

**Huguenot Road Baptist Church
2009
Advent Devotion Guide**

The Birthday of a King



What is Advent?

A time of anticipation and preparation for the birth of Christ, Advent is a Latin word meaning *to come* or *to prepare*. This time of preparation has a three-fold meaning: we prepare for the annual celebration of Christ's birth, we celebrate the coming of Christ into our hearts afresh, and we anticipate the coming of Christ again.

It is from these vantage points—past, present, and future—that we, through our Advent celebrations, identify with the ancient people of Israel who looked for the coming of the promised Messiah. We also look forward with hope and anticipation to an experience with the living Christ during this season of Advent. Finally, we look forward to Christ's coming in final victory.

Advent is the first season of the Christian year, and it begins four Sundays before Christmas Day. During each Sunday of Advent and on Christmas Eve, we enrich our corporate worship by lighting candles on the Advent wreath. Each Sunday, we are reminded that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World and that we, as Christians, are called to be the light of Christ to a needy world.

- 1st Week – Anticipation Candle – purple
- 2nd Week – Bethlehem Candle – purple
- 3rd Week – Shepherds Candle – pink
- 4th Week – Angels Candle – purple
- Christmas Eve & Day – Christ Candle – white

The colors utilized during the Advent season are symbols to remind us of Jesus Christ. Purple represents royalty and is a traditional symbol of the Advent season. Pink represents the joy that Christ came to offer us. The white color of the Christ Candle symbolizes the purity of Jesus Christ. The Advent wreath is made from greenery that is the symbol of Christian growth. The circular form of the Advent wreath represents the everlasting nature of God's love.

Members of HRBC have written devotional thoughts for each day of Advent to help you prepare for the birth of Christ. This year, the theme for our devotion guide is *The Birthday of a King*, and scripture passages tie to Sunday morning Bible study and worship. We encourage you to use an Advent wreath in your home and light the appropriate candle(s) each day.

We have also included a listing of all Advent worship experiences designed to enrich your time of preparation during Advent. Encourage others to join you for meaningful times of celebration during this Season of Advent.



at
Huguenot Road Baptist Church

Sunday, November 29 - First Sunday of Advent

- 8:45 a.m. CrossRoads Worship—Light the Anticipation Candle
- 11:15 a.m. Traditional Worship—Light the Anticipation Candle
Begin the Week of Prayer for International Missions
- 3:00 p.m. Ladies Tea and Mission Speakers

Sunday, December 6 - Second Sunday of Advent

- 8:45 a.m. CrossRoads Worship—Light the Bethlehem Candle
- 11:15 a.m. Traditional Worship—Light the Bethlehem Candle
Lord's Supper Observed in Both Services
Ingather Chuck & Erica Morris Offering for International Missions

Sunday, December 13 - Third Sunday of Advent

- 8:45 a.m. CrossRoads Worship—Light the Shepherds Candle
- 11:15 a.m. Traditional Worship—Light the Shepherds Candle
Parent/Child Dedication in Both Services
- 7:00 p.m. Christmas Musical—*The Carols of Christmas*

Sunday, December 20 - Fourth Sunday of Advent

- 9:00 a.m. Continental Breakfast
- 10:00 a.m. Bible Study for All Ages
- 11:15 a.m. Advent Worship (One Service)—Light the Angels Candle
Preschool Pageant

Thursday, December 24 – Christmas Eve – Light the Christ Candle

- 5:30 p.m. Family Christmas Service
- 11:00 p.m. Candlelight Communion Service

First Week of Advent



Anticipation Candle
O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Waiting for Christmas Day to Come!

Anticipation, for me, is probably the strongest feeling leading up to an event. Those who know me well know my love for all things Christmas. For me, the journey of the season is filled with awe, wonder and joy. When I close my eyes and let my memory wander back to my childhood, I can experience those same feelings I had leading up to Christmas. The sights, sounds and smells during Advent and Christmas set my sensory perception into overdrive.

I distinctly remember awakening on the morning of December 24 each year with that butterflies-in-my-stomach-excited-for-things-to-come feeling but also knowing I had to endure an entire day of waiting. The day was different. Our routine was off-kilter. My parents were on holiday, home from work. There were the sounds and smells of Christmas baking and meal preparation happening in the kitchen. There was the rustle of paper during the last minute wrapping of gifts. There was Christmas music in the air and little boys dancing with delight.

The excitement built and built all day long and finally, when patience was almost lost (for parents and children alike), the daylight would begin to wane and give over to the magic of the night. There were baths to be had and bright red Christmas sweaters to be donned and out into the night we went – moon shining, Christmas lights twinkling, off to my Grandmother’s church we’d go. There were carols to be sung and speeches about shepherds and wise men and angels to be given by little children. The Bible was opened, and Luke 2 was read from the poetic King James Version. Jesus was born in Bethlehem and all was right with the world. Then the lights would dim—the darkness heightening the sense of smell. The scent of the evergreen tree would wash over me. The organ would sound, and the choir would process while singing *O Come All Ye Faithful*.

At the end of the service, each person in that little church received a gift most rare—following the tradition of the wise men presenting gifts to Jesus. We could smell the gift as we entered the building. The anticipation of receiving it at the end of the night was almost too much for a little boy to endure. The tradition of our community was to give each person a fruit bag. The fruit was in a brown paper sack with the top twisted closed so its shape resembled that of a Hershey’s Kiss. Many in our community never experienced the treasures inside the bag except one night a year. There were red and yellow apples, oranges and tangerines, walnuts, pecans, Brazil nuts, a little box of raisins and if someone had good fortune that year and was generous, there might even be a piece or two of candy.

Arriving home after the service each of us would take a piece of fruit from our bags, and my Grandmother, who lived with us, would make a Christmas fruit salad. Then off to bed we would go, too excited to sleep and too tired to stay awake very long. And all would be at peace.

When Christmas day finally dawned, we realized we had come full circle - Jesus was born and God’s plan of redemption was now in place. There was still the ultimate sacrifice that took place. And afterward the Spirit came to dwell with us each moment of each day. But now, the anticipation of a glorious home-going to be with God and a reunion with those who have gone on before, is no longer a simple hope, it is a reality for all who put their trust in Christ and believe.

In this season of Advent, it is our hope and prayer that you are at peace because your trust is in the Christ of Christmas. May you have a Merry Christmas as you anticipate and experience the blessings of the season.

Phillip Brown

Anticipating Christ's Coming
Hebrews 9:28

So Christ, also having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

Advent is a season of anticipation. Just like the world anticipated the birth of Messiah, the Savior of the world, we now anticipate Jesus coming again as King. Christ's first coming was prophesied when the Jews were held captive in Babylon. They looked for their Messiah with longing and expectation. He would come and "Ransom Captive Israel."

In my natural life, there are many things I anticipate—births, weddings, family dinners and travel adventures, to mention a few. I, too, look forward to Christmas and the celebration of the birth of my Messiah. May we all "eagerly await" His second coming even as we celebrate His first coming. Jesus Christ is truly our "hope of eternal life" (Titus 1:2).

Marianne Allen

Pay It Forward
Isaiah 9:2-7

Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever... The people who walk in darkness will see a great light – a light that will shine on all who live in the land where death casts its shadow. For a child is born to us, a son is given to us...He will rule forever.

This is the time of year when we anticipate the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This Christmas will have a very special significance for me because my beloved wife, Christy, is still here by my side. There was a time in late June and early July when I wondered what it would be like to live without her, for she was very sick. You, my church, special friends and family, offered prayers for her healing, and God heard your call. He sent special caregivers in the form of wonderful doctors and nurses and special friends who cared for both of us. We were blessed to have healing prayers from friends, clients, business associates, and folks we didn't even know. We knew we needed their help and prayers. Prayer warriors all around the world prayed for Christy. You wrote notes of encouragement, provided special relief for me as I cared for her. Most of all you showed genuine love to us both. I can never repay you, but I will do my best to pay it forward.

Paying it forward is what Christ did for you and for me. For He gave His life that we might have life and have it more abundantly. I am grateful for many things, including a healthier and loving wife, a supportive family, thoughtful friends, and a Christian church community. I am most grateful to Jesus who came into this sinful world to pay it forward for me. I approach this Christmas season with anticipation and thanksgiving more than any of the preceding 62 years, for I am truly a grateful husband, father, father-in-law, and Papa.

May God bless you as he has blessed me this year!

Wilton Ford

**The Sign of Immanuel
Isaiah 7:10-17**

Have you ever received a sign from the Lord, without asking for one? It may have been perceived by one of your senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or feeling. The Lord provides signs as a reminder of our faith in Him and for positive reinforcement, just as He gave Noah the visual sign of the rainbow. And, many times we have to be patient in order to become aware of the sign.

My husband, Steve, had a heart attack earlier this year. He underwent unsuccessful triple bypass surgery and nearly died. He suffered numerous arrhythmias and had to be shocked back to life almost 100 times. The doctors could not continue to shock his heart, so they transported him to MCV Hospital and placed him on an artificial heart for nearly three months. That was a long period of waiting and anticipating. Then, on May 24, 2009, Steve was offered another heart and underwent heart transplant surgery. Throughout the entire ordeal, we both had to practice patience, but we continuously received signs and good news that everything would be okay with Steve.

As I was leaving the hospital early one evening before Steve was discharged, I pulled out of the parking lot and had the most magnificent view of a double rainbow. As I drove down to Leigh Street, I could see where the rainbow began, and it came back into my view as I turned onto Broad Street. By that time, I had to get out of my car and take a photo of the rainbow because it appeared to travel right through VCU/MCV Hospital. That was one of my signs from the Lord that Steve was definitely going to be okay.

Through the birth of God's son, Jesus, all who believe in Him will be born again and offered everlasting life. Just be patient and keep looking for the sign.

Cheri Bloss

Happy Birthday, Jesus!
Isaiah 9:7

Christmas Day has meant many things to me over the years. As a child, it was the excitement of opening presents, as well as having much of the extended family together. As I got older, it meant spending quality time with family I didn't see very often. As a parent, it has become a more reflective time, especially with a recent addition to our celebrations.

Our oldest son, Jacob, was due on Christmas Day. Being young and recently married, it was overwhelming for us to think that God had given us such a blessing; much less that he may be born on such a special day. Heidi started to have some issues with the pregnancy in November. I remember the doctor talking in very dire terms, and I was overcome with emotion. I prayed over my wife for God to give us peace in such a scary time, knowing that He had brought His son into this world when others were afraid.

Heidi made it through the remainder of the pregnancy safely, and Jacob was born a couple weeks early. A few short years later, he was able to understand that Christmas is the time to celebrate Christ's birth, and he made an interesting request, "Could we take the *Happy Birthday* sign from his party and hang it up for Christmas?" He also thought we should sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus on Christmas Day before opening presents.

That is exactly how we begin every Christmas morning. Every year as I join in singing with my children, my wife, my parents, and my sister's family, I think about how truly wonderful Christ has been to me and how blessed we all are by His birth!

Jon Thurmond

Anticipate God's Work in Your Life
Isaiah 7: 10-12

This past summer I got the privilege to go to a conference called DCLA with several others in the HRBC youth group. When I was first presented with the opportunity, I was very skeptical about going on a trip that was completely focused on my walk with God, and not on helping other people. I had engraved in my head that going on mission was God's only purpose for me, and that was what I needed to spend my summer doing. However, it didn't take me long to realize through the course of the conference that He was going to use me in more ways than I believed possible.

Shortly after arriving in Washington D.C., Jon Greenhill asked if any of us would be interested in being a small group leader during the conference. This meant we would "lead" the discussions within a circle of people we had never met. Before I knew it, I was signed up and getting information about what exactly I had gotten myself into. I had no clue what to expect! I felt completely out of my element, and I wasn't sure what in me had given me the sudden urge to step up to the plate. After all, I wasn't really expecting much out of the trip. Boy was I wrong!! The discussions we had and the relationships that were built will last a lifetime. I remember speaking when the group was silent after a question, and somehow bringing up a topic everyone could relate to—really lighting a fire under people to speak what was on their hearts. I'm not sure if I could ever effectively describe how that felt....it was amazing.

I would never have anticipated that God could change my life so quickly. But in reality, God changes our lives every day. The question is whether or not we choose to let Him be in control. Through the birth and then the sacrifice of His son Jesus we are able to live the lives we do. So, this holiday season, remember to listen and follow what's on your heart and anticipate His gift for you.

BE. LOVE. SERVE. REPEAT.

Jamie Latta
Tenth Grade, Midlothian High School

God Has Been Good to Us
Isaiah 9: 2-7

God is always with us, and he will always help us. He does things that we don't even think about. He made nature, but people don't often stop and say "Wow! God made that!" He's done many great things. One day Jesus will return and do more great things.

People don't take the time to stop and think about what God has done for them. He helps us no matter what kind of situation we are in. He made people to help each other. He brought us all to life. He has done wonderful things for all of us and this world. Stop and think: What has God done for you today?

Cameron Lloyd,
Third Grade

Second Week of Advent



Bethlehem Candle
O Little Town of Bethlehem

Small Idea...Large Impact
Micah 5:2 (NCV)

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, are one of the smallest towns in Judah. But from you will come one who will rule Israel for me.

Big things come in small packages.

One of the things about the whole story of Jesus' birth that never ceases to puzzle and amaze me is the wonder of how much the small things affect the larger picture. Scripture says that Jesus wouldn't be born in a large city, but in a small, humble town. We know Jesus didn't come as a big roaring lion of a man, but, as a tiny crying baby.

In a season that is so often overwhelmed with the idea of getting and giving bigger and better gifts, what do you think would happen if we gave small gifts that really made a difference in someone else's life? What if your family decided to give each other smaller or fewer gifts, so you would be able to give something to someone else who might need it more? Or what if you decided you weren't giving ANY gifts and instead invested time and energy in each other or other people.

A family I know decided, with their larger, extended family, to skip giving gifts to the many cousins this year. The money they would have spent on each other is being pooled to be given to a mission project. The money they would usually spend on each other was small, but together, the money will help someone else who needs it more. A small idea with a large impact.

Are there small ways you can make a difference in someone's life this season? It doesn't take much money, sometimes none at all, to let people know they are loved in a big way by a tiny baby, born a long time ago in a small town. Happy gifting!!

Amanda Lott

**Peace, from Where? from What?
Luke 2:1-7; Micah 5:2-5a; Is 9:6; John 14: 27;
John 15:4; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 2:14**

Reminder: Today is the 68th anniversary of Pearl Harbor Day.

How ironic that Peace comes from something small, and in the least expected way.

The prophet Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah. While God sent Isaiah to speak to His people in northern Israel, He sent Micah to speak to His people in southern Judah. And while God was going to allow His disobedient children to be overrun by their enemies, He also promised a new powerful ruler, One who would *be* their peace, not one who would lead in retribution, and One who would come from a small place in Judah, not from a fortified major city like Jerusalem.

The small shepherd boy-warrior and future beloved King David came from Bethlehem. God spoke to Elijah in a still, small voice.

Jesus during his teachings reminded us of the preciousness of little ones, and how wisdom can come from their mouths [rather than our own].

And of course the Prince of Peace came and was wrapped in swaddling clothes – you can't get much smaller or more unexpected than that. How ironic.

I have heard many times of the deliberate breaks in action during war time field battles on Christmas Day. I can only imagine the contrast between deafening cannon-fire and screaming warriors, and the silenced weaponry and quietly-sung carols known and appreciated from both sides of the battle line. What peace! How ironic.

Reverend Philip Brooks of Philadelphia penned the lyrics to "O Little Town of Bethlehem" in December 1865, just after he had visited Bethlehem, and just months after the War Between the States had ended. How ironic. I wonder what it must have been like to have just come from ministering in a war-torn nation, to visit the city of His Savior's birth. What inspiration.

When the angels sang, *Peace to men on whom His favor rests*, it is not necessarily a promise of peace to all mankind. How do we find favor with God? Only through inviting "the dear Christ to enter in."

The last line of the hymn *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, to me, implores the Lord Emmanuel to abide with us. It is stronger than an invitation. It expresses a need. We need Jesus. And we need to stay close to Him to experience the Peace that He is. "If we abide in Him, He abides with us."

A Steven Curtis Chapman lyric I like has a line which says "Sweet are the branches growing the fruit that comes from [abiding in] the vine...I want to be like them holding on to the One whose life is mine." We can only know the fruit of Peace by abiding in Him.

Usually late on Christmas Eve, after most have gone to bed, I find a few moments to reflection on the miracle of the Christmas birth and the bridging of the gap between God and man. I also think of the sacrifices our Heavenly Father made. The thoughts of sacrifice are disturbing, yet without the sacrifices, I could not know Peace. And without abiding, no Peace. Ironic, and amazing!

Amid the hustle and bustle of what Christmas can be, may you find and enjoy a few moments of quiet rest—and Peace.

(For more stories about songs check out 52hymns.com)

O Little Town of Bethlehem
Luke 2:1-7; Micah 5:2-5a

Looking back on my childhood in a small community in the Blue Ridge Mountains outside of Galax, Virginia, some of the happiest times were around Christmas. The small church where I grew up made this a glorious time as we looked forward to celebrating Christ's birthday.

The anticipation for us children would mount as we waited to see what the adults chose for us to do each season. Whether it was learning the Christmas carols like *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, *Away in a Manger*, or *Silent Night*; learning to read the scriptures in front of the congregation; or memorizing our parts in the Christmas play, each of us had a special task to perform.

We truly enjoyed rehearsing our songs, scripture readings, or play practice each week. All the families in the surrounding communities were invited to come and be with us on our special night of celebration. To us children, this was our "Little Town of Bethlehem" where everyone came together for one night of the year to worship the newborn King!

Ruth Mounce

**Make Straight the Way of the Lord
John 1:19-28**

Throughout my life, John the Baptist's instruction to prepare for the coming of Jesus signals that Christmas is just around the corner. With the advent wreath and candles marking time, we all prepare for the holidays on many levels. As the years go by, an increasing desire for a closer bond with my Creator and Savior is being kindled.

Christmas is a time of hope and joy because we are included in God's kingdom forever. By sending Jesus to us, He opened heaven to us. On this earth we, as believers, want to follow the path that leads to Him. In that context, we should make the way as straight and clear of the obstacles as possible so we can reach God. John's directive to straighten the way gives me a visualization of getting ready with focus and purpose.

May this Christmas bring you peace and happiness.

Bill Woody

Anticipating Presents
Luke 2:8-11

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

When I was a child, Christmas was always an exciting time for my family. My mother especially loved Christmas. She always made her special fruitcakes and enjoyed sharing them with everyone. She also loved to wrap our presents ahead of time so we could enjoy shaking and feeling our packages and trying to guess what they might be. I especially remember one Christmas when I had a small present under the tree that had many different shapes and textures. Every day I would pick up this gift and feel it and try to guess what it could possibly be.

We always celebrated opening our gifts on Christmas Eve so my grandmother and aunt could come and share Christmas with us. My grandmother especially enjoyed listening to my brother, sister and I sing Christmas hymns from a hymnal we had at home. This particular Christmas Eve night they were late. I can still remember how anxious we were waiting for them to arrive and constantly looking at the window for their car. My mother finally decided she would let us open one gift while we waited for them. Instead of opening one of the larger gifts, I couldn't wait to open the smaller one with the many different shapes. To my surprise, it was a shoe-polishing kit in a plastic zipper bag with cans of black and brown shoe polish and several different brushes. Back then, most children's shoes were either black or brown. They always needed polishing, and I was happy to get my own polishing kit.

When I think of the excitement and anticipation of opening that gift, I can only imagine how excited the shepherds must have felt after an angel of the Lord appeared to them and told them the good news about the birth of Christ. They also probably felt great anticipation while traveling to Bethlehem to find Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus.

Jane Jones

Serving Silently
Micah 5:2-5a

This past summer, I was given the opportunity to travel with HRBC to Port Sulphur, Louisiana. I was given the choice to either work at the music camp or help with construction. I jumped at the chance to work with the kids at the music camp. I love kids, so of course I did not have any trouble deciding how I wanted to serve that week.

At the camp, my job was to teach the kids how to move to music. The kids were awesome! I always had a child clinging to my waist, braiding my hair, or smothering me with hugs. One of the girls stood out tremendously to all of us working at the camp. She was a very talented and strong minded twelve-year old. She loved to play the drums, but she never seemed to look like she was enjoying herself. She liked to start trouble with the other kids, threatening to hurt some of them, and she showed plenty of attitude to those of us working at the camp. We dealt with this the whole week, or at least until Friday morning. Come Friday night, the night of the performance we had been planning all week, we were shocked to see her dressed up nicely with a smile on her face. She was ready to participate and show her parents everything she had learned. During the performance, she did all of the dances, she sang, and she did what she knew how to do best—played rhythms with her drumsticks.

I never realized it, but throughout that week, we were working in that little girl's life. Although she didn't show it, she was learning and having fun. It was silent, but we made a huge impact. So, as I sing the verse from *Oh Little Town of Bethlehem*, "How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given! So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven. No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in," I remember this touching experience.

Allison Kanna
Tenth Grade, Midlothian High School

A Small Baby in a Manger
Luke 2: 6-7

"While they were there, the time came for a baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

As we approach Christmas we all rush around making lists of things people want and buying gifts—worrying if we have the right presents. As we run around, we forget about the most special gift of all: Jesus Christ, God's own Son.

Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem for the census. It seems that even in the time of the Romans they were making lists of people.

God used something little, such as a baby, and made it great. We try to get the biggest and the best. He made a humble manger into the birthplace of the King. We try to live or stay in the nicest homes or hotels. The three wise men brought gold, Frankincense, and myrrh. We try to get the biggest TVs or computers or the best clothes. God used a small town in a small country to be the place where the savior of the world would be born, so why can't he use us?

Now please take time in this wonderful and busy Advent Season and look at the small things, and be thankful for them. Also, look how God can use you for his glory.

Nathan Olson
Fifth Grade

Third Week of Advent



Shepherds Candle
While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks

Unexpected Messengers

Take a minute to read Luke 2:8-20. Imagine YOURSELF being there.

It was otherwise a fairly normal night for the shepherds. They were out tending their flocks just like every other night. I get the sense that shepherding can be tough at times, but it also can be fairly routine and boring. What was a shepherd's main job? It was to count sheep. We do that when we're trying to fall asleep! So, it's a normal night for the shepherds. They were tending their sheep in the countryside. All of a sudden there is a flash in the sky and then there is a bright flash in the sky and there is a being hovering in front of you. Scripture tells us the shepherds were afraid. I SHOULD SAY SO! This ordinary night had just become very unordinary. The angel spoke to them and told them to not be afraid. The angel went on to say that the Messiah had been born in David's city. The angel told them where to look for the Messiah and at once a choir of angels joined them in singing praises to their King. This night was definitely not ordinary.

Then the story gets interesting. I know you are probably thinking that the story is already interesting. That may be so, but now it gets VERY interesting. The shepherds drop everything they are doing. They leave their sheep behind. They leave behind their jobs. And they run. They run for the Messiah. Not only do they run to Bethlehem, on the way they tell EVERYONE! Depending on which translation you use the text says they "told everyone" or "spread the news." Ordinary shepherds became the first messengers God used to tell the world of the Christ. Talk about unexpected.

2000 years later we find ourselves in the same position. God is still working in this world through Jesus. The tiny baby talked about in the book of Luke is the Savior of all who accept Him. The best part is God is still in the business of using unexpected messengers. He uses you and me. Sometimes I don't feel qualified for the task of telling others of Christ's love. It's overwhelming to think through. But then I think of the shepherds and how they just let the joy of God overflow their lives. They told everyone because the news was the best news they could have ever heard. I encourage you in this time of advent to let the joy of Christ overflow so you can be an unexpected messenger to the world around you.

Jonathan Greenhill

Celebrate the Magnitude of God's Gift

It's Christmas! It's Christmas—the best time of the year—the birthday of Jesus. The air is filled with love and joy and the choirs in churches are singing just as the angels did so very long ago. *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests* (Luke 2:14 NIV).

And here's the message! God Loves You! The whole world needs to know this! Let's Celebrate. *And when they (the shepherds) had seen him, (the baby Jesus), they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed* (Luke 2:17-18a NIV).

Oh God, I too am amazed at the magnitude of your wonderful gift. So big and great that I can not begin to know how really big it is. Thank you God for making the decision to send Your Son, and for what that decision has meant for me...for us...all of us. Through the gift of your Son we have opportunity to choose You as Lord of our lives and spend eternity with you in heaven.

I am especially grateful this Christmas for my church and for my parents who choose to bring me up in the way of the Lord. For it is in the singing of the Christmas hymns, the portrayal of the Christmas story through pageants and plays, the giving of gifts of food and clothes to those in need, and the many other ways we express our joy at Christmas that we learn, as children, the joy and lasting love God gave us through His Son.

This Christmas I pray we can all find that perfect peace given to us through our Heavenly Father's perfect gift, Jesus, and that we will be brave and willing to share the Good News wherever we are—in our actions and our thoughts and our daily living—that we will be tools in the hands of God for His good and perfect purpose.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV).

Gayle Bradley

Tell Others About the Glory
Luke 2:12, 15b, and 20a

And this will be a sign for you; you will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger...Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us...And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

As a young boy on a farm in Southside Virginia, I remember my father telling me the baled hay had to be put into the barn. Storm clouds approached. A neighbor who should have come to do most of the work did not show, so I began the task of “bringing in the hay” by myself. Driving the tractor and loading the bales was no easy task. Each 75 pound bale grew heavier as the hours passed, but I knew my dad needed the hay put up for winter. If rain hit it, the crop would be ruined. After about six hours, my father showed up, and I thought I would be able to call it a day. While proud of what I had done, he said, “Now, let’s go finish.”

God sends us a message, too—a Christmas message of the Messiah. While the message we receive may be as visual as the one sent to the shepherds, it is just as important. We are called to come and behold Jesus. Then we are given a task, just like the shepherds, to tell others about the glory and magnificence we behold in the baby Jesus and the man He became—our Savior.

Eric Millirons

My Debt to Charlie Brown
Luke 1:8-14

I believe whether we recognize it or not, a significant portion of who we are and how we think as adults was established by our childhood experiences—at least I know this is true for me. Sometimes those experiences may be detrimental, but sometimes they may serve to be greatly beneficial for the rest of our lives. Here is my personal example of this.

When I read the scripture for this week, my very first thoughts were of my earliest memories of hearing these words. I would like to tell you it was from a church service or in Sunday school, but as with much of what occurs today, it was from television.

In fact, my first recollection of Luke 1:8-14 is from Linus' monologue in the school play on the classic Peanuts Christmas special. For those of you who may not recall, Charlie Brown is upset because no one seems to remember the true meaning of Christmas in all the arguing and commercialism that he sees around him. Frustrated, he yells, "Does NO one remember the true meaning of Christmas??" Then Linus steps up to quote these verses. If you haven't seen this show, I highly recommend it—EVEN for adults.

Though some may think this is a sad portrayal of our society — that a child would hear and remember such a beautiful biblical passage from a cartoon—it is, in fact, what made me begin to really "get" what this holiday season means, and this has stayed with me ever since. As we all know, it is just so easy to lose the message of Christmas in all the hubbub and craziness of the holiday, and I'm sure this devotion won't be the only mention of this you hear. So even though it may be cliché, be sure to do whatever it takes to rejoin your heart, mind and spirit with the celebration of the coming of our Lord.

Beth Marshall Brown

**It's Still Good News Today!
Luke 2: 8-20**

In these days of Advent, our focus and our energies have been turned toward the true meaning of Christmas. This is a time for remembering the birth of Christ and the gift of "grace" God was giving to the entire world.

Today's text reminds us that God is one with us; we do not have to be afraid. The angel appeared to the shepherds as they tended to their sheep with the "Good News" that Christ, the Savior, was born in Bethlehem. An angelic choir appeared and praised God, saying:

**"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth,
peace to men on whom his favor rests."**

The shepherds wanted to see this newborn king face-to-face. After visiting the baby king, Mary and Joseph, they left praising God and spreading the word that God had sent His "Good News" to the world.

That same "Good News" the shepherds heard that night is the same "Good News" that comes to us by our faith in the grace and love of Jesus, the Christ.

In becoming flesh, God showed us He is a shepherd who cares for all His flock. Yes, even one who wanders off and gets lost. He also shows us He is a father who yearns for his children who wander off in self serving ways. God became flesh to show us what He is really like – a father who loves, cares and forgives each one of us!

I pray that these days of Advent will bring you as much joy and excitement as the shepherds experienced on that first Christmas night. Praise God for his gift and his love through Jesus, the Savior of the world.

Dean Lynch

Longing for Something Really Badly
Luke 2:8-20

This past year I really wanted to go skiing. I waited, and waited, and waited for Christmas to get here. On Christmas morning I opened one of my gifts, and the package contained ski tickets. I was so excited! It was so cool to want something really badly and then have it finally happen!

In Luke 2:8-20 we find the shepherds sitting in a field watching their sheep. They (like the rest of Israel) had been waiting for hundreds of years for the coming of Messiah. When the Angel came and talked to them they were scared at first. When they heard the news of Jesus' birth, they were really excited. Then they went and visited Jesus.

As I read this scripture it reminded me of how much I wanted to go skiing and how excited I was when the day finally came. I can't even imagine how excited the shepherds were when they got to finally see the Messiah.

How is your anticipation and preparation for the birth of Jesus coming along this year? How does your waiting compare to the shepherd's wait?

David Burton
Ninth Grade, Monacan High School

**Why Tell The Shepherds?
Luke 2:8-20**

What a boring day! Sit around, watch some sheep, drink some water, and watch some more sheep. Then suddenly, POW! An angel is talking to my friends and me! This would usually be about the time I pass out, but for some reason, I'm unbelievably sturdy. That's when I knew I was in the presence of the Lord.

Out of all the people in the world, why would God give the message of Jesus' birth to the shepherds? Well, it could have been a couple of different things:

1. Everyone is equal in the eyes of God, so it didn't really matter who was told, but the shepherds seemed the most humble.
2. The leader at the time (King Herod) was not the kindest person to tell, and later in the story it is revealed that he wanted to kill Jesus, not worship.

The shepherds immediately got the message that the Messiah had been born. They figured if God had come to them first, it must have been very important. The lowly shepherds quickly left to follow the star to Bethlehem. Just like later in the Bible when Jesus makes disciples, the shepherds left everything to follow God's desire.

Emma Prillaman
Sixth Grade

Fourth Week of Advent



Angels Candle
Angels, from the Realms of Glory

Come and Worship
Luke 1:26-38

Do you ever “people watch?” Now is a great time of year to people watch. Head on over to the mall, grab a cup of coffee, find a bench, and watch the world go by you. What I think you will find is a very eclectic mix of people. Everyone has a unique self expression from clothing to accessories to mannerisms. If you could engage each of them in conversation you would find an equaling entertaining mix of backgrounds and professions.

Rewind that scenario a couple thousand years and transport yourself to first century Bethlehem. You will find the styles are quite a bit different, but the diversity and variety of people still remains. You will find carpenters, government workers, shepherds, teachers, preachers, and more. It was here in the midst of these ordinary times and these unique people that God entered our world in human form. And it changed all of their lives and *our* lives forever.

The hymn and Scripture that guides our Advent worship today tells of angels, shepherds, sages, and saints coming to witness this grand event. From the lowly to the heavenly, they came to find out who this child was. With their unique stories and backgrounds, they came to worship this newborn King!

The invitation is the same for us today. Regardless of our backgrounds or our unique self expressions, our invitation this Christmas is to once again come and worship this newborn King. As we encounter this Christ child, let us go out into the world and proclaim the Messiah’s birth to everyone!

Melissa Fallen

Angels in Our Midst
Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

²⁹Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. ³¹You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called ^[a] the Son of God. ³⁶Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. ³⁷For nothing is impossible with God."

³⁸"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

One cold November day, I stopped at the gas station to fill up my tank. I was grumpy, tired, and running late. I still had the 50 minute commute home looming over my head. I did not want to stop for gas, but knew I couldn't make it over the mountain without it.

I got out into the cold and filled up my tank. After getting my purse, I ran into the store to pay. There was a line—of course! My mood worsened. The line I was in had a man at the counter who was counting change to pay for the gas! By that time, I was rolling my eyes at the length of time this was taking. The clerk recounted the man's change and announced, "You are a nickel short."

The man turned and said, "I will go back and look for another nickel." At that moment, I didn't have time for him to go and find another nickel. I threw one on the counter from my wallet and said, "Here's the nickel." The man looked astonished that I would pay for the nickel he owed. He said, "Thank you Ma'am!" I responded with a "You're Welcome" that probably translated "Now get out of my way!" The man left the station, and I finally paid for my gas. I had already forgotten the nickel by the time I turned and walked out of the station.

When I reached my car, the man was still standing by his van. As I climbed into my car, he approached me and asked, "Ma'am, are you a Christian?" Boy did He (The Lord) know how to stop me in my tracks! I was so taken aback by the man's question. I was speechless for a minute! Hesitantly, I said "Yes." I hesitated because it's not every day that a stranger asks you this. I was afraid because I didn't know the man's or the Lord's intentions. The man's response was this, "I knew that ma'am. I could tell by your willingness to pay for my nickel. You see ma'am I'm a missionary on my way to my new mission in New Jersey. I am short on cash. I had to search my van to find enough change to pay for my gas. Your paying for that nickel means more to me than you know. Thank you so much!"

Now, I was really speechless! This time when I said, "Your welcome," I really meant it. We both got into our cars and went our on ways. My heart was no longer cold from the winter wind. I felt like the Grinch when "his heart grew 3 times that day." I'd had a soul warming. Now, I drove home with tears of joy in my eyes because the Lord had used me as an Angel for this poor missionary. Not only did I serve as an Angel for him, he served as one for me too! I was quickly reminded of all of my blessings! Jesus sent the Angel Gabriel to tell Mary about her impending motherhood. I believe the Lord uses us every day to be "Angels" to one another, just as I was that cold

November day. Let us remember that Mary faithfully said, "I am the Lord's servant."
Remember that as we go through this season, the way we serve may be observed by
someone who really needs an "Angel"!

Amy Owens

Letting God Use You
Luke 1:26-38

The angel, Gabriel, came to Mary telling her she would conceive and bear a son who would be called the Son of God. Mary questioned how this could be since she was a virgin. The angel said, "The most high will overshadow you." Mary described herself as the "Lord's Servant." Didn't Mary realize how this pregnancy could ruin her reputation? She never complained that this may cause her to lose the man to whom she was betrothed. Mary simply said, "I am willing to accept whatever God wants."

While I served in the United States Marine Corps, one of the factors instilled in our training was following orders given to us without questioning. How important this is in a military combat setting! We did what we were told to do just as Mary did when she responded to God's message.

The gentleman who coordinates a state-wide prison ministry asked if I would be willing to serve in that ministry. I did not believe I could handle the confinement, to hear the prison gates banging shut closing me in. I told him I would not be able to do that. I felt troubled in my heart with my response as I became well aware this was how God wanted me to serve Him. I later called him to see if there was still a place for me in the ministry. This is the eighth year that my wife, Linda, and I have been going to the Powhatan Regional Correctional Prison one night a month to conduct two worship services for two different cell blocks. What joy and peace comes to us when we submit our wills to the plan God has for us!

Jim Hartz

**Willingness to Follow God's Plan
Luke 1:28-29, 38**

Raised in the Baptist church, I heard the story of the Immaculate Conception a million times. So when I learned it was the topic of my verses for this devotion, I was not sure what else I could add to a very well known Bible story. Imagine my surprise when I sat down to finally re-read the passage and God opened my heart and mind to something new.

Tonight, when I read Luke 1, verses 28, 29, and 38 jumped out at me. In the first two of these verses, the angel tells Mary she is highly favored. Mary's reaction to this was not to be honored but to be troubled. It was as if she knew that the next words the angel spoke would change her life as she knew it, and she wasn't sure she wanted to hear it. I can identify with that. I pray for God to use me and show me ways to show His love to others; but when opportunity presents itself, I find that instead of being excited about the prospect, I feel fear, anxiety, and in my typically human fashion, try to find an easier path.

How different our lives would be if Mary had done that. What if she let her fear lead her way instead of saying "I am the Lord's servant" as she did in verse 38? I wonder how different my journey would be if I faced the challenges God gives me (admittedly nothing as big as Mary's) as Mary did. Just after hearing that as a virgin she was going to give birth, not just to a son but the Son of God, Mary declares if that is what God wants of her, she will obey. She knew her path would be a difficult one and yet she placed her life in the hands of God to do His will.

I want to be able to take a leap of faith like that. I pray that I will do a better job of following Mary's example when God presents me with my next opportunity to serve Him.

D'Anne Early

Christmas Eve & Christmas Day



Christ Candle
Of the Father's Love Begotten

Reflections on a Father's Love

John 1:1-18

Three-hundred-sixty-five days ago I had a once-in-a-lifetime experience. On December 22, my sister Shelia called to tell me my 92-year-old Dad died. After futile attempts to fly to Alabama for Dad's funeral, I ended up driving through the night and arrived in North Alabama in the nick of time to catch a ride with my sister to Athens.

I visited my Dad for the last time the week before Thanksgiving 2008. I could tell his health was declining—not uncommon for a man his age. While talking with my siblings that weekend, I expressed my desire to share a eulogy at Dad's funeral service whenever that occurred. They didn't seem to understand what I wanted to do because eulogies are not the tradition in North Alabama. Nonetheless, I was given tacit approval to speak.

So, there I was on Christmas Eve saying goodbye to my father (a title he himself discouraged because it was reserved for God alone). What a joy it was to share with my family members and the large crowd how much P.E. Maples loved his family and his Lord. Yes, losing Dad's physical presence was difficult, but I felt God's comforting love and presence in a powerful way that day.

Today's passage tells us God sent Jesus into the world to be our light and our life. Those who believe in him become children of God's family. Because my Dad, a self-taught preacher since age 19, spent his entire life proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, I did not mourn as those who have no hope—for I knew Dad was a child of God and was now enjoying his heavenly Father's presence. What a wonderful Christmas gift that was for him and his family!

The paradox on December 24, 2008 was clear to me. As my family mourned my Dad's death and the extinguishing of his "light", believers around the world prepared to celebrate the lighting of the Christ Candle to celebrate Jesus' birth. Life and death are inextricably linked. We can't have one without the other.

Even Christ's miraculous earthly birth cannot be considered apart from his death 33 years later. Hear this text: "Of the Father's love begotten, Ere the worlds began to be, He is Alpha and Omega, He the source, the ending He. Of the things that are, that have been, And that future years shall see, Evermore and evermore!"

As I reflect upon the experiences of Christmas 2008 and as I anticipate Christmas Eve 2009, these thoughts come to mind:

- ❑ How comforting to know Dad is with The Light.
- ❑ What a blessing to know I was loved by my earthly father.
- ❑ How humbling to experience the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit when we hurt.
- ❑ How exciting to experience God's unconditional love through the grace gift of Jesus Christ.
- ❑ How appropriate my Dad's legacy of faith continues in me and my family.

Like John the Baptist, Dad pointed me to the true Light. Now I challenge all of us to let our lives reflect Christ's light to the world!

Terry Maples

**What's So Merry about Christmas?
John 1:18**

"No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."

Some Christians get pretty upset these days if someone wishes them "Happy Holiday" instead of "Merry Christmas." Christ is being left out, it seems, of the very commemoration intended to celebrate his birth. The fact that "holiday" is a shortened term for "holy day" is small comfort for the offended.

What concerns me more is the first word in the two-word greeting. That's the term that to me seems often to be missing, regardless of whether we end the phrase with "Christmas" or "Holiday." For a number of people, there is little if any "merry" or "happy" in their Christmas or holiday. The reasons for this are as numerous as the causes of human sadness and anxiety.

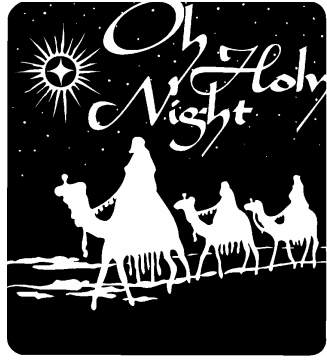
The birth of Jesus had one central purpose, according to John 1:18 – to make God known to us. Where God becomes known, darkness is overcome by light, sorrow gives way to joy, and despair turns to hope. The presence of God among us, full of grace and truth (John 1:14) is the source of the merriment and happiness of the Christmas story.

All of this past year, we as the HRBC family have emphasized "make a difference" as our theme for Christian service and discipleship. Whenever we have faithfully brought the presence of God in Christ into the lives of others, we can be sure of two things. First, we have made a difference in their lives. Second, we have made known to them the merriment and happiness that God alone can bring to a life. Best of all, doing so reminds us that joy is not confined to the Christmas season alone.

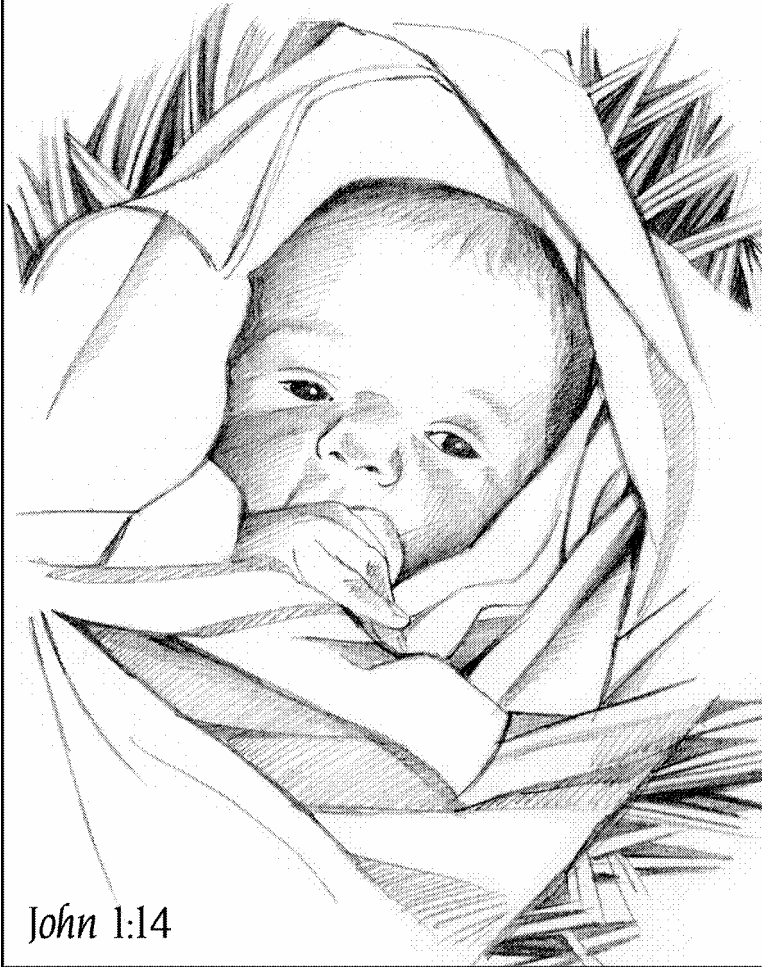
May the joy of Christmas be yours today and every day; and may you share that joy through introducing others to the transforming presence of God. When you share the joy, you make a difference!

Merry Christmas!

Bert Browning



*The Word became flesh and
made his dwelling among us.*



John 1:14