa. 53:2). There was more to Jesus than what anyone could see.

My mother grew up very poor. She was one of ten children and had to wash her dress each day to wear it back to school. No one would have guessed this about her: she never talked about herself. Yet she graduated at the top of her class, won a state award and a trip to Washington D.C. where she met the President’s wife. But I did not learn this from her. She never talked about it.

For several years she directed a vacation Bible school that averaged 300 in a church of 150 and in a town of under 1,000. She became president of the county library board and led in the building of a new, modern library. But you never heard it from her. I learned most of these things about her from others. When she died, 500 people came to honor her. And they told stories.

Her appearance deceived. She was always more than she said; that’s what God wants of us. He said, “By their fruit you will recognize them.” It is what we do that should tell people what we are, not our words.

When my mother and father were nearing retirement they started a group for poor teenagers. When mother died, one of the youth, now grown, drove 300 miles to see her as she lay in her casket. He stayed for 30 minutes then drove 300 miles back to work. He said to me, “She is the only person who ever loved me.” That is good fruit.

Dr. David Osborn, Doctor of Ministry Program Director

“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing on its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.”

Mal. 4:12 (NIV)

December 10 The Sun of Righteousness

IT HAS OFTEN BEEN MY PRACTICE during the Advent and Christmas seasons to read through the texts of seasonal anthems, hymns, and carols. As I did so in preparation for this devotional, I was struck by the number and variety of references to Jesus Christ in the incarnation and his first advent. I compiled a list of them and began to group the names or phrases into several categories.

There are, first of all, references to his humanity (e.g., Son of Man, Son of Mary, Son of the Virgin, Beautiful Child, and Beloved of Mary). These names affirm that he was fully human, in all ways as we are, yet without sin. There are, secondly, references to his divinity (Christ our Lord, Christ our God, Lord Most High, Emmanuel [God with Us]). These names affirm that he is fully God, for only God has such titles or designations.

I noted, thirdly, that there are references to his royalty (e.g., King, King of Israel, Heavenly King, Heavenly Lord, Prince of Peace) indicating sovereign rule and providential reign. I also found the theme of light coming into the world is contained in many of the names or titles of Jesus Christ in this music. (Star, Morning Star, New Day, New Light, Sun of Righteousness). Clearly, the advent of Christ signals the shattering of darkness and the full illumination of the world.

It was the name, ‘Sun of Righteousness’ in Charles Wesley’s well-known carol, “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing” that compelled me to go back to the text of Mal. 4:2 where this designation is found. The picture here is of a divine revelation of righteousness which illuminates and irradiates like the rays of the sun. Such revelation brings health and healing to those who love righteousness. They are compelled to leap and bound with sheer joy, like calves released from their stalls into sunlight, because righteousness has triumphed.

When we reflect on the advent of Christ as the coming of God in righteousness, how can we not go out and leap like calves released from the stall?! For the light from His coming irradiates the world and righteousness is victorious! Praise be to God!! Amen.

Dr. Keith P. Wells, Director of Library and Associate Professor of Theological Bibliography and Research

“We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

Matt. 2:2

December 11

A Fascination With Stars

THE WORLD IS LOOKING FOR STARS, icons, and success stories that inspire. In TV shows such as “American Idol,” “Dancing with the Stars,” and “America’s Got Talent” viewers anticipate nervously the rising of new stars whose brightness provides a glimpse of hope for future generations. Unfortunately, this kind of stardom is short-lived. Human glory fades and the search begins all over again.

Two thousand years ago, shepherds who lived in the field near Bethlehem witnessed the startling radiance of a special star. *“While keeping watch over their flocks at night, . . . the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified”* (Luke 2:8-9). Reassured by the words of an angel, the shepherds received the good news that the Savior of the world was born in a town nearby. They hurried to Bethlehem, found the babe lying in a manger and shared with Mary, Joseph and all who would listen *“the word concerning what had been told them about this child”* (v.17). Oh, how they danced and rejoiced in the shepherds’ field that night!

In Matt. 2, we find men of old who noticed a star—not just any star but *“his star”* (v.2). Who were these wisemen who traveled from a distant country to look for the promised Messiah? Some scholars believe that the men were Jews whose forefathers had been deported to Babylon centuries earlier. In their communities, the hope of a coming Messiah had remained alive. They were holding fast to the promise that, in the fullness of time, *“a star would come out of Jacob, and a scepter rise out of Israel”* (Num. 24:17b). In this passage, traditional rabbinic sources have concluded that the star mentioned in this passage was indeed *“the star of the Messiah”* (Aggadat Mashiach, BhM 3:1-143; also Taanit IV.8, Targum Onkelos).

By the time the wisemen met with king Herod, Jesus was probably a young toddler nearing the age of two. Eager to quench any competition for the throne, Herod asked the wisemen where the Messiah was to be born. They responded in a traditional Jewish manner—they quoted from the Hebrew scriptures. Referring to Mic. 5:2, they pointed to Bethlehem of Judah, a town near Jerusalem (Matt. 2:5-6; also 2 Sam. 5:2). The wisemen had seen countless stars in their day but none had given them this overwhelming sense of hope and joy (Matt. 2:10). After worshipping the young Messiah and presenting their precious gifts to him, the wisemen returned to their country eager to announce to their people that the promised Messiah had finally come.

The star that once shone in the fields near Bethlehem is shining on us today. During this special time each year, we join wisemen, shepherds, and believers around the world who have followed “the Star” and celebrate Him as personal Lord, Savior, and Redeemer. May His glory shine on us forever!

Dr. Hélène Dallaire, Associate Professor of Old Testament

“Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.”

1 Thes. 2:7-8 (NIV)

December 12 In the Midst of Messiness

CHRISTMAS IS AN EXCITING SEASON. Most of us relate it to a ‘busy season!’ I struggle each year with how we, as Christians, can live a ‘missional’ life during this season. How do we, as ‘sent’ people of God, influence our culture with the Kingdom of God? I get caught up in my own busyness so often, but reflecting on scripture I see Jesus’ example. He showed us how to live in intentional community, as well as reach out to those in our surrounding community wherever he went.

I understand and know painful seasons in life and I recognize that this time of celebration, the birth of our Savior, can actually ignite painful memories of loss. Jesus came to be with humans in their messiness. I want to both challenge and encourage you to use this season to dive in deeper with your community of believers; engage those in your community who need someone in their lives without an agenda, and love them where they are.

Jesus was an advocate for those around Him. In reading scripture I am always surprised to see where He stopped, where He went to meet the needs of those around Him. What if we were to create a culture around us where we both disarm and embrace people, allowing them to share their stories and lives with us? If we want to be friends with sinners we need to watch our posture, the tone we use as we talk, and the motives in our heart; having the faith to share the gospel but also truly listening to those around us with patience and grace.


What if we ‘walked out’ James 1:19 and became people who were quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger? I am asking the community around me to keep me to this standard during this busy season. By reaching out to those around us while in the midst of their messiness, we can rely on the Holy Spirit for strength and hope, being people of peace and showing the love of Christ that grips us.

Chris Johnson, Director of Development

“But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in
her heart.”

Luke 2:19

December 13 Mary as Model... All Year ‘Round

 **ONE OF THE GLORIES** of the Christ-story is that it is universal. When this is said, it usually means something like “applicable to all people in all times and places.” And, this sweeping historical and geographical statement is certainly true. There is, however, another closer-to-home sense in which it is true. The Christ-story—yeah, Christ Himself—is relevant all year, not just during Advent or Christmas. And, one of the many “every-day” lessons we can learn from the story we learn from His mother, Mary.

Luke reports that an angel of the Lord (Luke 2:9), and soon after “a great company of the heavenly host” (v. 13) proclaimed God’s sending of His Messiah. Understandably, the shepherds excitedly “spread the word” (v. 17) and other people were “amazed” (v. 18), undoubtedly talking about it. “But”—a three-letter word always worthy of attention—Mary “treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (v. 19).

Treasuring and pondering . . . this takes time. One has to slow down, maybe even “stop,” in order to treasure up and ponder. That Mary would be drawn to such reflection is, of course, understandable when one considers her utterly unique and profoundly intimate participation in the Christ-drama. Yet, she (Luke 1:38) is a model for us. She had the depth and presence of spirit to treasure and ponder. She may have talked, she may have discussed, but the Gospel account draws attention to the fact that she treasured and pondered.

It has become common to observe that during Advent and Christmas we often find ourselves more busy, more hurried even than other times of the year. Yet the fact is that in our culture most of us are terribly busy, terribly hurried all the time. And, yes, often we are even more so during Advent and Christmas.

Perhaps one of the great gifts that we can receive this year through the Holy Spirit is the model of Mary, treasuring and pondering. Week-by-week, day-by-day, simply pause . . . to reflect on God’s good gifts, God’s promises, God’s work in our lives, and beyond. This is one of the gifts of Christmas that we can receive all year ‘round.

Dr. W. David Buschart, Professor of Theology and Historical Studies

December 14

The Fullness of Emptying

WHEN ‘THE WORD BECAME flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood (John 1:14 MSG) he also ‘set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human!’ (Phil. 2:7 MSG). Jesus *emptied himself* in order to become human and a human baby at that. Why would God do such a thing—become powerless, dependent, and small?

In 1958 J. B. Phillips wrote the little classic *Your God Is Too Small* attempting to correct some of the diminished images of God circulating in his day such as resident policeman, celestial grandfather, and managing director. Today the book that may need to be written is *Your God Is Too Big*, for current notions of God are often more caricatures than diminishments. God, in the minds of many, has become too big to be personal, too big to care about suffering individuals, and too big to care about moral decisions.

Christmas, God becoming human, teaches us that God is neither too small nor too big, for in Jesus, the God-man, we can behold the glory of God in a way that we can comprehend. All because God was willing to become small and empty Himself. Jesus’ deity did not shield him from hunger, thirst, physical pain, or tears—in every way, except sin, He was one of us.

Why did God do it? My experience as a grandfather provides a pale illustration. As a ‘papa’ I have an insatiable desire to connect to, communicate with, and love my grandkids. As a result, getting on their level to wrestle, to hide and seek, to play monster, or to have a dance party has become the joy of my heart. Nothing comes easier than emptying myself of dignity, time, energy, and even my own needs in order to share life with them. How much more did God’s relentless, loving desire for relationship with us drive the Creator to take the form of a creature, to get on our level, in order to fulfill his yearning of love?

In the first few centuries of the church, based on the Philippians passage above, the Greek speaking leaders used the expression ‘*kenosis* before *theosis*,’ meaning that emptying of self precedes filling by God. Instead of the muchness, manyness, and fullness of the trappings of Christmas, how might we ‘Have this attitude in yourselves that was also in Christ Jesus’ (Phil. 2:5 NASB) and embrace a posture of self-emptying? As we do, our very emptiness will become the fullness of Jesus within us.

Howard Baker, Instructor of Spiritual Formation

December 15

The Messiah

A FEW YEARS AGO, when we were still living in Vienna, Austria, our son Toby, home for Christmas break, took me to hear Handel's *Messiah*. What a phenomenal experience! The fabulous setting of the Golden Hall of the world famous Musikverein; the Vienna Philharmonic; the Christmas atmosphere; the chance to be with my son home from college; and the very familiar music heard in a new context.

Early on we heard the prophetic words of Isaiah, anticipating the advent of the Messiah. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

And several movements later come the stirring words and music of the "Hallelujah Chorus:"
"For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth
The kingdom of the Lord, and of his Christ
And he shall reign for ever and ever.
King of kings, forever, and Lord of Lords, forever
Hallelujah, Hallelujah!"

There is a tradition of standing during the "Hallelujah Chorus." It's very understandable; the beauty and force of the music practically thrust us to our feet. And after that emotional experience, it felt like it was time for an encore and then exit exhilarated out into the night. But that wasn't the end. Hearing the *Messiah* in its entirety is a different experience than just hearing the "Hallelujah Chorus."

We tend to think of that great work as music for Christmas, singularly appropriate for flash mobs at the mall. But we were reminded that it occurs only two-thirds of the way through the Oratorio.

Christmas is a great time of year, a time when we celebrate our Savior's birth. It's my favorite season, but it's just the beginning. At Christmas we look forward to the end. The baby Jesus we celebrate became the crucified, risen, ascended Lord of the universe. The "Hallelujah Chorus" celebrates Christ's ultimate triumph following Easter.

The finale of the *Messiah* takes us to the throne room of God where we, together with believers of all ages and all peoples will sing:

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, And hath redeemed us to God by his blood
To receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing
Blessing and glory, honor and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb. For ever and ever and ever. Amen."


Wow! Anybody up for a concert?

Dr. Scott Klingsmith, Assistant Professor of Mission and Intercultural Studies

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and
only Son...”

John 3:16

December 16 A Father's Love

 **ONE OF THE THE JOYS** of growing up in Colorado was the proximity to the mountains and in particular, ski resorts. My parents had my brother and I on the slopes at an early age, and while I may have been a bit more hesitant to fly down the mountain than my daredevil brother, I grew to love our trips to the mountains. It was a family tradition, one I still look back on with fond memories.

As my brother and I got older and our skiing skills improved, we asked our parents for new skis. As Christmas approached, my parents said nothing about what was on the top of both of our Christmas lists—it seemed as if there was no way we would get this much desired gift.

That Christmas was to be spent in Texas with my mother's family and as my brother and I watched my dad pack the car, we saw nothing in the wrapped gifts that resembled the long, thin objects we so desperately wanted.

Christmas morning I woke up to the smell of coffee, bacon, and conversation at my Grandmother's house (another childhood memory I love). I ran into my brother's room to wake him up and we ran into the living room where we were shocked to see not only two pairs of skis, but ski boots next to the tree! I will always remember the big grin on my dad's face as he saw our excitement and surprise.

For many years I tried to find out how my dad got those skis and boots to Texas. “Did you mail them?” I would ask. “Nope, too expensive.” was his answer. “Did someone buy them in Texas?” “Of course not, you can't buy skis in Texas!” And my questioning would go on and on and still no answer. To this day I have no idea how he surprised us and to be honest, I have enjoyed the mystery of it all.

Those skis were a big deal to my 12 year old self. Yet each Christmas I tend to forget that an even bigger, more amazing gift was given to me, and everyone, that fulfilled God's promise to His people. He gave us His beloved Son on that Christmas so many years ago, knowing that there would also be pain and suffering in the years to come. It's a mystery to me how my God can love me that much, but it's a mystery I am awed by each year.

It's an amazing gift that our father gave us, one that I all too often forget. I pray that this season I, as well as all of you, remember the amazing gift our Father has given us. It truly is a time to count our blessings and give thanks.

Pamela Burton, Director of Communications

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss
your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation...”

Luke 2:29-32

December 17 Salvation Has Come

AS I WRITE THIS, there are ten wildfires burning in Colorado. Some are out of control, with zero percent containment. Families with homes in the burn zones are distraught, wondering if they will lose everything. Will help ever come? If it does, where will it come from and what will it look like? Will it be from firefighters on the ground? From aerial assault crews strategically dropping water and fire retardant? Maybe the skies will open and rain will fall. People feel hopeless, yet promises of help bring hope and expectation.

Having lived for 24 years in the forested states of Colorado and Washington, I have watched this scene play out multiple times. When help finally comes, the joy overwhelmingly erupts into uncontrollable thanksgiving. People shout and applaud the fire crews. Car horns honk. Thank you signs appear—even on rocks and the sides of buildings. Finally, expectations have been realized, hope is fulfilled, and they can move into the future.

These emotions are reflected in the Nativity. God’s people were waiting expectantly for their salvation. The Messiah had initially been promised in Genesis 3. This promise was repeated multiple times, in multiple ways, to multiple people throughout the course of divine/human history as recorded in the Old Testament. But God had now been silent for 400 years; He had not spoken to them since the time of Malachi. Like Coloradans living in the path of the wildfires, the Jewish people were struggling to remain positive and hopeful when times were difficult and the promised help seemed like it would never arrive.

But God finally did send the Messiah. The wait was over; hope was fulfilled and salvation was in their midst. Coming as a helpless baby, born of a virgin, may have been unexpected but the celebration could now begin. Simeon, upon seeing and holding the Christ child, erupted into joy. After a lifetime of waiting in expectation, hopelessness was replaced with the joy of promises fulfilled. Simeon burst forth into a song of praise, adoration, and thanksgiving.

Let us remember this Christmas season that Christ also came as our Messiah, fulfilling our promised hope. And let us join Simeon in his song of praise, adoration, and thanksgiving. Salvation has come!

Dr. Bradley J. Widstrom, Associate Professor of Youth and Family Ministries

“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true
God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

John 17:3

December 18

Jesus Came to Give Us Eternal Life!

THERE ARE MANY REASONS for the coming of Jesus Christ. He came to lay down his life for the sins of the whole world; He came to destroy the work of the Devil; He came to reestablish the Kingdom of God on earth as well; and he came to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God.

But, more than anything else, Jesus Christ came to give us eternal life. Anyone who receives Jesus Christ has and will have eternal life. “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11-12). According to this passage, eternal life is not merely a future thing, but rather a present reality. Yes, we will enjoy eternal life after our biological death. But it is very important to appreciate that we ‘have’ eternal life now even before death. We can enjoy eternal life here and now if we are in Christ!!

Then, what is eternal life? Some people misunderstand eternal life to be the life after death or the life that we can enjoy only after death. But that’s not true. Others misunderstand eternal life to be an everlasting but boring life which continues endlessly without any excitement and enjoyment. That’s not true, either. According to Jesus Christ himself, eternal life is about knowing God and Jesus Christ. It is important to appreciate that the word “know” never implies simply cognitive or cerebral knowledge but rather more experiential, experimental, and existential knowledge. It implies intimate and personal knowledge in the context of conjugal or marital relationship as we know our spouses in the context of marriage life.

Jesus Christ came to give us eternal life. He came for us to enjoy an intimate and personal relationship with him in the context of a spiritual and mystical union. In faith, we are united with Christ through the Holy Spirit. So Jesus Christ does not hesitate to call us His brides. And thus, the church is the bride of Jesus Christ. As the bride of Jesus Christ, we are responsible to stay away from blemishes and defilements. We should maintain our spiritual purity before Jesus Christ, our Bridegroom. Amen.

Dr. Sung Wook Chung, Associate Professor of Christian Theology and Director of Korean Initiatives

December 19

Someday, Things Will Not Be Like This

THIS IS THE STORY of the Kingdom that is introduced by Jesus. There is a day coming when we will be restored, the world will be renewed, and pain will be a distant memory of an existence long forgotten. The story of advent is the story of waiting. Mary waited for nine months in painful expectation. The child coming was the long awaited Messiah, the one who would set things right. But he also brought pain as she faced social stigma, fear and ridicule. We are still waiting for the Kingdom to become reality; we are still living in the gap between what has come and what is still yet to come.

Advent, the story of waiting, is also the story of hope. It is the hope that we can look forward to. So often we trivialize the story of Jesus' birth, or we forget the larger narrative of which he was a part. Jesus came to establish a new way of life, yes, but that new life is not comprised in a new list of rules, a new or higher list of expectations. The new life is characterized by the progressive restoration of a person's entire being and the restoration of the entire world.

I don't have much faith. As someone who grew up in the church, I never had much that you would label as 'faith.' I have learned, however, from the advent story and from the words of Jesus that there is much to hope for and look forward to. Faith is remembering that even though the world is broken now it will not remain this way. And more personally, even though we are often deeply wounded we will someday experience a renewal of our being that heals every part of us and brings us back into who we were meant to be.

While I have never had a lot of faith, I have always had hope for the future... a future that Jesus began in the advent and will someday bring to completion. In the serene images of the nativity and precious pageants by children, we often forget the suffering and pain that surrounds the beautiful story of advent. Mary knew that this life would not be easy but she saw beyond that. She had hope, that this baby really would fulfill the promise to Abraham, her people, and even herself.

Mary's story of joy and willingness to serve amid sorrow and fear reminds us to look past the immediate future and responded in the hope that life will not always be like this. Mary stood on the hope of generations that had gone before, the hope that despite painful times ahead it will someday change. One day we will find ourselves fully in the Kingdom that Jesus' birth inaugurated. The world will be renewed and we will be restored. We stand in that hope, as Mary did. As people devoted to the Kingdom of God and holding in tension the fact that it has not yet come, we live in the hope of what Jesus began and what he will finish.


Sara Bibb, M.A. in Theology student

“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”

Gal. 5:13 (NIV)

December 20

A Lesson Learned One Christmas

 **ONE OF THE MOST FORMATIVE** experiences of my childhood occurred on Christmas morning when I was barely 10 years old. My sister and I were having a particularly self-centered Christmas. We had each written out our lists citing the multitude of gifts we wanted, or more truthfully, believed we deserved. As Christmas approached, we talked incessantly about the gifts we would get, neglecting our chores, demanding to look at catalogs and go to stores, and generally becoming the poster children for “Spoiled Brats R Us.”

We had been raised better, and we knew we were being selfish. It was just that on Christmas morning, there were always gifts. We had no idea what it would be like NOT to have gifts. We had so much more than we needed, and we were so blissfully unaware of the blessings we had been given. Our parents tried to help us see how we were behaving, talked with us about our selfish attitudes, and warned us of the potential consequences of our behavior, but to no avail.

When Christmas morning came, we rushed out of our rooms, prepared to receive the bounty of gifts that were waiting for us. Under the brightly lit tree in our living room, where the usual mountain of gifts could be found, there were only a very few packages for each of us. Through tears of sadness and anger, we turned to our parents and asked what happened.

I remember my mother’s words, spoken through her own anguish over the decision, as she said, “The two of you just wouldn’t listen. Christmas is not about the gifts, but it seemed that was all that mattered to you. Your father and I decided a few days ago to not buy anything else for the two of you. We took all that money and bought Christmas gifts for many other little girls and boys who wouldn’t have had any gifts at all this Christmas. Christmas is about GIVING, not GETTING.”

This Christmas season, listen to Paul’s words to the Galatians. Use your freedom of choice and choose to GIVE, not GET.

Dr. Ronald D. Welch, Associate Professor of Counseling

“Because a child has been born to us,
a son has been given to us.
Political authority will rest on his shoulder.
He will be named:
Marvelous Counselor, Strong God, Father who is always there,
Prince who brings Peace.”

Isa. 9:6

December 21 A Reason to Hope

IN A WORLD WHERE EVERYTHING is upside down, is there any reason for hope? Isaiah lived at the end of a time of peace and prosperity, which believers had known all their lives would come. What message of hope did God send him? What hope could overcome the terrible judgment that was coming to his generation?

In the midst of words of war, bloodshed, and chaos, Isaiah speaks of a child. This child is a gift, and I believe every child is a gift from God. But here he is more. The child to come will bear the burden of government. He will rule, and what a rule it will be. As a result, his name will be composed of many names, like the great pharaohs of Egypt.

No longer will we search for answers to questions about who we are or how we can become what we want to become. The Counselor who does wonders for us is at hand. No longer will we cry: Why did you allow this to happen, God? The power of God will be there for us and we will at last understand why things happen as they do. Never again will our father desert us. The coming Son will be Father to us as His Father is to Him—perfect, caring, ready to forgive. The coming one whom God shows to Isaiah will bring peace to a world ready to destroy itself.

Even more important than the Son who stilled the storm that threatened his companions on Lake Galilee, he ended the storm raging in their hearts. So the Son brings peace and acceptance into our hearts just as he will end the violence in the world around us. This Christmas our hope is as strong as our faith in the One who was promised so long ago and who is the Child of Christmas.

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

“...because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

Luke 1:78, 79

December 22 A Tradition Worth Keeping

AT THE END OF HIS HYMN of prophetic praise concerning both his son John the Baptist and the coming Messiah, Zechariah draws on Old Testament images. The messianic mission of salvation is summed up with a metaphor of the rising sun shining on those in darkness. Fallen, sinful people have wandered the earth in spiritual darkness for millennia. Zechariah includes himself as one of us who needs God’s intervention, God’s light to guide our feet. He chose an apt metaphor, indeed one that remains particularly fitting for us who live in the northern hemisphere and celebrate the birth of the Messiah in December.

None of the Gospels give a calendar date for the birth of Jesus, and many scholars doubt that Jesus could have been born in the middle of winter. Most of us, in fact, have heard or read about the pagan background for various elements of Christmas festivities, down to its date. December 25 was not “official” until the 4th century and owes more to Christian competition, with the feast of Sol Invictus (the unconquered sun) at the end of Saturnalia, than to anything else.

But rather than disparage the date as pagan and traditional in the worst sense of the word, let’s consider its ingenuity. First, God understands the human propensity to forget him and thus He created days and seasons, feasts and fasts, all to remind us of His great deeds on our behalf. Second, it is in keeping with Paul’s best missionary practices to take elements of pagan culture and reinterpret and reuse them in service to the only true God. Third, commemorating the fulfillment of messianic prophecies near the winter solstice is a symbolic tour de force. In close proximity to the shortest day of the year, Christmas reminds us of our need for light in a dark world. Even if we live in the southern hemisphere, sunlight near the longest day of the year still pales to darkness in comparison with the illumination available to us who have Jesus as a guide.

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray!


Elodie Ballantine Emig, Instructor of Greek

“Glory to God in the highest...”

Luke 2:8-14

December 23

Why the Magi are Important to Christmas

 **ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR** events that we associate with the Christmas story is the visit of the Magi to Bethlehem to worship the Christ child. In Matt. 2:1-12 we read the stirring account of the Magi who came in response to the appearance of a star to worship the child, who is the Messiah, and present him with expensive gifts: gold, incense, and myrrh.

But this is much more than just a stirring scene that Matthew includes to show how “wise” these individuals really were to come worship Jesus when Herod and the others did not! Rather, the Magi are acting out a script that had been written long before their arrival in Bethlehem that day. Matthew is well-known for demonstrating over and over that Jesus comes to fulfill the Old Testament in his life and ministry (such as Matt. 1:23, which fulfills Isa. 7:14). Although not mentioned explicitly in Matthew, the coming of the Magi to visit and worship Jesus also fulfills a script, a prophecy written centuries before.

In Isa. 60 the prophet anticipates a future time when God will one day restore his people Israel who are in exile because of their sin. Isa. 60:1 describes this restoration using light imagery, in contrast to the darkness they now experience in exile. But more than just the restoration of God’s people Israel, Isaiah anticipates the salvation of the Gentile nations who will also respond to this light (Isa. 60:3). Furthermore, when they respond to the light of God’s salvation, Gentiles will bring their wealth to Jerusalem (Isa. 60:5, 11). Perhaps the most interesting verse is Isa. 60:6: “All from Sheba will come *bearing gold and incense* and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.”

Notice the connections between the visit of the Magi in Matt. 2:1-12 and Isaiah’s prophecy of restoration in Isaiah 60: the Magi are foreigners; they respond to a rising light (from a star); they come to Jerusalem; they bring their wealth, gold and incense; and they come to praise and worship. Not coincidental, God has orchestrated the events of Matthew 2 so that they are nothing less than the fulfillment of Isaiah 60, which promised the restoration of God’s people and his gracious provision of salvation to any Jew and Gentile who would come and respond in faith and worship.

The Magi were acting out a script written long ago, their visit to Bethlehem to worship Jesus has profound repercussions. Their visit was the first in a long line of Gentiles who joined Israel, responding in faith and worshiping Jesus. The visit of the Magi should cause us to reflect in profound gratitude on the salvation that God has opened up to people from every nation. When we respond in worship, we continue to act out that script written so many years ago.

Dr. David Mathewson, Associate Professor of New Testament

“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

Ex. 3:6

December 24

What is Your History with God?

HISTORY IS A FUNNY THING. Some of us love it, while some would do anything to leave it behind and never look back. Regardless of your love/hate relationship with history, it provides us with a sense of context, belonging, and connection to those people and places that have shaped us, whether for good or for bad.

Too often we get stuck in our own history, the context of our own lives, and we forget that we have a longer, broader, more extensive history that connects us to generations past. We forget that life, relationships, politics, faith communities, and civilizations have gone before us and yet still influence who we are today. We forget (I forget), that the God I experience today has an extensive history with humanity that goes far beyond me while still informing my current experiences. I forget that this is a history of faithful relationship that is not separate from His relationship with me today, but instead is a history that informs my today and a history into which my story is woven.

The children of Israel were charged often to remember the faithfulness of God throughout their history—not just the faithfulness of God in *their* lifetime, but throughout Israel’s entire history. I don’t know about you, but this is not a practice I’ve seen in many Western churches today, and without this practice it is far too easy to be absorbed into our own history and forget the greater story, the extended history that we have with God.

As Christmas approaches, we often reflect on the year that has passed and reminisce on all that has happened, the people we love, the things we found delight in, and the things we are grateful to see go. This Christmas, let us reflect not just on our personal experiences with Christ during this year but on God’s entire history with us as His creation, His children. Let us reflect on our shared history, marveling, praising, and standing in awe of His unchanging faithfulness throughout generations.

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

Dr. Elisabeth Nesbit, Assistant Professor of Counseling

“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 Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God...”

Luke 2:25-28

December 25

The Long-Anticipated Gift

SIMEON WAS A SIMPLE MAN. He wasn’t a priest or scribe. But he was a committed man—committed to live in ways that pleased God and convinced that God’s promise of future deliverance was absolutely certain. He waited with the patience that comes only by faith. 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, months and years spent wondering, “When, Lord?” didn’t erode his anticipation; they heightened his excitement.

And then He was there, the One Simeon yearned to see. Carried into the temple courts in the arms of a humble couple faithfully fulfilling the duties of tradition, Simeon took the Glory of Israel, the Light of the world, into his arms. *“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”* (vs. 29-32). His praise echoed through the courts of the temple. The marvelous provision of God for all people was at long last here! From the lips of a faithful and righteous man, what could have been a moment of 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 in eternity—salvation would come to all, not just one nation. Imagine! The baby squirming in the arms of a stranger is “a light for revelation” to those trapped in the darkness of worshiping false gods and “for 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 hope to see on Christmas morning. Let’s allow Simeon’s story to frame our excitement and anticipation for these gifts. Let’s affirm that the gifts that matter the most to us really ought to be the gifts that matter for all people.

Dr. Mark S. Young, President

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