



THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRISTMAS

DEVOTIONALS FROM DENVER SEMINARY
FOR THE 2023 ADVENT SEASON



There's nothing quite like Christmas, is there? It's our holiday on steroids. Excess rules the day. Some love it; others tolerate it. One social critic put it this way, "A lovely thing about Christmas is that it's compulsory, like a thunderstorm, and we all go through it together."

I love the Christmas season. For me, it's not just about the excess, although I have to confess that I like that part of the season, especially the cookies. It's about anticipation. Once the calendar turns to December, each day brings us closer to the day we're all looking forward to. Along the way there are plenty of parties and cookies and concerts (and cookies) and decorations (and cookies) and family gatherings (and COOKIES!). And finally, we wake on that glorious morning of remembrance, rejoicing with the angels that, indeed, "The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!" (Luke 2:11; NLT).

Living with anticipation is the great joy of those who know Jesus. But it's not just anticipation for the day of remembrance of His first coming; it's anticipation of His second coming, the day of restoration when Jesus returns to make everything that's wrong in the world right, everything that's broken in the world whole, and everything's that ugly in the world beautiful. For those of us who know Jesus, we have the privilege of living every day with a sense of anticipation. What a gift! What a joy!

Denver Seminary would like to give you a gift this Christmas. Our faculty, staff, and Board members 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—past, present, and future.

Merry Christmas!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Young". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mark Young

◆...◆* * *◆ DECEMBER 1 ◆* * *...◆

Of the Same Family

“Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. . . Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil. . .”

Hebrews 2:11, 14

The book of Hebrews is not often the place we think to go during Advent, but the author contributes some profound thoughts to our theology of Jesus' incarnation. In Hebrews 1, his main concern is to show that the Son is in a unique relationship with the Father so we make sure to pay attention to God's revelation in the Son (2:1–4). In Hebrews 2, the author shows how the Son is also in a unique relationship with humanity because He condescended to join the human family in order to bring the ones who believe into the family of God (2:10–13).

With respect to God, Jesus is Son; to us, He is Brother. He was not ashamed to become one of us. Everything depends on this; it is a prerequisite for our salvation into the family of God and His delivering us from the fear of death and breaking of Satan's power. And, in a real way, the Son has done these things through His death and resurrection, as the author of Hebrews here recognizes.

Yet, we also wait for the fullness of this redemption. This, too, is fundamental to Advent: the longing and expectation for the second coming of Christ. The author of Hebrews draws attention to this aspect earlier in the same passage when he uses Psalm 8 to note that, though humanity was created to rule over creation, “at present we do not see everything subject to them,” though God put everything under humanity's feet at creation (2:8).

In other words, we do not yet live up to our original vocation. “But we do see Jesus” (2:9), the author says, the One who, as a human being, took up not only humanity's flesh and blood, but also our vocation, faithfully representing God and His rule over creation. One day He will restore redeemed humanity to God's intended vocation for us in the beginning.

These are the ones Jesus calls brothers and sisters. So we wait. We long. We mourn. We hope. We grieve. We pray and sing in a minor key. And we do so knowing there is One who has everything under His feet, and He was not ashamed to call us family. This is truly good news.

Darlene M. Seal, PhD
Assistant Professor of New Testament

◆...◆* * *◆ DECEMBER 2 ◆* * *◆◆

His Impoverishment for Our Riches

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

2 Corinthians 8:9

Advent is a season of giving based on God’s gift to us in the Incarnation, the greatest and most costly of gifts. In one sentence, the Apostle Paul demonstrates how the Incarnation should motivate our generosity.

The Apostle moved easily between theological truths and moral principles in his writings, with Jesus often serving as his model. In his second letter to the Corinthian church, Paul discussed many topics, often addressing the church’s shortcomings and outright sins. But in chapter eight, Paul takes up the issue of giving and generosity. He writes, “But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving” (2 Corinthians 8:7).

Paul does not command them to give, but rather reminds them of the generous grace of Jesus Christ, who “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Paul knew how to pack titanic theological truths into a few words. This verse proves that Christ existed before His Incarnation, since Jesus was never rich in this life. As Paul wrote elsewhere of Jesus:

“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:6-8).

Jesus left the riches of heaven to become a poor man. As Jesus said, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). Worse than that, he went to the Cross as our substitutionary sacrifice, having lost everything that He might “save the lost” (Luke 19:10). He gave His life for us that we might experience the riches of forgiveness, justification, fellowship with God, and eternal life.

This Advent, may we give generously in the spirit of the One who was impoverished for our riches. Thanks be to God.

Douglas Groothuis, PhD
Professor of Philosophy

◆...◆* * *◆ DECEMBER 3 ◆* * *...◆

Crooked Timber

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

Matthew 1:1

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” asks an incredulous Nathanael after being told that Israel’s long-awaited deliverer was raised in the sticks. It’s not hard to understand why. After all, everyone (thought they) knew Jesus’ dirty family secret—that He was born out of wedlock to a couple of hicks, a carpenter and his teenaged girlfriend. That’s not the half of it. Dig a little deeper into Jesus’ bloodlines, and you’ll find that His family history is positively sordid.

Just follow his family tree. Abraham: a great man of faith. . . when he’s not lying or swindling. Isaac: another liar. Jacob: deceiver, con man, and cheat. Judah and Tamar are right out of an episode of Jerry Springer: a Canaanite who disguised herself as a prostitute to trick her father-in-law into bearing her child. Then there’s Rahab: an actual prostitute (not just pretending to be one). “The wife of Uriah”: that would be Bathsheba, mother to David’s illegitimate sons. And that’s not to mention David himself: adulterer, manipulator, abuser of power, predator, murderer. And we haven’t even gotten to the part where Judah’s kings started sacrificing their own children to pagan gods, as Ahaz and Manasseh did.

Jesus of Nazareth comes from rotten stock.

What are we to make of all this? This genealogy means many things, including that Jesus was not ashamed of His family tree and that He is not embarrassed by our family secrets, either. The dysfunctional relationships with our parents, children, and siblings, our broken marriages, the wreckage of our failures, our deep wounds and wells of pain that are too much for us to bear—none of it embarrasses Jesus of Nazareth. This genealogy is another way of saying that Jesus is the friend of sinners.

“Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made,” wrote Immanuel Kant.¹ So, is that it, then? Is there any hope for us who come from rotten stock, twisted and warped? Is there grace even for us with our gnarled and knotty family trees, with stories marred by sin and failure?

Can anything straight be made of this crooked timber? Only the son of a carpenter could do that.

Ryan Tafilowski, PhD
Chair of the Theology Department; Assistant Professor of Theology

¹Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of Immanuel Kant* (1784; repr., Hastings, UK: Delphi, 2017), Proposition VI.

◆...◆* * * DECEMBER 4 * * *...◆

The Lamb of God, the Rescuer of Sheep

“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.’”

Luke 2:10-11

Goats are intelligent; sheep are not. Regardless, both smell and are needy. The job of a first-century shepherd was humble and lowly; necessary, but unenviable. And so, it was to shepherds that God’s angel announced the birth of His son, the Messiah. It is to a shepherd that the Messiah likens His own ministry, and to sheep (not the more intelligent goats) He likens His people. There are multiple layers of symbolism here; two incline us to think of David, his youthful employment, and Israel portrayed as sheep without a shepherd. All call to mind the longsuffering and steadfastness of God’s love.

After the shepherds are urged to quell the fear that accompanied angelic appearances, the angel shares good news. With one Greek verb, also used of the birthday of Caesar Augustus, the angel declares not only that this news is good, but also that it will bring great joy to all the people. Joy in Luke is a response to God’s saving activity, the fact that He keeps His promises. “All the people,” a collective singular, means Israel in contrast to the citizens of Rome. This good news, though truly universal, began as a promise to God’s own people, Israel.

The content of the message reminds us that God is not finished with the Davidic line, that fulfillment is not far in the future, but present “today.” We find three functional titles for Jesus—Savior, Messiah (Anointed One), and Lord. Savior, or Deliverer; is often predicated to God in the Old Testament. That God’s Son will deliver His people from all enemies, physical and spiritual, demonstrates that the Son is the ultimate, anointed King and Lord. Although “Lord” can merely mean “sir,” in combination with Savior and Messiah, it refers to divinity here.

Our Savior, our Good Shepherd, is also the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. All of our Christological metaphors get at some part of the scope of His mission and work, but even taken together, they fall short. As we contemplate the good news proclaimed to shepherds, let us consider the ways in which the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, portrays the Messiah, from His humble birth to His glorious exaltation. Let us be awestruck by the fact that our Good Shepherd left ninety-nine sheep to rescue us.

***Elodie Emig, MA**
Instructor of Greek*

◆...** DECEMBER 5 **...◆

Singing with the Saints

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

Isaiah 7:14

Of the traditions my family observed while growing up in Korea, those I cherish the most are singing, worshipping, praying, and rejoicing together at church, full of laughter and joy. When I close my eyes, I hear my mom’s and my sisters’ voices singing with me.

Singing old, familiar Christmas hymns gives me a glimpse of heaven when we will all sing and worship the Lord with whole hearts, minds, and voices. I look forward to praising the Lord, alongside my mom and dad, who led me to Jesus. My heart swells with gratitude for the love my Lord poured out on us. My soul fills with wonder at the gift. As Paul concluded, “Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift,” our Savior (2 Corinthians 9:15).

I remember my dad reciting from memory a passage from Isaiah as our family gathered to celebrate our mom in heaven, inspiring and challenging us all. “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem” (Isaiah 53:3).

The word Immanuel (God With Us) reminds me of how Jesus—divine, infinite, self-sufficient, all-knowing—chose to take human form to rescue, redeem, and reconcile us to Himself. Jesus knew what kind of death He would face, yet willingly He came for our sake. As we sing “O come, O come, Emmanuel,” we celebrate that He has already come, finished the work on the cross, and that He lives. And we are given His Spirit to empower us.

My favorite Christmas hymn is penned by Isaac Watt, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare Him room. And heaven and nature sing. . . He rules the earth with truth and grace.” I pray all the saints in the world will sing Christmas hymns, remembering His love, celebrating the hope we have, that one day we will rejoice with those who helped us to know Jesus just a little more, a little deeper, and that we are encouraged to keep sharing the Good News about the love of Christ with those who do not know Jesus yet.

I am grateful for the forefathers who penned the truth, and that we get to sing year-after-year knowing who we are. For the Apostle Paul says, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10).

Chong-Ae Shah
Member, Board of Trustees

◆...◆* * * DECEMBER 6 * * *◆...◆

A Prophecy Fulfilled

“After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”

Matthew 2:9-12

Matthew's account of the Christmas story in Matthew 2:1-12, an account from the early childhood of Jesus, narrates how Magi from a foreign country traveled to Jerusalem, and eventually Bethlehem, in response to the light of a rising star. These Magi find the young child Jesus and worship Him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. This scene has become part of our treasured manger scenes, though it probably takes place a year or two after Jesus' birth. But this is more than just a heart-warming story about Jesus as an infant. There is more to Matthew's story!

Matthew's story is part of another, one that goes back to the Old Testament. Keep in mind the main events in Matthew's account: the rising light (of a star), foreign dignitaries (Magi) coming to Jerusalem in response to the light, and gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Now, notice parallels between Isaiah 60:1-6 and Matthew 2. Notice in Isaiah 60 the rising light: "Arise, shine, for your light has come" (v. 1). It attracts the nations to it, who come in response to the light: "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (v. 3). And they bring gifts, including gold and incense: "To you the riches of the nations will come. . . And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord" (vv. 5-6).

Haven't we heard this before? Matthew is showing us that with the story of Jesus, Isaiah's prophecy of a light shining in the darkness, one which brings salvation and attracts people from all nations, is being fulfilled. God has designed the events of the birth and childhood of Christ to show that He is the fulfillment of the long-awaited hope of Isaiah's promise of a coming kingdom and salvation. We live in a world full of spiritual darkness, a world of uncertainty and instability, a world that seems unsafe. But Jesus comes to shine a light in the darkness, to bring salvation to all peoples. That is good news for a time such as this. And like the Magi, we cannot help but respond by worshiping the one who brings hope out of despair; and light to the darkness.

David L. Mathewson
Associate Professor of New Testament

◆...* * * DECEMBER 7 * * *...◆

The Comfort of Christmas

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them... to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days... 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 1:68, 74-75, 78-79

For many, Christmas is synonymous with comfort. The familiar comfort of Bing Crosby, claymation reindeer, and candlelight services foster a sense of contentment and security. For others, Christmas serves as an unsettling reminder of loss and suffering. Rather than peace and joy, the first Christmas without an irreplaceable loved one is a reminder of brokenness within our family, or a profound sense of loneliness. Reflecting on this juxtaposition is unsettling, yet the tension between comfort and distress is at the center of the Christmas story. In the verses above, John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, lyrically exposes this tension in his song of praise regarding the birth of his son and the coming Messiah.

On the surface, we see Zechariah's wonder at God's mercy and care for Him and His people. We see a hope and desire to follow God with abandon. Underlying these truths, however, are uncomfortable realities. We are anxious and in danger. We desperately need to be redeemed. We are under attack from very real enemies, be they spiritual, emotional, or physical. If this were not true, Zechariah's praise would lack any weightiness.

As a child, I had severe allergies. Periodically I had to undergo allergy testing, where I was poked with dozens of needles with various allergens on them to see what I would react to. I tried my best to be brave as I lay on a table for thirty minutes in pain and discomfort. Eventually, I could not handle the discomfort and broke down crying in my dad's arms. To this day, this is one of my most comforting memories of childhood. My dad's strength surrounded me, and I knew I was safe, even while in pain.

Ultimately, the comfort of Christmas comes grounded in the reality that we need to be comforted. As anyone who has soothed a crying child knows, the comfort the child feels in your arms is potent primarily because they are in need. They are in deep need of security and comfort. Comfort in pain leads to an internal security and confidence to step out into the world knowing we have a comforter and a protector in our pain. We are indeed "living in darkness." Yet, Zechariah's song reminds us, God's effulgent comfort is always with us.

Adam Wilson, PhD

Associate Professor of Counseling; Chair, Dual Clinical Mental Health and School Counseling Program; Chair, School Counseling Mental Health Initiative

◆...◆* * *◆ DECEMBER 8 ◆* * *...◆

A Ransom for Many

*“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

Matthew 20:28

In the midst of the holiday season, the story of Christmas often revolves around the birth of Jesus in a humble stable. While this event is undeniably profound, the significance of Christmas extends beyond His birth, encapsulating His entire life and mission. Matthew 20:28 captures the essence of Jesus' purpose on Earth, emphasizing His selflessness, servanthood, and the ultimate act of generosity.

The use of the word “ransom” in this passage carries a deep and significant meaning. In ancient times, a ransom was a price paid to secure the freedom of someone held captive. It represented deliverance from bondage, a new beginning, and a chance at a better life.

When Jesus declared that He came to give His life as a ransom, He was conveying the idea that His sacrifice would secure our freedom from the captivity of sin. We were held hostage by our wrongdoing, separated from God's perfect love. But Jesus paid the ultimate price to set us free. His life was the ransom that bought our redemption. This concept of ransom underscores the depth of God's love for us. He was willing to give His precious Son as the payment for our sins. The magnitude of this sacrifice demonstrates the lengths to which God will go to restore our relationship with Him.

As we reflect on the idea of ransom, it prompts us to consider the value God places on each of us. He sees us as worth the price of His Son's life. What shall we do with our deliverance from bondage, our new beginning, our chance at a better life?

This realization should fill our hearts with gratitude and humility, and inspire us to respond with lives marked by generosity, service, and love for others. The old hymnal quote, “O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord,” reminds us of the profound adoration we should have for Jesus. It calls us not only to celebrate the birth of Christ but to adore Him for His entire mission—His life, death, and resurrection—through which we find our ransom from sin and the promise of eternal life.

Christmas is about both the manger and the life that followed—a life marked by unparalleled generosity and love. As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, let us carry His spirit of service and selflessness in our hearts, spreading the good news of His love to all we encounter, and adoring Him as the One who gave His life as a ransom for our freedom.

Ryan Dougherty
Director of Donor Relations

◆...◆* * *◆ DECEMBER 9 ◆* * *...◆

Part of God's Family

“In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.”

Hebrews 2:10-11

What is God up to? What is He doing now? Many people have raised these questions with fear and trembling. Scripture teaches clearly that God is doing a redeeming work “bringing many sons and daughters to glory.” God is making numerous people “from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Revelation 7:9) His holy children. God is accomplishing His redemptive mission through the power of the Holy Spirit and in His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters.

Whenever I reflect upon the miracle of the first Christmas, I am in awe because of the grandeur and glory of the triune God's redemptive plan and purpose. Even before the creation of the universe, the three divine Persons of the triune God established a covenant among themselves that Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, would become a human being, live an earthly life of obedience, and die on the cross for the sins of the future sons and daughters of God.

When I repented of my sins and put my personal trust in Jesus Christ, I received the full rights of God's sonship. I have been adopted into the triune God's eternal family. As a result, I can rejoice in the truth that “whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours” (1 Corinthians 3:22). All is mine in Christ! As Martin Luther proclaimed, as a Christian I am “an utterly free man, lord of all, subject to none.”

Through faith in Christ alone, I have been spiritually united with Him. I have become a son of God, a little Christ, and a small Jesus. Jesus Christ is now “the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (Romans 8:29). He calls me His brother and friend! With the help of the Holy Spirit, I can address God, “Abba, Father.” What a privilege! What an honor! The only proper response is to praise God from whom all blessings flow! Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! Amen! Amen!

Sung Wook Chung, DPhil

Professor of Christian Theology; Director of Asian Initiative

◆...◆* DECEMBER 10 *...◆◆

Faith Like a Child

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.’”

Matthew 18:1-5

As a working mom of a one-year-old, I brought my daughter with me on a trip. She would stay with her grandparents while I attended meetings. I naively believed I could easily travel with her on my own. I chose non-stop flights, loaded the tablet with shows, and packed snacks and milk, extra clothes and diapers, and toys for my sweet girl.

We power-walked through the airport, crawled on furniture, and ate snacks to burn off energy before sitting for four hours on the plane. She tired, though, as her bedtime neared, and I was not prepared for fifteen minutes of screaming before she cried herself to sleep.

On the drive to my parents' home, despite my best efforts to provide comfort, she cried and screamed inconsolably. Once at the house, after all efforts to quiet her failed, she threw up from an upset tummy. I bathed her, wrapped her in a towel, and held her close to my heart. She quieted with her head against my chest. She was safe and loved.

While we sat on the floor, I realized how much I was like my little one in my relationship with God. As she sat in my lap, quivering, naked, and needing comfort, I saw how great God's love was for her and for me as He held both of us in that moment. I saw her vulnerability, her need, and her dependence reflect my own needs and vulnerabilities. And I saw how my love for her was much like God's love for us.

I also saw the times I have screamed at God and let Him know how unhappy I was with painful life circumstances, as she was frustrated about the challenges that face a baby on a trip. But He has never stopped loving me or her or anyone else who has screamed at Him. Instead, He encourages us to come to Him with the faith like a child in Matthew 18:1-5.

Following that command from God is hard when I want to be independent or strong. Yet there is a sweetness and simplicity in being vulnerable and trusting your needs will be taken care of. I hope to be more like my daughter in my relationship with God—trusting that I am loved and cared for as He holds me and my daughter close to His heart.

Elizabeth Meier Thornton, PhD
Assistant Professor of Counseling

◆...** DECEMBER 11 **...◆

See the Light

“In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:4, 14

I had some very good news this past year. At my eye checkup, I was given a paper with a grid printed on it. With my right eye the grid appeared just as it was supposed to. However, with my left eye, the lines became wavy and disappeared in the center. My doctor scheduled another eye test for me. I looked up that test on the internet and learned that it was used to diagnose macular degeneration, a condition that leads to blindness.

As I awaited the results, my wife Jean and her friend Judy prayed for me. The following morning the doctor called to say I did not have macular degeneration but a condition that could be treated with surgery. The surgery was a success, and I am seeing much better today.

For some, this story may be an example of my own unnecessary worry, and there is truth to that. However, I have come to see it even more importantly as an example of God's intervention, through prayer and faith, to give me continued sight. Among His works, Jesus healed those who were blind.

At Christmas we remember how the Light of the World came and brought us light and life. He came that we could at last bear witness to the love and redemption of our Savior. He came to reveal His great glory to us, and to enable us to confess with the blind man who was healed and brought before the authorities who tried to persuade him that Jesus was a sinner and no healer at all. “He replied, ‘Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!’” (John 9:25).

May God give us eyes to see Jesus. May He give us grace to allow Christ's light of salvation to shine through us so that others may see Jesus and give Him their lives and their worship.

Richard S. Hess, PhD
Distinguished Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages

◆...** DECEMBER 12 **...◆

Finding the Kingdom of Heaven in the Special Olympics

*“Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.”*

Isaiah 40:4

Isaiah announced the good news of Christmas. As the Messiah has entered the world, so came the kingdom of heaven to earth. Jesus then taught and demonstrated through His life what allegiance to that kingdom and lifting up the low places meant.

The kingdom of Jesus was not the kingdom expected by the Jews or the Roman rulers. Jesus blessed the meek and called those on the margins to come to sit beside Him. And Jesus corrected His disciples on more than one occasion, revealing that they did not occupy the head of the table. Even He, the King of Kings, was servant of all. He continues to call all of us into the kingdom of the unexpected.

And the kingdom of God may not be what we expect. It may just look like the Special Olympics, especially when held at the athletic fields of an Ivy League university. I spent years participating in this juxtaposition of worlds as one of my sons joyfully competed in New England summer Special Olympic Games.

Sometimes I need renewed hope that the kingdom of God is actually the right way up and the values our other more visible kingdoms have to offer are upside down. When I attend events for the Special Olympics, I glimpse heaven on earth. The world is not easy for people with intellectual disabilities to navigate or thrive. Neither the physical nor social environment is designed for them. From telling time to reading and managing money—these are out of reach for people like my son. But at the Special Olympics, out of view from the rest of society, the athletes' strengths shine. Being “typical” is turned upside down. They show what they can do in their own adapted and unique ways—they walk, run, or roll in races; many can swim better than they can walk. They each are a testimony of resilience and triumph against the odds. The kingdom of God is like the Special Olympics, because on those days cultural idols like being able-bodied, good-looking, or self-reliant are silenced as literal ivy gates are thrown open to the meek and the childlike.

May the good news announced by the prophecy fulfilled in Jesus motivate each of us to embrace our limits and weaknesses. We can declare, like the apostle Paul, that while one may earn the right to boast of their heritage, education, moral reputation, or even sacrifices, it was in His weaknesses and not His accomplishments that the grace and power of Christ was revealed.

Teri Elliott-Hart, PhD
Assistant Professor of Training and Mentoring



◆...◆* * * DECEMBER 13 * * *...◆

The Obvious Question

“How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’”

Luke 1:34

My young son is particularly drawn to the techniques of drawing. When we are reading together or he is flipping through the pages of a comic book, he will more often than not stop to look more closely at the way a gradient of colors, the creation of depth, and shading of objects cause the seemingly flat page to come to life. The normal cadence of moving through the story is stopped. Curiosity, wonder, honesty, imagination, sometimes even awe and stillness. . . make way for longing and expectancy. Then, the obvious question emerges, sometimes asked quietly under his breath and other times to whoever is in proximity. Pointing at the page he asks, “How?”

In Luke’s gospel, we hear one of our guides in the faith—Mary—asking the same question. The pattern of her existence is interrupted by the annunciation sent from on high with the angel Gabriel. She is disrupted from the cadence of her day-to-day, perhaps roused from the comfort of rest, possibly surprised, and surely startled. She receives what is in front of her and the obvious question emerges, “How?”

Mary receives word of the fulfillment of a long-made promise now literally growing inside of her. She has been given a shocking update. She has heard seemingly impossible news. Her “how” is not one of unfaithfulness. It is a response of curiosity, wonder, honesty, and even faithful doubt.

Mary’s willingness to ask the obvious question is a holy Adventous response. It reveals a longing for God’s caring presence. It voices the expectation that the God of long-promised grace is in on the conversation. What’s more, Mary’s response meets God’s longing to be in on the conversation with us.



This Advent, do you have an obvious question you are longing to ask God? Or, perhaps there is a question God is longing for and invites you to ask.

Take a moment now to slow down. Pause and consider the past day, week, month, or even year:

When were you startled? When have you been face-to-face with seeming impossibility? Have you noticed a growing expectancy or desire? Has the once-normal cadence of your day-to-day been disrupted? Have you been roused to attention? Does something else come to mind?

Considering any of these things that catch your attention, in the spirit of Mary's faithful honesty, does an obvious question emerge?

Chris Hess
Director of the Soul Care Initiative

*“Her ‘how’ is not one of unfaithfulness.
It is a response of curiosity, wonder,
honesty, and even faithful doubt.”*



◆...◆* DECEMBER 14 *...◆

Immanuel, God With Us!

“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.’”

Luke 2:10-11

I love Christmas! The carols, the family gatherings, the gifts, and especially the food bring a Yuletide smile to my face and delight to my soul. With only one or two exceptions, I can't think of a Christmas I didn't thoroughly enjoy. And even in those few “less than happy” holiday seasons, there was always a hint of hope of better days to come.

Yet at the heart of all the familial and cultural blessings of Christmas lies a baby in a manger: Born in difficult circumstances to young parents forced to migrate to meet the demographic demands of a distant emperor; Jesus takes center stage. Shepherds are told of His birth by a heavenly chorus and leave their flocks at night to worship Him. Magi journey hundreds of miles from hearth and home to bring Him gifts. Faithful senior citizens like Simeon and Anna rejoice at His arrival.

The central theme of Christmas is that God became human as an infant too weak to raise His head. As Matthew noted in verse 23 of the first chapter of his Gospel, “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means ‘God With Us’). Without question, the Incarnation of Christ is a great theological truth. But of equal importance is its revelation of God's infinite care and concern for each of us.

As we enjoy the many blessings of this Christmas season—and we should—it behooves us to take some time each day to reflect on the birth of Jesus. For at that first Christmas, the human race no longer looked up to see the face of God but down into the face of a baby—Immanuel. As that first angelic messenger told the shepherds, this is “good news that will cause great joy.” (Luke 2:10-11). And it is good news—Gospel—because He's the One who came from heaven to earth to save us from our sins and provide us life eternal with Him.

Scott Wenig, PhD

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

◆...◆* * * DECEMBER 15 * * *◆◆

Good News, Great Glory

“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’”

Luke 2:13-14

Heaven’s creatures worship the Lord. God desires that the entire world do the same. Even in this Christmas season, His goal is not our bliss or our comfort. His goal is to fill the heavens and the earth with His glory. What does it look like to give glory to God? Isaiah 58: 6-8 helps answer the question.

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.”

At Christmastime, generosity cheerfully expands to meet needs. Our holiday habits frequently benefit others, especially those who are powerless. Yet, Isaiah did not limit such behavior to a season. He spoke to the residents of Judah who were among the first to return and rebuild the city after their exile. As some fought over who should rule, Isaiah described the acts and attributes that continually glorify the Lord.

Take the blame off the people who are unjustly accused. Be people of *peace*.

Cancel burdensome debts. Be people of *generosity*.

Don’t demand too much or pay your workers too little. Be *gentle* people.

Give the helpless the opportunity for freedom. Be contributors of *joy*.

Welcome the hungry at your table like a friend. Be people of *kindness*.

Offer a room out of the elements to the one who is on a journey. Be people of *hospitality*.

Put new clothes on someone soaked in shame. Be *compassionate* people.

Give attentive care to your family. Be *faithful*.

These are not one-time actions, like a gift opened at Christmas. God’s desire is less for singular pious acts than for righteous rhythms that dismantle unjust relationships. Done season after season, such actions fashion us into a new kind of people—glorifying to God and at peace on the earth. This is good news for everyone!

Debra Anderson, MA

Assistant Professor of Training and Mentoring; Chair of the Training and Mentoring Curriculum

◆...◆* DECEMBER 16 *...◆

A Time Such as This

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

John 15:5

The Christmas season has a way of both reminding me of times gone by and causing me to imagine times to come. This is especially true this year as our three girls have left the house, leaving their younger brother as the only child left in our home.

Christmas has long been a season full of celebrated memories and dreaming about hopeful futures for our family. Memories of the sweet excitement of young children on Christmas morning, of first and last days of the school year, athletic accomplishments, homecoming dances, college choices, and Christ in our home. Each memory gives birth to the hope of future moments—growing confidences, times of laughter, and the continued presence of our Coming King. And this season, there is an uneasiness in my manic shifts from Christmas past to Christmas future, a sort of grief over what has passed and an anxiety over what may yet be.

And, as is common in my experience, in this tension, Scripture invites me back into the presence of the Christ child. Emmanuel, a name that offers direction during a season full of emotion, memory, and hope. God With Us. In this time, between the first Advent of Christ and the second Advent of Christ, we are reminded that we embody Christmas as we live in Christ who is with us in our disorientation and in our celebration. We are invited to consider the depth of our longing for peace, the depth of our longing to know and to be known. Grateful to be alive in Christ who gives meaning to our lives past, present, and future.

Inevitably, the Christmas season will bring with it a time of reflection and lament, and prayerfully, joy and laughter. And it likely will be both orienting and disorienting in the span of minutes! As I reflect upon both the loss and gratitude for our emptying nest, I am reminded once again, that Christmas is not a season, but a Person.

Jeff Cook, PhD
*Associate Professor of Counseling; Chair,
Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program*

◆...*★ DECEMBER 17 *★...◆

The Wonder of it All

“How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’

The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.

For no word from God will ever fail.’”

Luke 1:34-37

These four verses, inspired by the Holy Spirit and penned by Luke, place my spirit in a space that magnifies the very wonder of our God. Even before the world knew what was happening, miracles were taking place behind the scenes that were filled with the wonder of God. Mary, a young virgin, would carry the Christ child. . . wonder! The Holy Spirit would come and overshadow her. . . wonder! Elizabeth, a cousin to Mary, who was said to be unable to conceive was then in her sixth month of pregnancy. . . wonder! The real meaning of the Christmas season is simply filled with wonder.

Even today when we reflect on the season, we can't help but take in the wonder of it all. God steps away from His heavenly throne, puts on flesh, and comes into the world as an infant. Seemingly weak and helpless, it is His strength that is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). That is a wonder! Because the world needed a Savior to cancel our sin debt, which none of us could ever pay, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21). That is a wonder.

As we enjoy the fullness of the season, may we continually ask ourselves the question that Mary begs when she hears the life-changing message spoken by the angel. How can this be? How can we be so loved by God that He would send His only Son to save us? How could this be that all who trust Him as Lord and Savior can look forward to being secure in Him for all eternity? Our answer can be found in the coming of the Christ child that was foretold, foreseen, and fulfilled in Bethlehem so long ago. Jesus, our Savior, is both the answer to the question and the reason for the wonder of it all.

Iantha Brown, MDiv

Alumna, Recruiter/Urban Initiatives Community Liaison

◆...* * DECEMBER 18 * *...◆

The Power of the Supporting Cast

“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him. . .”

Matthew 1:24

My wife is a high school theater director and routinely deals with students (and their parents) who are upset about being cast for smaller parts than they wanted. Sometimes they decide not to be in a show because of the small parts they receive. Interestingly, Joseph, Jesus' adoptive father, had such a role in the events that changed human history. He was part of the supporting cast and received relatively little attention in the Gospels. Yet his decisions of obedience were integral to the redemptive events that transpired.

Four times in the first two chapters of Matthew's Gospel, Joseph received directions from the Lord. “Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife” (1:20). “Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt” (2:13). “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel” (2:20). “Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee” (2:22).

Each time he did as he was instructed. In none of these instances is Joseph recorded as saying anything. He simply followed instructions. Only Matthew and Luke mention him in the birth narratives, and only Matthew records these instances when he received and responded to the Lord's direct guidance. Matthew repeatedly notes that Joseph's response fulfilled something the prophets had said about the Messiah. Matthew could offer this perspective as one who knew the rest of the story; he saw how everything unfolded and ended (with the resurrection and the ascension!).

Joseph had these periodic directions from an angel but certainly did not have the big picture or the end of the story. He didn't see how his acts of obedience would be pivotal in the drama of redemption. His part was quantitatively meager but qualitatively immense!

Our celebrations of the first coming of our Lord should include gratitude for Joseph's faithfulness as a member of the supporting cast. We can also take note of how God used such unspectacular acts of obedience in the drama of redemption; the impact of his role extended far beyond what he could have imagined. Joseph is yet another example of how God meets the world's deepest needs through methods that run counter to our instincts and how God expands and extends the impact of simple faithfulness in our lives.

Don Payne, PhD

Vice President of Academic Affairs; Academic Dean; Professor of Theology

◆...* DECEMBER 19 *...◆

A Story of Visitation and Response

“After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”

Matthew 2: 9-12

The birth story of Christ is one of visitation and response. Throughout the narrative we see God visiting His people in a variety of ways, and we witness the humble response of worship by those who have encountered the unexpected.

The priest, Zechariah, who is visited by an angel with a message about an unexpected son, responds in prophetic song. A young, unmarried woman responds to a life-altering visitation with humble acceptance. Lowly shepherds are visited by a chorus of heavenly messengers announcing good news for all people, and respond with curiosity and seeking. And there are the Magi, wise men from the east, who interpret the appearance of a star in the sky as a divine visitation that proclaims the birth of an important king. Their response was to endure months of discomfort in travel, willingly traversing cultural barriers for the opportunity to bow before a newborn king and offer gifts. They followed a star, unsure of where it might lead, and pushed forward with one goal in mind—worship.

There is also a pattern of visitation and response in the birth narratives. God moves towards humanity. He visits those who have been included in His people, and also those, like the Magi, who were excluded. He sends angels, His Spirit, and a cosmic body to share the good news of the birth of Christ. He reveals Himself and His plan to shepherds, unmarried women, priests, and foreigners. And the response to these miraculous visits is humble worship. It is likely that the Magi did not understand all that was happening through the birth of this Jewish king. Yet, they faced all the risks inherent in ancient travel and even faced the veiled threats of King Herod to bow before this child.

The pattern of visitation and response continues in our lives. God is still visiting His people. He may come to us in the words of Scripture where we are suddenly overcome with the presence of the Spirit. He may come to us in a dream to remind us of His promise of hope, visit us through the words or actions of someone else, or even in our service to others. No matter how the Lord might visit us this Christmas season, may our response be one of humble worship where we offer Him our precious gifts.

Patty Pell, PhD

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Executive Director of The Gospel Initiative*

◆...* * * DECEMBER 20 * * *...◆

Come and See

“Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which, when translated, is Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, ‘Follow me.’

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’

‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’ Nathanael asked.

‘Come and see,’ said Philip.”

John 1:40-46


For generations—for centuries—the Hebrew people had waited for the Messiah, the chosen One, the promised One.

The prophets had foretold that the Messiah would throw off the Hebrews’ yoke of oppression, gather the dispersed of Israel, and usher in peace. He would literally be God among them, *Immanuel*. He would save the people from their sins, and His kingdom would know no end.

And then—on what might have been a silent night but was more likely pierced by a cacophony of animal sounds—a small, innocent, helpless baby entered the world. A decidedly ignoble birth for the purported Savior of the World.

And yet, this child was special. His birth was announced by angels to nearby shepherds. “Let’s go see!” the shepherds said, hurrying from their fields to Bethlehem.

Magi from the East—wise men, perhaps even kings—also saw a sign, a star, announcing the child’s birth. They followed the star for thousands of miles just so they could see this miracle for themselves.



Decades later, Jesus began His public earthly ministry. John the Baptist announced His arrival: "I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One." "Look!" he told his followers, "See for yourself!"

One of those disciples, a man named Andrew, believed John, and left him to follow Jesus. He then went to find his brother, Simon Peter: "Come and see!" Andrew said.

Andrew and Peter were joined by Philip, who found Nathanael. "Come and see!" Philip entreated.

On His way from Judea to Galilee, Jesus stopped at a well in Samaria, where he talked with a woman about her life, living water, and worship. The woman left that encounter and immediately went into town: "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could this be the Messiah?"

It was. He is.

In this season of Advent, we are invited to slow down, to remember, to see, to worship. The Christ-child has come to us. Immanuel, God With Us.


Come and see. Behold the baby in the manger.

And then... we are invited to encounter and re-encounter Him throughout the rest of the year: *And* to tell others. *Come and see*.

This Messiah, this miracle-worker. The Jesus who makes the lame walk and the deaf hear; who bore our suffering and who breaks every chain; who saved us and who now sits on a throne at the right hand of God the Father.

Come and see!

Angie Ward, PhD
Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program;
Associate Professor of Leadership and Ministry



◆...** DECEMBER 21 **...◆

The Messiah's Friends—Women!

"You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus."

Luke 1:31

Jesus brings hope to all people. Here we focus on the hope He brings for women. The number of women in Jesus' life is noteworthy. First, *Elizabeth* gives birth to John, who is destined to "bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah. . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:16-17). For nine months, Elizabeth pondered these words as she awaited the arrival of the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah!

Second is *Mary*, a betrothed, virgin Jewish girl, who is visited by the angel Gabriel. The angel declares, "The Lord is with you. . . You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. . . The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:28, 31, 35). Troubled at the angel's words, Mary wonders how this could be since she had known no man. With faith, fear, and bewilderment, she answers, "May your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38).

After Jesus' birth, we meet *Anna*, an eighty-four-year-old prophetess who lived as a widow for sixty years, worshipping night and day, fasting and praying, eagerly awaiting the arrival of the One who would bring redemption to her people. When she finally sees Jesus, she breaks forth in thanksgiving to God and speaks about the Child to everyone she encounters. Anna is our first evangelist!

Jesus began His life surrounded by women who loved Him and recognized His life's purpose. At the end of His life, Jesus is still surrounded by women. On the *Via Dolorosa*, "women who had come with Jesus from Galilee" (Luke 23:55) followed Him. At the cross, these women appear alongside Jesus' mother, her sister Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, Joseph, and Salome. After the resurrection, they are the first to see the empty tomb and hear the words of the angels, "He is not here; he has risen!" (Luke 24:6).

Jesus came to us through a young virgin. He lived a sinless life surrounded by women. He ministered to women and healed their wounds. He protected them from harm and forgave their sins. And today, He is still a woman's best friend. O, what a Savior! O, what a mighty God!

Hélène Dallaire, PhD

*Earl S. Kalland Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages;
Chair of the Old Testament Department*

◆...** DECEMBER 22 **...◆

The Light of the Life, Death, and Resurrection

“The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

Matthew 4:16

The past months have been difficult. Three men at church with whom I shared the journey died after suffering through difficult diseases of aging. Three friends from my younger years also died, including Terry, a lifelong friend. Terry's passing was the most difficult, watching ALS bring him, in his final months, to only being able to communicate through blinking his eyes. And now my sister-in-law is facing an uncertain future with her recent diagnosis of pancreatic cancer.

When reflecting on this, I was reminded of an article I read as a young pastor discussing God and healing. God, the author wrote, can choose to heal in four different ways: 1) natural body processes; 2) doctors, drugs, surgery, and the marvels of modern medicine; 3) supernatural healing through the Holy Spirit; and 4) yes, God heals through death. Most of us have experienced the first two, maybe even the third. It's the fourth that gives us pause when we think about it. Death connected to healing and life.

This may not seem like the typical Advent reflection, but it comforts me, and I hope it will you, too. Christ came as a little babe, born in a manger. The angels and shepherds bowed down and worshiped. Anna and Simeon, after waiting for years in expectation, lifted their voices in celebration. Many who encountered Jesus during His ministry years gave thanks for physical, emotional, relational, or spiritual healing. But the end goal was for Jesus to bring the light of hope to those living in darkness and under the shadow of death. God sent His son to restore humankind to Himself, defeating the powers of Satan and death. Christ was born for the cross. And the cross, despite how dark and depressing it is to think about, brought the light of life.

The angel on that first Christmas said to the shepherds, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.” The angel at the tomb told the women, “He is not here, he has risen.” The life, death, and resurrection brought a great light to us who live in the shadow of death. This is the good news of the Gospel. This season we need to remember that Advent was the first crack of light breaking into the darkness.

Bradley Widstrom, EdD

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Director of Personal Formation of Counseling Division*

◆...◆* * * **DECEMBER 23** * * *◆

Sharing the Hope of the Gospel

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

John 3:16-17

This well-known passage of Scripture comes from a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, a Pharisee, in a secret nighttime encounter, and it sums up the great news of the gospel message. God, in His love for all of humanity, gave the greatest gift of all time to offer reconciliation to all who would believe by faith. As we prepare our hearts and homes for the commemoration of Jesus' birth, let's reflect on the sheer magnitude of what God did for us, and the implications for our eternal destiny.

Out of perfect love, God the father, sent His only Son, His most priceless gift, to fallen humanity so that the whole world could be restored to God by His perfect sacrifice. Jesus did not come only to save the Jews, which would exclude most of us, but He came so that we all might have an opportunity to believe in Him and experience salvation. Salvation and reconciliation are not only for our short lifetime on this earth, but for all of eternity!

Jesus, who will judge both the living and dead, told Nicodemus that God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it through Him, which is fantastic news. The Pharisees thought they were pleasing God by following rules and looked scornfully upon people who did not do the same, including Jesus Himself. What they failed to recognize is that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. He did not conform to their system of religion, so they rejected Him.

As we reflect on what Jesus said to Nicodemus and think about the people we will connect with during this season in our families, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and communities, how can we make this truth compelling for those who do not know Jesus? Do we need to root out any pharisaical tendencies in ourselves so we can approach and accurately reflect the love of God for those He places in our path this holiday season? People need this perfect gift, and we have an exceptional opportunity during this season to make this priceless gift available through our words, actions, and deeds.

Rev. Debora Barr, MDiv
Washington DC Campus Site Director

◆...*★ DECEMBER 24 *...◆

The Blessings of His Common Grace

“[God] causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

Matthew 5:45

Joyeux Noël is an inspiring and haunting film. Released in 2005, it is based on the true story of a one-day truce for Christmas Day 1914 during World War I, organized by one small group of French, Scottish, and German soldiers in the trenches near Lens, France. A priest says the Latin Mass for any who want to participate. Men bury their dead. Some play soccer or strike up very temporary friendships that end when the shooting resumes the next day.

I remember as a boy reading about other Christmas truces during the Civil War. I always thought that if men could stop fighting for one day, surely, they could stop long enough to bring the war to an end. I didn't understand about the powers and principalities that lay behind all the warfare.

The summer of 2023 included Denver's wettest June on record. I often thought about how God "sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." He also makes *His* sun rise on everybody. A terrible battle in a war can happen on a beautiful day, just as the weather on Christmas may be far from what we hope for. Human beings, whether Christian or not, are capable of heroic, altruistic sacrifice as well as stunning cruelty. God nevertheless extends the blessings of His common grace to all.

I have an old black-and-white photograph of my mother's father in his uniform with his rifle from when he served in the German army during the last few months of World War I, after he turned eighteen on July 4 of that year. If birthdays can prophesy, this one foresaw that he would emigrate to the U.S. in 1923 and become a loyal American citizen and patriot the rest of his life. But I know from first-hand testimony that, even when he enlisted as a young German soldier, he was the same wonderful Christian man that I knew.

Many righteous and unrighteous people alike celebrate Christmas. Actually, it's really only the unrighteous, because by God's standards we are all unrighteous. This year, let's thank God that He shines His sun and brings His rain on all people. Let's also recall that it's only in Jesus that we can be freed from this world's evil powers and enjoy eternal life.

Craig L. Blomberg, PhD
Professor Emeritus of New Testament

◆...◆* * * DECEMBER 25 * * *◆

The Best News We Could Ever Imagine

“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”

Luke 2:10-11

According to a recent survey, seven in ten Americans suffer from “bad news fatigue.” It’s well documented that consuming negative news stories increases feelings of anger, anxiety, and fear. Yet, negative news headlines have a sixty percent higher click through rate than positive news headlines. We say we’re overwhelmed by bad news, but we can’t stop clicking on it! Good news, on the other hand, has been shown to lift our spirits and make us more hopeful. Bottom line? We need good news. Really, really good news!

So did God’s people in the first century AD. Living under Roman oppression had stripped them of their agency and hope. Life was hard and the presence of the Romans was a constant reminder that what God had promised His people wasn’t yet a reality. Most put their heads down and called out for God to intervene on their behalf. Others took up arms and attacked the Roman occupiers. Everyone longed for change and most believed that only their promised Messiah could bring that change. But when? “How long, O Lord?” was their constant refrain.

Therefore, when an angel announced to a group of shepherds in the fields outside of Bethlehem, “*I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord,*” (Luke 2:10-11) they heard the good news they had waited to hear for generations. Perhaps, the angel’s announcement brought Isaiah’s words to mind. “*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring glad tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’ Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.*” (Isaiah 52:7-10)

Notice how Isaiah’s promise and the angel’s proclamation lay out the scope of this good news. It’s good news for everyone. That’s one of the reasons this good news is better than all other good news. One of the tragic consequences of human depravity is that good news is typically good for some, but not for everyone. That’s not the case, however, with news of the coming of the Savior. The news of his coming is good news for everyone because Jesus will defeat the three enemies that plague every human being: sin, death, and evil. That’s really, really good news!

And that’s why Christmas morning means so much to us. The coming of Jesus, the Savior, is the best news we could ever imagine. On this morning we remember, we give thanks, and we rejoice over this incredibly good news.

*Mark Young, PhD
Denver Seminary President*

❖...❖❖❖ **WE PRAY THAT** ❖❖❖...❖

THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRISTMAS

found in Jesus' birth, and the comfort, hope, joy,
and peace it brings, fills your hearts and
minds this holiday season.

May God bless your Christmas and New Year.

Mark + Priscilla Gray

❖...❖❖❖ *And the entire*
Denver Seminary Family ❖❖❖...❖



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