

NASHVILLE
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH



The Greatest Gift

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
ADVENT 2019

Celebrating Advent at Nashville's First Baptist



Another Advent season is upon us, and it is a welcome season of hope as the church recalls the promises of God that are fulfilled in Christ. These weeks are the perfect time to reconcile, to renew commitments, to realign our hearts and minds to spiritual things we may have neglected in the midst of living busy lives.

Advent precedes Christmas. The word Advent means “coming” or “arrival” and reminds us of the period of time before Christmas when we anticipate the coming or arrival of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Though Jesus was born on earth over two thousand years ago, each year we celebrate how His birth changed the world forever. The word Advent also reminds us that He will come again, and we look forward to that day as well.

On each of the four Sundays of Advent, Nashville First Baptist celebrates by lighting one new candle on the Advent wreath. Church members used as candle lighters represent the diversity of our congregation. The slow procession down the aisle intentionally slows the pace of this busy, commercialized season, subtly reminding us all to prepare for God’s loving presence among us.

The imagery is significant. The four candles help us think about God’s gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love, all of which find their complete revelation in Jesus Christ. The evergreen wreath reminds us that God’s promises never die.

In the center of the Advent wreath is the white Christ candle. It signifies the purity of the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This candle is lit on Christmas Eve, marking the end of Advent and the beginning of Christmas. We celebrate Advent because it helps us prepare for Christmas as a congregation and as individuals.

One of the things I anticipate each year about Christmas at First is the music. Children sing, handbells ring, our Sanctuary Choir shares well-rehearsed anthems both reverent and festive. Best of all, the congregation sings together the carols of Christmas. Listen to the sacred songs of the season with an ear for the music but also with a heart finely tuned to the message. Listen for lines that praise God for His greatest gift to us—Jesus’ birth.

God continues to send His Son into every new generation and, indeed, every new life. Those who accept Jesus as Savior and Lord realize the miracle of His coming to earth, born as an infant according to God’s plan to shed light on God’s love and to become the sacrifice for our sins. Incredibly, our redemption was and is Jesus’ appointed mission from God. He is God’s greatest gift to us.

May God richly bless you this Advent!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frank R. Lewis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names being more prominent.

Your Pastor,
Frank R. Lewis

Welcome to the 2019 Edition of the Advent Devotional Guide

Throughout the book you will see nativity scenes from different countries and made of different materials. Also find a scattering of Christmas memories.

Completely unprecedented events surrounded Jesus' birth. As you move through these pages, **THINK!** What difference did it make in the lives of everyday people then? How do we think and act now because of it?

This year's sermon series is titled "The Greatest Gift." On the Saturday before each Sunday of Advent find the sermon title and text and the Scripture passage related to the Advent candle. You will also see words from a Christmas carol, Christmas memory, thought, question, or fact related to the devotionals for the week.

In this Advent guide, we read again about the people who with joy immediately recognized who Baby Jesus was. And we see a few people who preferred their status quo to welcoming the long-awaited Messiah.

- Week 1 of Advent looks at those closest to Jesus' family and His first days of life on earth. Written by Ellen Price and Lauryn Moody,
- Ben Rogers considered the shepherds in devotionals for week 2 of Advent.
- For week 3 of Advent, Bob Grammer studied the wise men who came to honor the baby king.
- Week 4, Christmas week, anticipates Jesus' birth and looks forward to how we live after Christmas because of it. Writers are Mary Frances Satterwhite, Pastor Frank Lewis, Diane Jordan, and Helen Owens.

On December 26, read the text of an anthem sung by our choir: "The Work of Christmas."



Artwork by Lisa Bergen-Wilson



The Greatest Gift

Preparing for Sunday,
December 1: The
Greatest Gift Is Free

*For the wages of sin is
death, but the free gift of
God is eternal life in
Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 6:23)*

The Candle of Hope

Read Romans 15:12-13

Think about this:

People traveled many miles in the Christmas story—probably on foot, much in the hilly Judean country. Approximate distances:

Mary: from Nazareth to Elizabeth's home in the hill country – 90 miles

Mary and Joseph for the census: Nazareth to Bethlehem – 80 miles

The family to the Temple: Bethlehem to Jerusalem – 6 miles

The Magi travel to Jerusalem: starting point unknown

The family flees: Bethlehem to Egyptian-controlled territory – minimum of 40 miles

The family returns from Egypt to Nazareth – 106 miles



Jesus' Family and Friends

“Though he was in the form of God, [Christ Jesus] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:6-7)

To free us from the wages of sin, Jesus left His throne to be born on earth in great humility. He grew up in a family of brothers and sisters. (See Matthew 13:55-56.) Though His brothers initially did not believe in Him (John 7:5), after He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven in the clouds, they believed. They were gathered in the upper room with His disciples, their mother Mary, and women who followed Him. All of them “with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14).

Think about this:

This week, as we read about family and friends who welcomed Baby Jesus, let us remember that Jesus left His throne and became a helpless baby for all the world including us. We, too, can welcome Him.

Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown
when Thou camest to earth for me;
but in Bethlehem's home there was found no room
for Thy holy nativity:
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
there is room in my heart for Thee.*

* From “Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne” by E.S. Elliott (*Celebrating Grace Hymnal*, #165)

by Ellen Price

Mary: Courageous

*“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name. ...” (Luke 2:46-49)*

Courage. I recently saw a meme that said “courage is leaving home without your cell phone charger.” While I laughed at the absurdity of that statement, I paused to think of my own life. When was the last time I did something truly “courageous”?

Out of all the biblical characters involved at the nativity, I think that Mary was the most courageous of them all. Today, we barely trust people her age with cell phones. But in the nativity, we see God entrust the redemption of the entire world to this unwed, inexperienced, teenage girl.

Before Jesus, Mary lived a quiet life. I imagine she lived simply—fulfilling the daily duties required of young Nazarene girls. It is interesting that despite her gender and age, Mary was very familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures and synagogue liturgies—which is evidenced in her response to the angel, known as “The Magnificat.” In fact, it is in this passage of Scripture (Luke 1:46-55) that we see how truly courageous Mary was. She may well have felt inadequate to take on the angel’s charge, but instead of being fearful or overwhelmed, she responded with joy and courage!

The angel’s news meant Mary’s plans for her life would be completely upended. No longer would her life be simple. Like most parents, she would worry about her Son, such as when some questioned His sanity at one point (Mark 3:20-21). But Mary continued to live courageously. We see this even as she watched the crucifixion. Because of Jesus, she experienced the greatest grief—as though she had been pierced by a sword. But because of Jesus, she also experienced the greatest joy. Imagine her joy at the resurrection.

What joy might you experience if you dared to live as courageously as Mary?

by Lauryn Moody

Joseph: Selfless and Obedient

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. (Matthew 1:24-25)

I have a confession. I like attention, especially the good kind. Way too much. Joseph was obviously more like my husband, content to give himself away like the “Giving Tree” and never be noticed.

The Bible doesn't mention Joseph often, but we can learn a lot from the few glimpses we have. He was a “just” man with great respect for God's laws and the legal practices of his Jewish community. When he discovered Mary's pregnancy, his first concern was faithfulness to God. How could he possibly honor God if he married a woman whose purity was in question? His second concern was for Mary's well-being. His deep love for her, and his tender, merciful heart guided his actions. Strict custom required that Mary be publicly stoned. For Joseph that was unthinkable! His plan to divorce her quietly would save her life and avoid the inevitable shame she would feel. Joseph did not follow the letter of the law but understood the heart of it.

The angel in Joseph's dream told him not to be afraid of taking Mary as his wife. In trusting that message, Joseph gave up his security, his own dreams, his reputation. But he surrendered to something bigger, something he did not yet understand. He'd been chosen for a role in God's plan to save the world and to fulfill His age-old prophecies, back to Abraham and David, and even a promise made to Adam and Eve.

When Jesus prayed as an adult, calling God “Abba”—or “Daddy”—perhaps it reflected the tenderness of his childhood Daddy, chosen by God for His Son's care and protection, a man whose heart was kind and just. Joseph may not get much attention, but his obedience helped to change the world.

A Christmas Memory

One of my favorite Christmas memories is singing “The Very Best Time of Year” at the Hanging of the Green service each year as a member of the children's choir. I felt so grown up to wear my robe and sing together with all of the youth and adults in front of the whole church! The biggest moment of the night was always the last stanza where the adults sang a line by themselves, and Mrs. Laurie covered her mouth and opened her eyes wide to remind us not to sing with them. I don't think we ever really got it right, but it was so much fun to try!

—Annie Roberson

by Ellen Price

Mary and Joseph: Faithful Parents

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. (Luke 2:39-40)

Have you ever considered what it was like to parent Jesus? If only Mary and Joseph had written a parenting book, they'd surely be famous now. *Parenting for Dummies: Raising a Perfect Child in a Not So Perfect World*. Alas, they could have retired early. I joke, but I do wonder what it must have been like for them. How did the birth of Jesus change their lives? How did having Jesus as big brother affect family relationships?

Because I tend to get caught up in the Christmas story, I often mentally leave Mary and Joseph at the manger. While it's true that the nativity scene was a pivotal moment for them, their story by no means ends there. In fact, as for any parents, the birth of a child is only the beginning of the story. Scripture doesn't tell us everything that we'd like to know about the holy family; however, what it makes abundantly clear is that Mary and Joseph were faithful to God—over and over again.

When an angel announced to Mary she would give birth to the Son of God, her response was complete submission and faithfulness. She said “yes.” Likewise, Joseph said “yes” when he heard the news of Mary's baby. Joseph remained faithful to God and to Mary by honoring their engagement.

Mary and Joseph named their baby “Jesus,” as they had been instructed to do. And once it was time, they took Jesus to Jerusalem to present Him before the Lord. Faithfulness. When an angel said go to Egypt, surely we are not surprised by their response. They went. In faith. Even their parenting blunder (leaving Jesus in Jerusalem) is marked by their faithfulness in attending the Feast of the Passover in the first place. While I still wish I could ask them all my parenting questions, I have a hunch they would simply tell me—stay faithful.



A nativity within a decorative egg.

by Lauryl Moody

Elizabeth: Confident and Bold

And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. (Luke 1: 6-7)

How could anyone think that women do not have influential voices in Scripture after reading the book of Luke? A powerful and influential voice comes from Elizabeth, our study for today.

When her husband Zechariah received news of a son to be born, his doubts resulted in nine months of his being mute! But during this time, Elizabeth's voice had quite an impact. As soon as Mary learned from Gabriel that her cousin Elizabeth was pregnant, she hurried to Elizabeth's home, knowing she would find support from her kinsmen. She had made quick preparations to visit them, as she wanted to see the miracle of Elizabeth's pregnancy for herself! I remember the comfort and reassurance I received in early days of motherhood from women who were a "little farther down the road," and I rested in their wisdom and strength.

With Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's baby leaped in her womb. It confirmed the angel's announcement that Elizabeth's baby would be "filled with the Spirit even before his birth." Elizabeth also was filled with the Holy Spirit, and He revealed to her in that moment the miracle inside Mary's womb, even before Mary told her. Elizabeth then spoke with a prophetic voice, encouraging her young cousin and professing Mary's unborn baby as her Lord, confirming everything that Mary had been told by Gabriel. How that must have lifted Mary's heart!!

Elizabeth was first to call Jesus "Lord." She was first to affirm Mary's trust in the angel's words. This wise, strong woman recognized God's hand in it all and knew His Love was at work doing something magnificent!

by Lauryn Moody

Simeon and Anna: Patient and Faithful

*[Simeon] took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,
“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.” (Luke 2:28-32)*

When Bill and I first heard about synchronous fireflies, we were skeptical. But the Smoky Mountain phenomenon intrigued us, so we booked a campsite, eager to view the spectacle. At dusk, we hiked to a very dark spot in the woods, knowing that patience was required. But after several hours we were wondering—were those bugs gonna show? Was it worth the wait?

Finally ... a blink, several flickers, and total darkness again. Then FLASH! Dazzling light everywhere! The breathtaking performance went on like a 4th of July fireworks display. It was definitely worth waiting for!

When Mary and Joseph came to the Temple for Jesus' circumcision, Simeon was waiting. He had been waiting expectantly for years, but the Spirit of the Lord moved him to be present in the Temple on that day. He's described as "just and devout," trusting God's promise that he would see the Messiah before he died. His physical eyes saw a helpless baby, but his wise, understanding eyes saw "the Consolation of Israel," God's salvation—not just for the Jews but for all people, the Deliverer for all nations. Simeon did not see a political, warrior Messiah, but a long-suffering, heart-changing Messiah who would be a light to the world. He also saw the pain and turmoil to come.

Anna, a devoted, elderly widow who never left the temple grounds, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day, was also there. When she saw Jesus, she immediately gave thanks and began proclaiming that "the redemption of Israel" had come in this baby.

These two elderly saints must have given welcomed reassurance to Mary and Joseph. Perhaps no one else that day knew who Jesus was, but these two did, because they had believed God's promises and never stopped hoping. Jesus was definitely worth the wait!

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7

The Candle of Peace

Read Luke 1:67-79

Think about this:

“In the Incarnation, Jesus literally comes and lives in our home—with all of its suffering and mess and shame—and he offers us the home that it will one day be: an eternal home where God will wipe every tear from our eyes, where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. (Revelation 21:4) Or, as J.R.R. Tolkien puts it, where everything sad will be made untrue.”*



**Vince Vitale, “Everyone Believes in a Virgin Birth,” from A Slice of Infinity, a creative writing resource from Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. Used by permission. Available online at rzim.org/a-slice-of-infinity*



The Greatest Gift

Preparing for Sunday,
December 8:
The Greatest Gift Delivers

*Grace to you and peace from
God our Father and the
Lord Jesus Christ, who gave
himself for our sins to deliver
us from the present evil age,
according to the will of our
God and Father ...
(Galatians 1:3-4)*

The Shepherds and the Angels

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

*“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:13-14)*

Read about the shepherds, whose world was rocked by the heavenly host and who did “come and worship” Baby Jesus.

Shepherds, in the field abiding,
watching o’er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing;
yonder shines the infant Light:
Come and worship, come and worship,
worship Christ, the newborn King!*

Think about this:

The shepherds saw the heavenly host. Can you imagine such a congregation of heavenly beings? The Bible tells of angels delivering messages, fighting cosmic battles, and faithfully carrying out tasks that God gives them. Like us, they can’t be everywhere at the same time.** So did this multitude of the heavenly host gather from around the universe to praise God for the birth of the baby, Christ the Lord? Could the shepherds ever forget such a sight?



* From “Angels, from the Realms of Glory” by James Montgomery (Celebrating Grace Hymnal #126)

** Read about angels at work in Luke 1:19 and Daniel 10:4-21.

*Angel ornament crafted
by Megan Wilson
at a workshop led by
Headly McMains.*

by Ben Rogers

The Shepherds: Vigilance

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. (Luke 2:8)

I wonder what the lives of the village people and shepherds were like in the days before Jesus' birth and before a tangible image of God was walking among them. The shepherds had most likely been out for days on end, moving their sheep to new grazing grounds and spending their nights on the dirt, not thinking of the coming of Christ. Shepherds had the tireless job of ensuring the health and safety of their sheep, sometimes having to fend off predators like jackals and hyenas. It was a difficult lifestyle that demanded constant vigilance and care.

The people of Bethlehem, on the other hand, were probably going about their daily business, bringing their oils, crops, meats, and fabrics to the market for sale. Women would have been taking care of their families. Contrary to the work of a shepherd, a villager's work would have been generally more routine, robotic, and "on the run"—a type of work with which I'm sure many of us are familiar.

I think these two groups in the society of Bethlehem are a wonderful example of who we often are and who we have the opportunity to become. When we get sucked into our tasks, whether rushing to get the kids ready for school or doing our math homework, we develop tunnel vision for the task at hand. In those moments, it's easy to turn a blind eye to God. Is this a mistake some of those villagers might have been making before the birth of Christ?

As this Advent season continues, let us practice vigilance as the shepherds did, because we never know when and in what ways God will reveal Himself to us.

A Christmas Memory

My father's 10-year battle with cancer ended with his heavenly homecoming a few days before Thanksgiving in 2016. As we rolled into December the following week, I was exhausted, emotionally and physically, and less than motivated to decorate for Christmas. I pulled out some smaller seasonal items, but the idea of a full tree was daunting to me that year. It would require a lot of energy on my part to set it up and take it down.

While I was debating whether or not to go for it, mostly for the kids' sake, a sweet friend from our church unexpectedly delivered a gift of remembrance to our home: It was a 2-foot, live Christmas tree--already decorated. She said that in thinking of how to love on our family during this season of holidays and grief, that's where the Lord had led her. A decorated Christmas tree. He is so very good. He cares deeply about the details. And I am grateful that this is only one of MANY examples where he has used members of our church family to show his love to each other in such specific and tangible ways.

—Meredith Rodriguez

by Ben Rogers

The Shepherds: A Divine Whisper

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. (Luke 2:9-10)

You’re sitting in the dusty fields surrounding the city of Bethlehem. The blazing heat of day has quickly turned into the cool breeze of night. The fires and noises from the little town have died down and there is now only silence. As you sit there with your sheep and speak to your companions, worn from the day of caring for your flocks, a blinding light shines from the sky. A voice speaks loudly and joyfully, telling you that your Savior will be born this night. After overcoming your initial terror, you feel an overwhelming sense of hope and purpose at this incredible news of a Savior.

I think all of us have experienced moments where we feel God speaking to us. As a child, I expected a burst of light and a loud booming voice from the heavens just as the angel spoke to the shepherds. However, I now realize that He often speaks to our hearts in a subtle way that demands our vigilance but doesn’t beg for our attention. When I am vigilant, I find His voice in the sermon that feels like it was written for me, in that song that makes me happy-cry, and when I take time to help a stranger. In my experience, God never speaks when I expect it. In fact, I am most often sitting in the dusty fields of my own mistakes, worn from the trials of everyday life.

Reflect on your own experiences with God’s voice. Do you listen, or do you push Him away? Once we decide to listen for it, that divine whisper can point us to a hope and a purpose, just as the shepherds were pointed to the Savior.

A Christmas Memory

For many years, the first Sunday night of Advent was the Hanging of the Green. The five banners were carried in on long poles. Pairs of church members carried in the 180 feet of garland which festoon the balcony, processing down the center aisle and up the steps near the piano and organ to the balcony, where “the green” was ceremoniously placed and secured.

Tricky details were tying bows on plaid sashes for the lady garland bearers, posting a balcony clearance monitor for the banner bearers, and instructing garland bearers on how to get up the side balcony stairs carrying said loops of balcony greenery!

—Barbara Sanders

by Ben Rogers

The Shepherds: To Boldly Go

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” (Luke 2:15)

The light disappears from the sky and you’re left sitting in the dust with a heavenly hope and divine purpose. So what comes next? The New Testament is full of stories where faithful disciples gave up all of their possessions so they could follow Jesus. For others, such as the rich, young ruler, their possessions controlled them and kept them from a relationship with God. What things in your life might be controlling you, and what’s holding you back from leaving them behind? It may be an object like your phone, or it could be something less tangible like that bad habit you can’t seem to break or your tendency to compare yourself to others.

When God speaks to our hearts and shows us the first step forward, it’s scary. It’s scary because moving forward means leaving something else behind. I wonder what the conversations were like between the shepherds after the angels left. Did they all just get up and start their journey toward Bethlehem, or did they think about the consequences of leaving their sheep unattended? Those sheep were most likely owned by the temple and being groomed for sacrifice. The shepherds would probably have had to pay for sheep that were lost. A fear of the unknown could have held the shepherds back from finding this Savior, just as we can be when we’re called to trust God to lead the way.

Whatever conversations happened and whatever feelings were felt, the shepherds chose to forfeit the care of their flocks to seek out this Savior. When God has spoken and we know what we have to do, I hope we set aside that which holds us back and boldly go forward, knowing that God has wondrous things in store for us.



Mali Stone Nativity

by Ben Rogers

The Shepherds: Joy and Wonder

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. (Luke 2:16-18)

The words of the angel and the praises of the heavenly hosts echo in your head as you move with haste along the winding dirt roads of Bethlehem. You begin to hear the cries of a newborn baby and your anticipation grows. You enter an ordinary stable to find a young woman comforting a baby boy lying in a manger. You stand in the doorway with a look of joy and wonder on your face because you've just experienced a night you could never have imagined—one angel with a message, then a heavenly host praising God! Any doubt you've ever had about the existence of God or of miracles fades away, and you can't help but share all that you've seen with this young woman.

The endgame of God's plan is often a hazy one at the start of the journey. The light at the end of the tunnel is not always immediately visible, and the darkness along the way can tempt you to give up hope. Even still, when we reach the end of our path, we find those who are in the darkest part of theirs. Maybe Mary felt especially weary and lonely after giving birth to Jesus. Nothing had gone as she might have imagined, and she had just given birth in a stable, hardly the welcome that God's Son deserved. But imagine the validation and encouragement the shepherds provided with the story of their divine encounter. From their account, she knew God meant for her son to be born in this humble stable.

I think the shepherds show us how, after listening to Him, trusting Him to point us in the right direction, and enduring some uncertainty along the way, God can restore our hope and affirm that nothing in our journey was without purpose.

by Ben Rogers

The Shepherds: Onward and Upward

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Luke 2:20)

You've left the manger-side and said your goodbyes to Mary, Joseph, and their baby named Jesus. You feel there is no mountain you cannot climb because God chose to give you, a lowly shepherd, a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven and the miracles to come.

I feel this sense of triumph when I've endured a struggle and come out the other end, finally seeing what God had planned for me all along. That spiritual spark is strong when you're coming home from church summer camp or when you've found your lifelong calling. And when we experience these spiritual highs, we feel more ready than ever to take on the world. However, it is in our human nature to forget and turn back to our old ways. We often see the spiritual struggle within us as a battle instead of a war. We may endure a personal battle with addiction, destructive relationships, or anger at God and emerge thinking we've defeated our sinful nature. But wars are not won with a single victory.

The shepherds left that stable with a memory they would cherish for years to come. However, they were people just like us, and undoubtedly they continued to have their personal struggles. Every Christmas season, we experience our own journey as did the shepherds. Christmas day is the culmination of our anticipation, but December 26th is right around the corner.

During this Advent season, let's contemplate how we can keep our glimpse of heaven fresh. It may be through choosing the right people to surround ourselves with, the quiet time we take every day, or the organizations we choose to pour into. No matter what it is, let's be intentional about maintaining our wonder, joy, and excitement as we walk away from the stable, glorifying and praising God.



Kyrgyzstan Cloth Nativity



The Greatest Gift

Preparing for Sunday,
December 15:
The Greatest Gift
Rescues

*For God so loved the world,
that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in
him should not perish but
have eternal life. (John 3:16)*

The Candle of Joy

Matthew 2:1-12

Think about this:

This Sunday night we will sing with joy and celebrate with candlelight:

“The people who live in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those living in the shadowland of death,
light has dawned.” (Matthew 4:16)



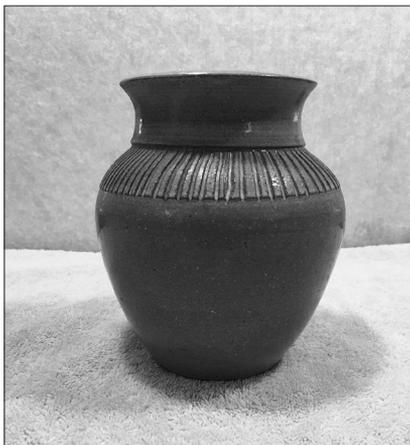
The Wise Men

For what can be known about God is plain to [men]. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world. (Romans 1:19-20)

Think about this:

Most of the people surrounding Jesus' birth were descendants of Abraham, God's chosen people, prepared through centuries by prophets and Scripture to anticipate the Messiah to come. But a group of sages—scholars, the magi—who were not Jews, also came to worship the king of the Jews. They studied the stars and perceived God at work through the heavens that He made.

Sages, leave your contemplations,
brighter visions beam afar;
seek the great Desire of nations;
ye have seen the Infant's star:
Come and worship, come and worship,
worship Christ, the newborn King!*



Might some supplies for the journey and the gifts of the wise men have been transported in containers such as this pottery by Bill Powell.

* From "Angels, from the Realms of Glory" by James Montgomery (Celebrating Grace Hymnal #126)

by Bob Grammer

Wise Men: The World Is Turned Upside-Down

*In the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? ...”
(Matthew 2:1-2a)*

Judea was a land straining under the weight of tyranny which had lasted for centuries. The people had suffered the oppression of Egypt, Babylon, and Rome. At the time of Christ’s birth, Herod the Great had been established as leader through political machinations. Herod was an amoral politician who rebuilt the Temple as well as building many new structures to appease the people, but who also thought nothing of executing his political rivals, banishing his first wife and son to secure his political position, then later executing his second wife. Herod’s connection with Rome led to the Roman Senate’s naming him “King of the Jews.”

God the Father had been with His people, bringing them out of Egyptian bondage into the promised land. He had been with them throughout the Babylonian exile and led them to re-establish their homeland. And now the Roman military might and ruthlessness came to bear on them, funneled through the person of Herod.

Relatively speaking, Israel was a tiny speck within the vast Roman Empire. Individual Israelites, indeed any individuals, were powerless against the Roman machine. At this point God said, in essence, “Now, it is time. I will bring my Messiah to heal their wounds. But it will not be who they think, a military titan; rather, it will be ... Me.”

God changed the rules—He altered the paradigm. The playing field was now different. Soldiers, wealth, phalanxes, weapons, head counts no longer mattered. Rather, He brought His own desires to fruition. In a baritone solo from “The Saviour: A Modern Oratorio,” God says, “I long to say the words, the words that are true, ... Someone to hear my heart belongs to you.” God entered history in a new and revolutionary way to say to the Israelites—and to all people—through the birth of a child, “My heart belongs to you. *

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

*SAVIOUR, Music and Lyrics by Bob Farrell and Greg Nelson

by Bob Grammer

Wise Men: Following the Star

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”... After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” (Matthew 2:2,9-10)

Matthew, and only Matthew, tells of a visit to the infant Jesus from men from the East: Wise Men, Magi, or scholars, they are called. The text in Matthew is skimpy on detail. Who were these men? A frequent interpretation is that they were astrologers, both from the origin of the word Magi used in the Greek text and from their stated observation of a star in the East. They would have been scholars, respected for their wisdom.

From where did they come? Again, Matthew does not tell us. If they came from the East, as in east of Judea, it would have been from Persia. They could well have studied the ancient texts of the large Jewish population that had lived there since the time of Daniel. Other interpretations have suggested Turkey (having a city whose name was East) or Sheba (present-day Yemen). Their trip would be expected to take a minimum of four days up to several months.

Despite what we do not know, we do know why they came. In most translations of Matthew, as in KJV, they say, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him.” The Phillips translation says, “to pay homage to him.” It seems likely that these scholars had read from the Jewish prophecies, our Old Testament, references to a birth of a Messiah, or Jewish ruler, perhaps in Isaiah.

What was that star? It has variously been described as a miraculous event, a comet, a conjunction of planets, or a supernova. Whatever the case, the Wise Men followed that light, making their way to Jerusalem. Weeks, perhaps months, of study preceded many days of travel to visit a newborn king in a neighboring country. Why? How does that compare with what we “followers” have done over the last few weeks? The next few weeks?

A Christmas Memory

I remember mom and dad putting on Christmas music the day after Thanksgiving. As I grew older, and started working in retail stores, Christmas music started much earlier—and I was one of *those* people that LOVED the music. Now, I’ve extended that love by listening to Christmas music the 25th of EVERY month ... and starting my Christmas playlists on repeat in October. So feel free to come visit anytime, but be ready for the Yuletide songs.

—Bethany Bedford

by Bob Grammer

Wise Men: The Visit to Baby Jesus

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

*"And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel." (Matthew 2:3-6)*

After days of travel the Wise Men reached Jerusalem. They began asking for directions, maybe at Herod's palace or maybe the Temple. Eventually Herod received word that an entourage had arrived, seeking the newborn King of the Jews. Herod, who was named King of the Jews by the Roman Senate was, of course, troubled by this.

Before meeting the Wise Men, Herod went to his scriptural advisors to determine what prophecies existed that pointed to the birthplace of a King of the Jews. Having determined from them that the location was Bethlehem, Herod met the Wise Men and told them that the location was Bethlehem. "And oh, by the way, when you find Him, let me know so I can come worship Him as well."

The distance from Jerusalem to Bethlehem is short, about 6 miles, so probably one day's journey or less would have brought the Wise Men to the village. Matthew tells us that they found Mary and the baby in a house, indicating that it had been some time since the birth in the stable. But when they found Him, they knelt before Him, worshipped Him, and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Afterward, a dream from God warned the Wise Men not to return to Herod to report the baby's location.

Rev. Claude McBride once said, "Jesus knocks at the door of our heart, not to be let in, but to take us out to someplace we would really rather not go." How about our own gifts? Do we give anything? Do we send our gift? Or, do we take it with us as we go wherever the baby leads us?

Christmas Humor

Sir Kenneth Robinson relates a story of a nativity play in which his 4 year-old son took part. When the Wise Men entered, the first one said, "I bring you gold." The second one, "I bring you myrrh." Then the third one said, "Frank sent this."

by Bob Grammer

Wise Men: Bethlehem Weeps

And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, [the wise men] departed to their own country by another way. ... Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under. ... (Matthew 2:12,16)

After the Wise Men left Mary and the baby, life returned to normal. But Joseph soon had a dream from God in which an angel warned him of impending danger—that Herod would try to kill the child! He should take the family to Egypt until the angel told him when it would be safe to return. Joseph did so immediately.

Herod soon realized that the Wise Men had not followed his request, and thus there might be a competitor to his throne somewhere in Bethlehem. True to his reputation, Herod was furious and ordered the death of “all” (KJV) or “all male” (ESV) children under the age of two, hoping to murder any competition, but Jesus and family were not there. They were on their way to Egypt.

The horror of this act by Herod is emphasized in Matthew by a reference to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:15) in which he writes of the weeping of Rachel in Ramah because her children “are no more.” The Jeremiah passage seems to be a figurative allusion to ancestral Rachel, the mother of two of Jacob’s children, weeping as the tribes were taken into exile by the troops of Babylon, Ramah being the gathering point for the journey. Matthew invokes the plaintive cry, “she refuses to be comforted,” to reflect the depth of feeling, the anguish, of the mothers whose children were slaughtered by Herod.

Joseph and his family remained in Egypt until the death of Herod and then returned to Judea. Joseph found that Herod’s son had taken over, so he wisely settled in Galilee in the town of Nazareth.

Some thoughts:

- (1) Sometimes, dreams can have meaning for us.
- (2) It can happen, and does happen, that innocents suffer at the hands of evil persons.
- (3) God intervened again to protect His Son. God will not be deterred by the actions of evil.

by Bob Grammer

To Learn from the Wise Men

So, what can we learn from Matthew 2:1-23, the story of the Wise Men?

- (1) The Wise Men studied. Whether the Old Testament passages of Psalm 72, or Isaiah 60, or even Numbers 24, or from other texts from other cultures, they studied and acted upon what they learned.
- (2) The acts of the Wise Men were ones of great sacrifice. Wherever they came from, it was a long and arduous journey. Trips in those days and of those lengths placed great demands on the travelers, and yet these men felt it worth it to visit the baby they envisioned as the King of the Jews.
- (3) The Wise Men, however many there were, came to pay homage to the baby Jesus. Matthew tells us that they fell on their knees and worshipped Him. We don't know exactly how the Wise Men viewed the baby—as the Son of God, and therefore worthy of worship, or as the newborn King of the Jews destined to become the political leader of Judea and therefore worthy of homage. Perhaps they made the trip for the sake of good relations between countries. Whatever it was, they were respectful and observant of His role as a person to be honored.
- (4) The Wise Men brought gifts to the baby—gold, frankincense, and myrrh, all gifts of great value. So, they freely gave of their means to the baby and His family.

Thus, the entire story of the Wise Men—the preparation, the journey, the respect, and the gifts—speak to us as examples of how we, along with people of other cultures and roles in life, can pay honor, show respect, bring gifts, and sacrifice to the Christ Child.

A Christmas Memory

I grew up in a small church. For our Christmas fellowship time, we went to Fellowship Hall in the basement where the entire church sat in a big circle around the room. After a program and carol singing, every child was given an orange. At Christmas now, I remember the oranges!

On Christmas Eve, our entire family went to my grandparents' house: four sets of adults and grandchildren—nine boys and two girls. Grandchildren had to take part in a talent show. My grandmother bought the same Christmas gift for every grandson; we had to watch each person open his gift in turn. After the first boy opened his gift, the suspense was over.

—Dan Owens

The Candle of Hope

Reread the Christmas story

- Jesus' genealogy – Matthew 1:1-17
- An angel speaks to Elizabeth and Zechariah – Luke 1:5-25
- The angel Gabriel speaks to Mary – Luke 1:26-38
- Mary visits Elizabeth for about three months – Luke 1:39-56
- An angel speaks to Joseph in a dream – Matthew 1:18-25
- Jesus is born in Bethlehem – Luke 2:1-7
- Angels appear to shepherds, and they see Baby Jesus – Luke 2:8-20
- Jesus' parents obey the Law of Moses – Luke 2:21-24
- Simeon and Anna recognize the promised Christ – Luke 2:25-40
- The Wise Men visit and the family flees to Egypt – Matthew 2:1-23



*Ethiopian Banana-leaf
Nativity Set*



The Greatest Gift

Preparing for Sunday,
December 22:
The Greatest Gift Saves

*Grace to you and peace
from God our Father and
the Lord Jesus Christ, who
gave himself for our sins
to deliver us from the
present evil age, according
to the will of our God and
Father ... (Galatians 1:3-4)*

A Joyful Week

*Oh sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth!
Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples! (Psalm 96:1-3)*

Think about this:

Have you noticed how much singing and spontaneous praise in lofty language occurs in the Christmas story? You may want to keep your Bible near as you recall that Jesus was born in song:

Mary praised God in the Magnificat – Luke 1:46-55

Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, praised God and prophesied – Luke 1:67-79

The angels praised God – Luke 2:14

Simeon blessed God in exalted speech – Luke 2:29-32

Where God is, there is song. The world was born in song:

*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? ...
when the morning stars sang together
and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4,7)*

Heaven is filled with song:

*“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!” (Revelation 4:8) and
“Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.” (Revelation 4:11)*

We are instructed to sing:

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing
one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual
songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)*

Think about wonderful music you have heard and sung this season.

Remind yourself that YOU sang! YOU praised! YOU rejoiced. Look forward to singing praises during this week!

by Mary Frances Satterwhite

Anticipation

*And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation. (Luke 1:50)*

The day we've been preparing for is almost here. I hope over the past three weeks you have been pondering Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, Anna and Simeon, the shepherds, and the magi, putting yourself into their shoes, and looking at Jesus through their eyes. All of them were going about their daily lives, as we are. Some making plans for marriage, others studying the ancient promises, still others doing the hard work of watching sheep. Waiting for that day God would bring deliverance, just as He promised, but also very much focused on the normal routines of the present day.

You might have been busy with Christmas with no time for waiting, hoping, and pondering Christmas. Still, there is time today to anticipate His coming and watch for His promises. Perhaps after the flurry dies down, you might think what you can do differently next year to allow for pondering.

But we don't just celebrate Christmas long ago—God's kept promise to Israel to send the Messiah. God, in His mercy, promised salvation for everyone who fears Him. God extended the promise made to Abraham to all people, from generation to generation: "and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:2).

As you look forward to Christmas and celebrate with joy, with whom are you sharing this mercy? Sharing this hope? Sharing this joy? How will the excitement of Christmas spill into your daily life? Ask God to lay on your heart these things ... to come to Christmas thinking not just of your own life, but of those around you who need the hope of Jesus.

African Nativity Set



John's Christmas Story: John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin,
The Light of the world is Jesus!
Like sunshine at noonday, His glory shone in;
The Light of the world is Jesus!

Come to the light, 'tis shining for thee;
Sweetly the light has dawned upon me;
Once I was blind, but now I can see:
The Light of the world is Jesus!



Nativity set from Peru

From "The Light of the World Is Jesus" by Philip P. Bliss (1956 Baptist Hymnal)

by Dr. Frank R. Lewis

Christmas: Receive the Gift

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

This year's Advent sermon theme has been "The Greatest Gift." God's precious words in each sermon text teach us something significant about the greatest gift ever given and the greatest giver who ever gave: God so loved that He gave His one and only Son to redeem and save a lost and dying world. This gift is free to all. It delivers, rescues and saves. No matter what, that must ever be our message!

The measure of this greatest gift is exceedingly extravagant, for it came at the cost of our Savior's very life. The incomparable potency of this gift is sufficient to save whosoever will come, efficiently, thoroughly, marvelously washing them clean and making them just as if they'd never sinned. The incontestable results of this priceless gift are everlasting. There is hope for each new day, peace in the midst of any storm, joy that never ends, and the promise of an abiding presence that walks with us now and welcomes us home when death gives way to victory.

The greatest gift that has ever been given is the gift of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

But, dear friend, that gift must be individually and personally received for it to make a difference in your life. This season of gift giving is the perfect time for you to receive the greatest gift that has ever been given. If you have never done this before, would you surrender your life to Jesus Christ today, asking Him to forgive you of your sin and rebellion against God? Would you open your heart to receive Jesus as your Lord today? It happens in an instant. The Holy Spirit of God convinces you that the gospel is true and that you need Jesus to be your Savior. You pray simply and honestly asking Jesus to come into your heart and forgive you of your sin. Then you start the journey. O please, if you have not come to Jesus, do it now while your heart is open, before it is too late.

The greatest gift is Jesus Christ.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:11)



Christmas Continues

*“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”
(Ephesians 2:10).*

Today, reflect on the words of this anthem sung by the Sanctuary Choir this Christmas.

The Work of Christmas*

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.

After Christmas day many Christians around the world celebrate the “twelve days” leading to Epiphany.

“In an ironic twist of history, Christmas day became the end point, the full-stop of the Christmas season. But in the ancient Christian tradition, Christmas day was only the beginning of the Christmas season. ... In the traditional celebrations, the somber anticipation of Advent—waiting for God to act—flowed into the celebration of the Incarnation that began on Christmas day and culminated on “twelfth night”—the Feast of Epiphany. For twelve days following Christmas, Christians celebrated the “Word made flesh” dwelling among them.”**

What difference did it make in the lives of everyday people then? This year may the joy of the “Word made flesh” work itself out in our lives.

*Howard Thurman, “The Work of Christmas.” You may listen to it online at <https://www.beckenhorstpress.com/the-work-of-christmas/>

**Margaret Manning Shull, “Christmas Past,” from *A Slice of Infinity*, a creative writing resource from Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. Used by permission. Available online at rzim.org/a-slice-of-infinity

by Diane Jordan

Now What?

I love Christmas – everything about it, so I’m sad to see the decorations come down and the holiday songs stop. BUT, I’m learning, more and more, to let the joy of the season carry over into the New Year as we realize that we’ve just celebrated God’s coming into our world ... so NOW WHAT?

He came to be with us forever and to fill us with his very Being so we can carry on His work. How glorious is that! But what does that really mean? As he said in first explaining his mission, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2, **“He has sent me to preach good news to the poor ... proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord”** (Luke 4:18).

So now, may we do as the choir’s anthem “The Work of Christmas” challenges us to do: “to find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner, to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among brothers, to make music, music from the heart.”

Christmas doesn’t end with the holiday season; it is really just beginning. Let’s celebrate with joy the fact that God is with us here on our planet and goes with us to carry out His mission and to bring us ultimately into His heavenly Kingdom.

Merry Year-long Christmas!

Prayer – Our loving Father, we can’t thank you enough for coming into our world to show us what you’re really like and to bring us to yourself. We so often fail to do what you taught us, so please help us to listen and obey and allow you to work through us to heal our hurting world. We need you, we love you, we trust you. In Jesus’ name, Amen



Top: Gigi Ruark serving on mission team in Thailand

Middle: Jonathan Higdon and Lora Bunn serving shaved ice during a block party in Nashville.

Bottom: Elaine Williams teaching Sunday School.



The Greatest Gift

Preparing for Sunday,
December 29:
Sharing the Greatest Gift

*As each has received a gift,
use it to serve one another,
as good stewards of
God's varied grace ...
(1 Peter 4:10, NIV)*

All year long

Think about this:

The countercultural Christmas story that sits at the heart of all our holiday efforts begs us to see it as far more than a peak event in December. Christmas is an annual reminder on the church calendar that God is on the move and was on the move long before we knew it.*

*If you have received God's gift of His Son
Jesus Christ, how can you share it in 2020?*



**Jill Carattini, "Life After Christmas," from A Slice of Infinity, a creative writing resource from Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. Used by permission. Available online at rzim.org/a-slice-of-infinity*

by Helen Owens

And Now, We Wait!

Last January, we received wonderful news: Our 2-year-old grandson would become a big brother! For months we waited for this baby girl, but we didn't know the EXACT date. As the due date neared, our bags were packed and we were ready to go at a moment's notice. When she was born, be assured we spread the good word.

God's people had been waiting for centuries for the promised Messiah. They didn't know exactly how or when He would come, but many waited expectantly and welcomed Him gladly.

Mary waited willingly: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

Joseph obeyed the angel in his dream immediately.

Elizabeth and the miraculous son she was carrying greeted *Mary* with joy.

After initial fear and doubt, *Zachariah* became confident and joyful.

The shepherds, seeing the heavenly host, responded, investigated, and returned to their work with joy.

The wise men, studied, watched, brought gifts, and came with joy to worship Him.

Herod reacted viciously, much like the Pharaoh in Baby Moses' day. (No joy for Herod!)

Simeon recognized Baby Jesus in the temple and blessed God.

Anna worshipped daily at the temple. Seeing the baby, she thanked God and spread the word to others who were also waiting for Him.

The Christmas story is filled with joy—singing, thanksgiving, glorifying and praising God, and people's telling what they had seen and heard.

Jesus described His return in the clouds: "*Take heed; keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come.*" (Mark 13:33) Like all of God's people who waited and watched for the Messiah to come, we do not know when He will return.

Think about this:

Are we watching and waiting? Does the Christmas season make a difference in how we wait?

Advent Devotional Guide Writers

Bob Grammer:

With his wife Linda, Bob Grammer joined First Baptist in August 2013. He sings in the Sanctuary Choir and is a member of the Connecting Bible Study Class. Bob, retired professor of Biology, is grandfather to Cade, Zoe Beth, and Anna Kate.

Dr. Frank R. Lewis:

Dr. Lewis has been the Senior Pastor of Nashville First since 1997. He and Lori are the proud parents of Lauren and Gregory, and the extra-proud grandparents of Peyton, Bentley, and Hailey. I love being the Pastor of this congregation and thank God for the faithful ways so many of you have sacrificed and used your gifts to make this such a special church. Thank you for being a blessing!

Diane Jordan:

My daughter and family (the Jordan-Lakes) are members here, and my son and family live in Decatur, GA. I sing in the choir, facilitate a mission group, help with the Christ Closet, and am a deacon. At my retirement community, I direct the Glee Club and am involved in various activities there.

Helen Owens:

Helen teaches 3s in Sunday School and helps with the children's program at a weekday Bible study. She and her husband Dan are parents of Mary Frances and Susanna and grandparents of Daniel (3) and Nora (4 months). She enjoys hearing Dan play trombone in groups including the Sanctuary Orchestra. Helen began church life in the Cradle Roll at Nashville First.

Lauryn Moody:

Lauryn is a retired elementary music teacher, still working with the Children's Choirs at Blair School of Music and playing the piano whenever she can. She and her husband Bill serve as Innkeepers in our Room in the Inn ministry and attend the Bryson SS class. They love to hike and spend time with their ten (fabulous) grandchildren. Lauryn plays in Keyboards at Christmas.

Ellen Price:

Ellen Price has been a member at Nashville First since July 2017. She enjoys helping teach 1st and 2nd grade choir on Wednesday nights and serving on the Executive Leadership Council. She is married

to Geoff and has three children, Mary Peyton (7), Catherine (4), and Hudson (1). She loves to travel but hates to pack. Loves to eat but hates to cook. And loves to exercise but hates sweating.

Ben Rogers:

Ben Rogers is a senior at Belmont University studying Nursing and Economics. He grew up at First Baptist Nashville with his parents, Jason and Elizabeth, his sisters, Hannah and Caroline, and his adopted brother, Kenbe. Ben has a passion for medical mission work, and he hopes to one day start his own medical non-profit organization abroad.

Mary Frances Satterwhite:

Mary Frances grew up at Nashville First and has many fond Christmas memories here. She is married to Chuck, and they enjoy volunteering together at Project Connect Nashville. She works for Baptist Global Response (BGR) and teaches GAs at NFB; she and Chuck are also greeters at Fellowship on Broadway.

The 2019 Advent Devotional Guide is a Christmas gift to your family from Nashville First Baptist's Devotional Service Group: Martha Kirkland, Bob Grammer, Mary Frances Satterwhite, Megan Wilson, Judith King, Jerry Brown, Grace Wilkinson, and Helen Owens

Credits: Cover Art and Layout: Katie Shull; Coordinator: Helen Owens

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Note: Printed Scripture passages are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) or Christian Standard Bible (CSB) unless otherwise indicated.

Join us for worship

In addition to our regular Sunday morning worship at 10:30 a.m., join us for these special services.

Service of Remembrance and Hope

Sunday, December 1 at 5:00 p.m.

A time to pause and support those who are grieving the loss of a loved one in a moving time of worship that we call the Service of Remembrance and Hope.

Christmas at First

Sunday, December 8 | 10:30 a.m. Morning Worship

A service of worship featuring our Children's, Youth, and Sanctuary Choirs

Keyboards at Christmas

Sunday, December 8 | 5:00 p.m.

A festive evening of music featuring over 20 pianists on six grand pianos joined by The Sanctuary Choir

Carol-Candlelight Celebration

Sunday, December 15 | 5:00 p.m.

A service of celebration with The Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra

Christmas Eve Communion

Tuesday, December 24 | 5:00 p.m. in Sanctuary | 8:00 p.m. in Fellowship Hall

A special time of worship featuring carols, candles, and communion

Free parking is available in lots surrounding the church.





NASHVILLE
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For more information about the ongoing services and ministries of Nashville First Baptist Church, visit NashvilleFirst.org or call 615.664.6000.

The Advent devotionals in this book can also be found on our website NashvilleFirst.org/Advent.