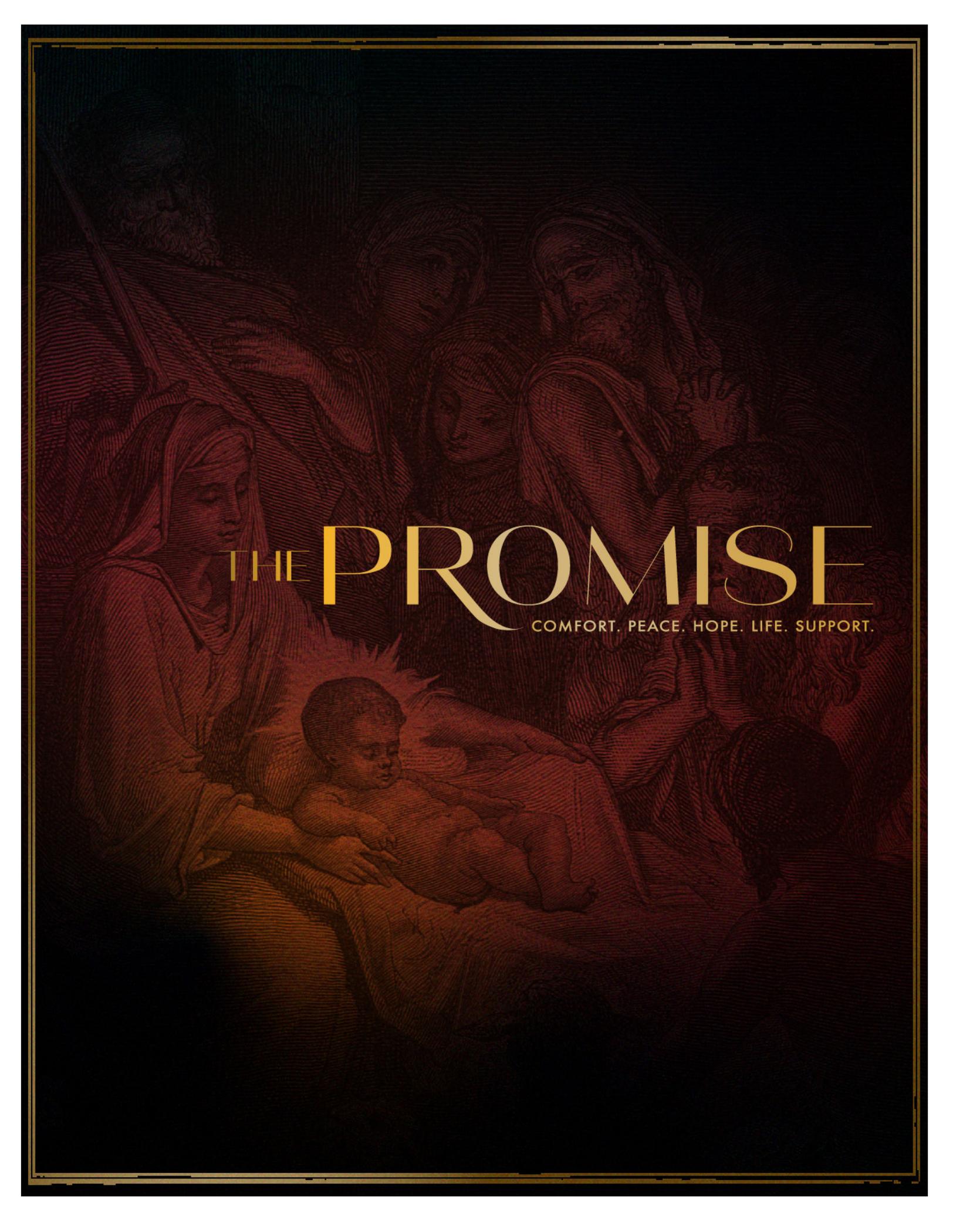




*Looking
for the
Light*

ADVENT
DEVOTIONAL
GUIDE 2021



THE PROMISE

COMFORT. PEACE. HOPE. LIFE. SUPPORT.

EVENTS

Sunday, Nov. 28, Sanctuary, 10:30 a.m.

**MORNING WORSHIP:
"THE PROMISE OF COMFORT"**

Isaiah 61:1-4

Sunday, Nov. 28, Sanctuary, 5 p.m.

**SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE
AND HOPE**

a time of healing and worship for families who are grieving a loss

Sunday, Dec. 5, Sanctuary, 10:30 a.m.

**MORNING WORSHIP:
"THE PROMISE OF PEACE"**

Philippians 4:6-7

CHRISTMAS AT FIRST

a morning of worship featuring our Children's, Youth, and Sanctuary Choirs and the Sanctuary Orchestra

Sunday, Dec. 12, Sanctuary, 10:30 a.m.

**COMBINED MORNING WORSHIP:
"THE LAST INVITATION"**

Revelation 22:16-17

Sunday, Dec. 12, Fellowship Hall, 11:45 a.m.

**RECEPTION FOR SENIOR PASTOR
DR. FRANK R. LEWIS**

Everyone is invited to come to the new Fellowship Hall and celebrate the 24 years of devoted ministry of Pastor Frank at Nashville First. Lunch will be served for no charge.

Sunday, Dec. 12, Sanctuary, 5 p.m.

KEYBOARDS AT CHRISTMAS

a festive evening of music featuring 24 hands on six grand pianos joined by the Sanctuary Choir

Sunday, Dec. 14, Sanctuary, 11 a.m.

TUBA CHRISTMAS

a collection of tuba players from across the Mid-State come together to play Christmas songs and raise money for Second Harvest

Sunday, Dec. 19, Sanctuary, 10:30 a.m.

**MORNING WORSHIP:
GUEST PASTOR, BEN MANDRELL**

LifeWay President and CEO will preach

Sunday, Dec. 19, Sanctuary, 5 p.m.

CAROL-CANDLELIGHT CELEBRATION

a service of celebration with the Sanctuary Choir, Children's Choirs, and Orchestra

Friday, Dec. 24,

Sanctuary, 5 p.m. Broadway Chapel, 8 p.m.

**CHRISTMAS EVE
WORSHIP & COMMUNION**

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

Tony Rankin will be preaching in the Sanctuary at 5 p.m. and Gary Morgan will be preaching the Fellowship Service at 8 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 26, Broadway Chapel, 10:30 a.m.

COMBINED MORNING WORSHIP

a morning with friends and family after Christmas to worship Christ the King

Gary Morgan will be preaching

Sunday, Jan. 2, Sanctuary, 10:30 a.m.

COMBINED MORNING WORSHIP

start off the New Year by worshipping alongside your church family

Caleb Cummings will be preaching

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Week 1



David Miller

Mountain Sunset,
South Africa



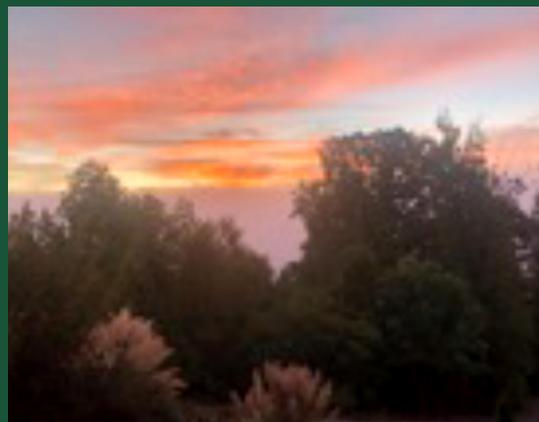
**Walter Chandler brother
of Diana Chandler**

Sunset in Kaanapali, Maui



Bob Grammer

Radnor Lake, Nashville



Alyssa Goins

Scottsboro, Alabama



Judith King

The Jefferson Memorial and Cherry
Blossoms in 2014.

Sunday, Nov. 28 – 1st Sunday in Advent

Looking for the Light!

Throughout the Bible, God revealed His glory to us, His creatures whom He loves – through incomparable miracles, through His Word, and through our senses: through cloud, fire, sound, and light. This Advent we explore what God revealed to us through Light and through His Son, the Light of the world.

In the beginning, all was dark. The Holy Spirit hovered over the dark, formless creation. God's first command in the Bible was, "Let there be light, and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). By this light we can see everything else He has made. We know that Jesus was at work from this beginning: "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:3-5).

Jesus said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5). At His birth, the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds as an angel brought them "good news of a great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10).

One day, in the new heaven and the new earth, Jesus will reign: "And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:5).

So now, in the 21st century, where is the light? Peter's words written to persecuted believers also apply to Christians today: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Today, His marvelous light can shine through us in our homes, our neighborhoods, our church, our city, our country, and our world. One day, night will be no more and we will be together in God's kingdom, built through Christ, whose birth we are celebrating, for our joy and for His glory.

A couple of this year's devotionals are written by friends in our city with whom we work to share the light in our world. Look for ways they and we are doing this. Enjoy photos of light by fellow church members. Truly, Jesus is the Light of the world. As you read these devotionals, be looking for the light!



Writer:

Helen Owens has attended First Baptist Nashville since the Cradle Roll. She and Dan (plays trombone in the church orchestra) have two daughters, Mary Frances (Chuck) and Susanna (Brittan), two grandchildren, and two more expected soon! Helen works on the Advent guide service group and hopes you find a thought here to ponder about the Light of the world. She also hopes you meet a writer in our church community who is new to you.

Monday, Nov. 29 - Gary Eaton

Genesis 1:3-4

Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. (Genesis 1:3-4, CSB)

On a moonless dark night, looking toward the constellation Andromeda you might spot a faint smudge. That smudge is the Andromeda Galaxy. Need help? Yes, there's an app for that. The galaxy is a massive spiral with around 1 trillion stars. It's the closest large galaxy to our own Milky Way. At 2.5 million light years away, it is the farthest object visible with the naked eye. That is, traveling at 186,282 miles per second it takes light 2.5 million years to reach us. Viewing the Andromeda Galaxy is looking back in time. With telescopes, even more ancient light is visible.

Let's look much farther back beyond all telescope limits and imagine primeval time before first light had shown. Nothing on Earth we think of as grand or beautiful existed - no mountains, rivers, sunsets, and no life. It was formless, empty and in total darkness.

Then, as recorded in the first few verses of Genesis, a simple yet profound and stunning event occurred. The Spirit of God hovered over the deep and God said, "Let there be light." The very power of His spoken word inaugurated light that burst forth. As master artist, beginning with light, God brought order to the world we recognize and experience. In our scientific age there is still considerable mystery concerning the nature of light. For believers, there is no mystery regarding its origin.

Light reflects the very nature of God. Light is good. Light supports life. With light we see and feel warmth. It is a gift. Metaphorically, light represents all of our blessings, including truth, salvation, the very presence of God and more. May we welcome the light that shines into darkness, penetrating deep into our lives enabling us to truly reflect His presence for those around us here on planet Earth.



Writer:

Gary Eaton retired from Lifeway Christian Resources in 2018, after a 34-year career, and resides in Franklin with his wife Kenna. They enjoy traveling together, visiting museums, and camping. They have two grown sons, Daniel and Chris. Gary is an avid amateur astronomer and enjoys cycling as well as classical music, theology, history and science. Kenna grew up at Nashville, FBC. Gary and Kenna were married at FBC in 1980 and are active members of the Connecting Class. Kenna plays flute in the church orchestra and enjoys art and gardening.

Tuesday, Nov. 30 – Nancy Ross

Exodus 13:21

By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them LIGHT, so that they could travel by day or night. (Exodus 13:21, NIV)

The Israelites had just escaped from bondage under the Egyptians and were on their way to the Promised Land. They were bewildered with nothing good that they could see. Darkness was all around them. The nighttime darkness was probably even more bewildering because when morning came, they still had no guidance of what to do next. But God was there, always there. He provided a cloud for them to follow in the daytime and a fire so they could rest and be protected during the nighttime.

“Faith is walking to the edges of all the light you have and then taking one more step.”

This quote was popular when I graduated from college. I was pretty much in the darkness at that time. I remember feeling darkness all around me. As I think back on those days, over 50 years ago, I see God guiding, protecting, and saving me from dangers that were always close enough for me to see them.

He DID protect me. He DID guide me with the offer of a job that was perfect for my skills. He DID provide me a place to sleep with the offer of a bed from a college roommate. He was there in the darkness as I rode the bus, and when a teenage girl offered to teach me how to drive. And soon He stepped into the darkness around me with the offer of a car I could afford to buy.

Now as I look back over those 50+ years, I can see many times that He broke through the darkness to show me slivers of LIGHT: the perfect husband who cares for me as I walk now through several health issues; doctors who zero in on my needs and provide what I need; and, most precious of all, a church full of people who nurture me, give me a place to serve Him, and show me the LIGHT that gets brighter and brighter the more I trust Him and walk toward the LIGHT.



Writer:

Nancy Ross, a native of Springfield, TN, graduated from Belmont 56 years ago. She and her husband, John, have been members of NFBC for 34 years. Shortly after they joined, their son, Andy, age 10, was baptized by Dr. Page; he had wonderful years in the youth group led by Carolyn Jenkins. John and Nancy taught preschoolers in Sunday School for over 20 years. At home she enjoys coloring in adult coloring books, playing her baby grand piano, making greeting cards, and researching her father's huge Turner genealogy. She has begun writing and mailing her discoveries to 90 of her "closest cousins." At Christmas she and John decorate their home with the 200+ elves she has collected over the years.

Wednesday, Dec. 1 - Beverly Curtis

2 Samuel 22:29

For you are my lamp, O LORD, and my God lightens my darkness. (2 Samuel 22:29)

More than ever before, reading through the Bible this year has given me a greater appreciation for the Old Testament. Like many Christians, my focus has more often been on the New Testament. The Old Testament comprises roughly three-fourths of the Scriptures.

God had a divine purpose in giving this Word to mankind. It shows His mercy and grace to His human creation. It gives His promise of never leaving us. Near the end of 2 Samuel, David is an old man. He sings his song of thanksgiving to our Lord, from which we can glean many lessons.

We all stumble and fall just as David did; however, the light of our Lord, ever present in a dark world, gives us the strength to continue. As with David, our Lord does not consider appearance. God looks at the heart. David came from a humble beginning. David was a sinner. As are we. All David had and all he was came from God, as is our case.

No one can see in the darkness; how merciful is the light! We need light when we stumble. God's light. God was David's support and rescued him as He will rescue us if we humbly ask Him. God is our refuge and shield as he was King David's. God warms our soul with his light. When you are looking for the light, look to God. He is wrapped in light, and that light permeates all things. Trust in God is vital to standing In God's light.

My prayer each day is thanking God for never giving up on me, and thanking him for continually providing His light in which I bask.



Writer:

Beverly and Ken Curtis have been members of NFBC since 2000. Beverly has volunteered at Christian Women's Job Core (now Begin Anew), the Next Door, Samaritan's Purse, and now at Project Connect in Madison. Her husband, Ken, taught 6th grade Sunday School for 18 years and now is the Church Director for Room in the Inn. Beverly assists him when possible. They are members of the Encouragers Connect Group.

Thursday, Dec. 2 – Melinda Cullen / Katie Cullen / Ann Beasley

Psalm 27:1

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)

Katie Cullen (granddaughter):

With Psalm 27:1 as my life verse, it is almost comical to know the number of fears that run through my head and how I try to deal with those thoughts alone. In those moments of worry, before panicking, I stop and try to redirect my worries into prayers. A friend said, "You can't control what happens, but you can control where you place your trust." There is no greater sense of peace than knowing He is always near. David says: "He is our LIGHT and THE strength." Fast forwarding to the end and getting answers before knowing our Author of life would be no fun anyway, right? Our home is in Heaven, so why worry in this life?

Melinda Cullen (mother):

Many days I awake with worries for the day and troubles ahead. Anxieties about my family, my health, my future can go on and on. Rejoicing in the gift of Jesus who endured the pressures of this world and experiencing life as we see it, is a help to me. His humbleness and humanness remind me that He understands and He empathizes. When I rely on His words, rely on my faith, rely on my prayers, and rely on my fellow believers, the extraordinary peace and calm overflow. Then, I can confidently say I am not afraid!

Ann Beasley (grandmother):

I love being active doing things with family and friends and doing things for myself. When Covid started, I became mad, afraid, lonely, and concerned. After a few weeks, I felt the blessings from the love and concern shown from my family. I read my devotional, prayed and worshipped daily, and really started listening to what God was saying to me. He wrapped His arms around me, and I felt peace and love. He said, "Relax! There is more to life than Ann." Through His words and prayer, I know Jesus is my light and salvation. I shall not be afraid.



Writer:

Ann Beasley has been a member for 56 years. She and her late husband, Bill, have three children, Mark, Melanie, and Melinda, who grew up in the church. Melanie (Brad Dunn) and Melinda (Kevin Cullen) and their families are active members of NFBC. Mark and Beth live in Raleigh, NC, and have three children (two are married). Melanie and Brad have three sons. Melinda and Kevin have two children, Blake (22) and Katie (20). Katie is a Junior at Auburn University studying Marketing and Graphic Design.

Friday, Dec. 3 - Dabbs Matthews

Psalm 36:9

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. (Psalm 36:9, NIV)

One of my favorite things to do around Christmas time is to drive around and look at Christmas lights with my family. Some houses have elaborate lights while others are plain and simple. What is similar between both is that the light *always shines* through the darkness.

So is Jesus in the life of every believer...

He gives us truth.

He gives us hope.

He gives us peace on our paths.

He is light in our darkness.

As the fountain of life, Jesus sustains us, and we can draw from an endless well of love.



Writer:

Dabbs Matthews is the son of Andy and Renee Matthews and brother to Harper and Catherine. He and his family have been members of Nashville First since 2010. As an 8th grader, Dabbs is active in the student ministry and youth choir at Nashville First. He loves sports and all things outdoors.



In the 1950s-60s, families traveled from all around to see the Centennial Park nativity scene. You can read about it here: <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/religion/2019/12/23/nashville-history-centennial-park-nativity-scene-parthenon/2670203001/>

Saturday, Dec. 4 - Advent Kids

Following is a compilation of meaningful activities to use with your family during the Advent season. These are favorites that were submitted by parents and grandparents.

Kimee Shideler

Truth in the Tinsel for preschoolers.

<https://truthinthetinsel.com/>

Each day, you will be led through a passage of Scripture. It also includes detailed supply lists, links to Scriptures, simple craft tutorials, step-by-step talking points, craft templates and a fun paper chain countdown. This ebook will give you everything you need (besides a few basic craft supplies!) to walk your kids through the entire Christmas story from the Bible—beginning with prophecy in Isaiah, through the stories in the Gospels all the way to Jesus' ultimate goal for coming to earth.

Christmas Story Rebus.

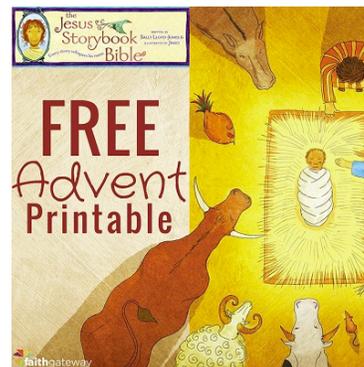
One year, we read the story of Jesus birth—maybe one or a few verses each night. After reading, we had one child draw on a big poster board what we read. It was fun to see and re-tell the finished story on Christmas Day. I actually had it framed and we put it out each year for Christmas.

Advent Calendar.

I have little pouches or pockets that we put in a daily reading from the Jesus Storybook Bible. See Faith Gateway for Free Printables and other ideas. (<https://www.faithgateway.com/jesus-storybook-bible-advent-calendar-printable/>) On various days throughout Advent, we'll put little surprises in the pouches—only one surprise is ever a toy or a "material" item. Most are experiences and I try to mix them up between family fun and thinking of/caring for others. For example, one might be to take a ride to look at Christmas lights. We deck the inside of the van out with Christmas lights, make hot cocoa, popcorn, and watch a Christmas movie if we're going to be waiting in a long line. Another might be having Chick-fil-A for dinner and paying for the person in line behind us. Making treats for

our neighbors and/or for the local fire station one year.

Last year, we did a surprise ice skating night. It's getting a little harder to "surprise" as they get older, as well as keep their enthusiasm up if it's not exactly what they would have wanted to do. We're intentional about being low budget.



Advent Wreath

This year, I'm going to add in more nature-based things. We're going to make an Advent Wreath for our table with items we find in the yard and/or on a hike.



Christmas Eve Hike

Take a walk and look at the stars. Talk with your kids about darkness and light and how God used the lights of His creation to guide people to the ultimate "Light of the World."

Themes of Advent, for older children and teens

For older children and teens, explore the themes of Advent with the kids.

to our grown daughter at Thanksgiving and added pieces each year. St. Mary's Book Store carries these figures and also has an amazing display of Jerusalem in their basement.

Renee Matthews

Stained Glass Sugar Cookies

We make stained glass sugar cookies. Even my big kids still get into it. We make the sugar cookie dough. We use Christmas cookie cutters and jolly ranchers. I cut out a space in the center of the cookies. They love to smash the jolly ranchers into tiny pieces and sprinkle them in the center of the cookies. We watch the jolly ranchers melt and liquify. When the cookies cool, the center of the cookies look like stained glass and you can see through!



Allow the children to set up the Nativity, minus the people. After everything is in place, read (or have an older child read/tell) the story. Let the younger children act out the story with the figures. If you have more than one younger child, let them choose who they will be. Be sure to do this frequently throughout the season so everyone has a turn to be the characters of their choice.

A variation on Helen's activity. Set up the Nativity with all of the characters in various stages of their journey to Bethlehem. Talk about how they did not all arrive at once. Each night of

Advent, use a flashlight for the star and move the characters closer to the manger. You might even combine this activity with Kimee's and put Baby Jesus in the pocket for the 25th. If you have a large, outdoor nativity, move the pieces closer to the stable each week of Advent.

Helen Owens

Follow the Star

This is an activity that my cousin did with her kids, At the beginning of Advent, they set up the nativity scene under the tree in the living room, and they placed the Wise Men in the farthest corner of the house from the tree. Each night they moved the Wise Men a little bit closer to the tree, arriving at Christmas. (Though they probably didn't arrive at the manger itself, but they were coming!)

Daily Reflections for Teens

Look for free printable cards to guide your pre-teen/teen to reflect in his/her own journal. Writing down thoughts is a good way to re-live the experiences with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph during this season of expectation. Let your teen choose one card each day and reflect by writing in his/her journal. They will enjoy looking back each year on these journals and discover their spiritual growth.

Kids Devotion: Light and Darkness.

An experiment.

Materials you will need: water, bowl, black pepper, dish soap, toothpick.

See directions in video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2gqCowQpM0>

Janis Aston

Follow the Star

Setting up the Nativity has been a tradition with our daughter and now our grands. We purchased a non-breakable but beautiful set—Fontanini—and added to it each year. We then gave a starter set

Week 2



Dan Owens

Myrtle Beach, S.C.



Alan Raughton

Sunrise & Sunset



Martha Kirkland

A beam of sunlight illuminates my collection of hymnals. I call this picture "Sunlight on Sonlight."



Valeriy Ryabukha
(Odesa, Ukraine)

Mr. Ryabukha organized and leads an ESL/Bible Study group on Zoom in which a few people at NFBC participate. ESL mentoring is included with the Bible Study.

At the beach on the Black Sea

Sunday - Dec. 5 - Karen & Heath Bush

Psalm 119:105

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)

When Heath was a teenager, he made a lamp from an old surveyor's tripod – a special gift for his mom. Today that lamp sits in their living room and it's one of her most cherished gifts.

Like the lamp Heath made, God's Word is also a lamp for our lives and a gift to us as we journey through life. A lamp doesn't cast bright light over a whole room; it just casts light over a small area. It may seem scary that we can only see a small piece of what's in front of us. But we can trust that God is providing a light along the path and He knows what is around the corner.



When you think of God's Word as a lamp, you can have confidence that HE is with us in each moment, even when we can't see what is up ahead. Our faith must rely on Him to cast a light right when we need it most, each step of the way.

Let God's Word be your true guide. Lean into his teaching, instruction, and promises. Let the word of God bring you peace and comfort so that you will know joy in your heart, no matter what circumstances you may face.



Writer:

Heath and Karen Bush have been members of Nashville First for 11 years. They are proud parents to Bradford (8) and Katherine (5). You can find them hanging with their Connect Group or serving in various church committees.

Monday, Dec. 6 - Zach Bevill, from Project Connect

Isaiah 9:2, Afraid of the Dark?

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined. (Isaiah 9:2, NRSV)

When I was a kid, I was afraid of the dark. I hated the enveloping presence of a pitch-black room because of all the unknowns and potential dangers that could lurk in it. As most people do, I grew out of it. Now rather than fear of the unknown, I more often fear what I *have* come to know - I do not like what I've found lurking in the darkness of my own heart and in the world around me. And yet, here is this promise. **Jesus is the light in the dark.**

I have walked in my own land of deep darkness, and even so - a light shines on me. I have been loved by a Savior who knows the deep darkness of my heart, and who still chooses to love me deeply. And I have been changed because of that love.

The darkness in our world is pervasive too. I have seen relationships broken, addictions win, homelessness abound, and hope found elusive or temporary. I've also seen marriages saved, addictions overcome, housing stabilized, and the hope of Jesus Christ change lives. Jesus is lighting up the darkness of the world, and the crazy thing is - He chooses to use us!

Those who have faced the darkness of their hearts and allowed Christ's light to overcome it are now on a mission - we are light-bringers. Yes, until the Kingdom comes in its fullness, this glorious light that shines on us and through us will still cast shadows. There are still dark corners. But we know that the light is winning.

So I'm not afraid of the dark anymore. I know what is there because Jesus Christ came into our world to light up that darkness and overcome it. He is still doing it right now - in us and through us - and He won't stop until the darkness is eradicated. We have walked in darkness and seen a great light - the light of eternal and everlasting hope.



Writer:

Zach Bevill is the interim Executive Director for Project Connect Nashville, a local ministry that works to alleviate poverty in Jesus' name through relationships, resources, and education. He is passionate about seeing everyone come to experience the powerful love of Christ every day, and the broad implications of that love across all areas of life. Zach is married with two kids (ages 10 and 7), and he enjoys spending time with his family and friends, coaching youth baseball, playing disc golf, and leading musical worship from time to time.

Tuesday, Dec. 7 - Mackenzie Carris

Isaiah 42:6

“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations ...” (Isaiah 42:6)

We human beings are generally drawn toward light. Almost like a moth that is drawn to a street lamp in the middle of the night, except maybe not quite so literally. We see it in the way that we choose to be around people who are kind and happy and caring, rather than those who are negative and put us down. We see it in the way that a bright, sunny day after a week of rain is almost recharging to our bodies. We function better in the light. It allows us to see where we’re going, what we’re doing, and keeps us from tripping over random little things that somehow end up on the floor.

The Bible says that as Christians, we are to be a light to those that don’t know Him. But what does that actually mean? What is this “light” that we have? Does it mean that once we start following Jesus, we become perfect and have all the answers? Do we receive a complete list of do’s and don’ts that, if followed correctly, guarantee us to have happy and more successful lives than those who don’t believe? Is it a checkpoint we get to where we don’t have to worry about sin anymore?

Of course not.

The purpose of our light is not to convince the world that we are somehow superior to those who don’t believe. It is not our job to decide who is “good” and who is “not-so-good.” The purpose of our light is to shine through the darkness that is in the world, and *draw these people* to something that is much greater than what they know. We were not given this light to better ourselves, but rather to expand the Kingdom of God.



Writer:

Mackenzie Carris and her family have been members of Nashville First since she was three years old. Mackenzie graduated from UT Chattanooga in December of 2020 and is currently working as a graphic designer at nixonPRO Media.

Wednesday , Dec. 8 - Larry Felts & Elaine Hostetter

Micah 7:8, Go!

**Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise;
when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. (Micah 7:8, NRSV)**

Oh, how we rejoice as we are again able to gather in celebration and anticipation during Advent. How we missed sharing the sheer comfort and joy of our Christian fellowship last year as we were confined to quarters!

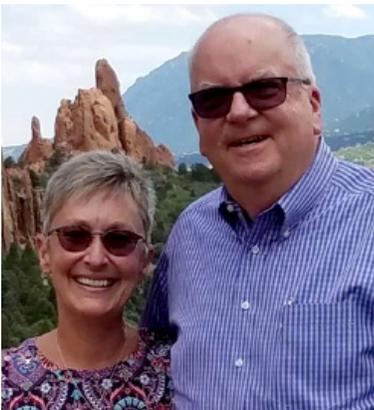
Yet as we gather this year, clouds of darkness gather, and their threats grow more intense. Storms, wars and rumors of wars, and other global catastrophic events grow in strength and frequency. Perhaps the enemy is stirred to action because he senses his time draws near. But for whatever reason, man's inhumanity to man and nature's fury have never been of greater concern.

During 2020 and now in this year we have often been implored to live by faith and not in fear. While a most worthy mantra, as the numbers of non-believers, altered believers, opposition, and oppressors grow globally, that attitude of faith over fear is more actively challenged. However, when Jesus said "go and make disciples," He didn't condition it on peace and harmony and sunny days. In fact, our challenges pale compared to His while He was on this earth. Rejoice, however, because along with our marching orders, we carry His promise of victory.

So, while we are assured by His word of the second coming of our Lord and Savior, we are not to sit meekly in anticipation. We are to go boldly into a world filled with darkness of growing hostility toward Christianity. Literally billions of God's creations are ensnared by the false assurances and blatant lies of our enemy and are being taken further from the light. In our own city the evidence of rampant non-believers grows daily as our security and peace gives way to anger and rebellion. It is time to "go" and celebrate Jesus to the world that those in darkness may know Light!

It is time for us to carry the word and light of our risen Savior into the darkness in a spirit of revival and salvation. It is time for us to light the path out of darkness through the strength of Jesus Christ. It is time for us to also declare: "Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be light to me."

Amen.



Writers:

After a whirlwind romance, Larry Felts and Elaine Hostetter were married 10 years ago on Amelia Island. They joined Nashville First in 2014 and are members of the Encouragers Class. Larry is the father of two and grandfather of five. Larry and Elaine enjoy playing golf and going to tournaments to watch the pros. They love getaways to the beach and NYC.

Thursday, Dec. 9 - Lisa Pruitt

Matthew 4:16

**The people living in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.
(Matthew 4:16, NIV)**

We sometimes use the term "Dark Ages" to mean a time before modern scientific knowledge began to emerge. Historians no longer talk about the "Dark Ages," but instead use "Middle Ages" to refer to a time in Europe, before about 1450 CE, when knowledge of classical learning from Ancient Greece and Rome lay dormant in manuscripts preserved in monasteries throughout Europe.

As that knowledge gradually began to revive and spread after the mid-14th-century plague, Europe began to experience a "Renaissance," an intellectual awakening in literature, the arts, and eventually science and medicine. The Renaissance didn't just happen, however. It was brought about by the intellectual labor of thousands who were supported by the physical labor of millions (most of whom couldn't even read). All of that was built on top of centuries of tedious work by monks cloistered away copying ancient manuscripts. The light of the Renaissance breaking over the "darkness" of medieval Europe produced great benefit for humanity, benefit that we still reap today.

The darkness referenced in Matthew 4:16 went deeper than the intellect. It was a profound spiritual darkness resulting from the sin that separates us all from God. The light that broke through that darkness came as a gift from God in the form of his Incarnate Son, Jesus. Millennia of spiritual labor had proven that, for all our creative ingenuity, we humans couldn't reconcile ourselves with God. We could not satisfy His demand for righteousness; we could not save ourselves. Therefore, God did the work on our behalf, bringing us out of the land of shadows and into the light.



Writer:

Lisa Pruitt has been a member of Nashville First since January 1994. She sings in the choir and currently serves on the Music Committee and as a deacon.

Friday, Dec. 10 – Cheryl White

Matthew 5:14-16

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16, NRSV)

I have taken part in attempting to hide a city. Growing up in South Korea as a missionary kid, air raid drills were a regular part of life. When these drills occurred during the day, traffic and any other outside activities came to a halt, and we all went inside the nearest building. Air raid drills at night were basically the same except we added turning off all our lights to the exercise. The city I lived in had over 500,000 people living there, so I'm sure we didn't get every single light turned off, but we tried to make our city as difficult as possible to find.

In the past few years, one of the darkest places I have frequented is an amusement park ride at Lake Winnie in Chattanooga. It's called the Boat Chute, and it dates back to 1926. You begin the ride by riding through a tunnel for a few minutes, go up an incline, and then accelerate to a splash down to end the ride. The part of the ride through the tunnel is pitch black, and it is easy to imagine spiders and bats overhead. There is one place in the middle of the ride where a tiny pinprick of light shines through the roof of the tunnel and offers welcome respite from the darkness.

Jesus didn't mean for our identity as one of His followers to be hidden from the world. He puts an inner light in us that, just like a city or a pinprick of light, is difficult to truly hide. Right now, our world can seem like a dark place, but it is this very darkness that allows us to provide a glimpse of the light of Jesus through the way we serve and love others.

I see this light in so many of you and it inspires me. You welcome the stranger, you provide food to the hungry, you give shelter to the homeless, you adopt the orphan, you teach faithfully, you give generously, you love and encourage one another and you pray for others. Your light shines brightly in our dark world.



Writer:

Cheryl White is a consulting actuary and partner at Select Actuarial Services. She has taught mission friends at Nashville First for many years and enjoys participating in Nashville First's Room in the Inn and Second Harvest Food Bank ministries. She enjoys watching sports and rarely misses a day of getting in 10,000 steps.

See page 38 to learn about different ministries in which our church members "shine as lights."

Saturday, Dec. 11

Shining as Lights in Our World

Nashville First has found different ways to spread the light, meeting needs as times change. Today, working through our ministry partners, we continue to engage in many of the same kinds of ministries, meeting spiritual, physical, and educational needs. See the list of our ministry partners on page 38.

**The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. (Psalm 19:1)**



From Donna Scudder:

During the summer of 2020 I began to walk almost daily in my neighborhoods. While walking, I would often pray about most everything: the pandemic, my family, other people, our church, my safety as a medical provider, etc. One Saturday evening toward the end of the summer, the overcast sky began to lighten up as I got back to my driveway. My daughter, who had accompanied me on this particular walk, looked up and exclaimed "Look a cross"! The sun was behind a cloud, but the reflection of the rays bounced off creating a large cross of light across the sky. It lasted only a minute or two, but it was a special sighting that I will never forget! It gave me great peace and hope that has sustained me during the past year and a half.

Week 3



Sam Talley

Lighthouse in Maine



Jim Shull

Stained glass windows in a church in Prague



Susie Roberson

Lighted Hands at the Joseph School



Masayo Yairo

A Japanese friend of the Wedekinds, who lives in Japan. Mt. Fuji sunset from her neighborhood.

Sunday, Dec. 12 - Joan Lehning

Matthew 25:34-40

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:34-40)

When I saw this passage on the list of suggested verses for the Advent Guide, I rushed to fill in my name. Admittedly, I was picking the low hanging fruit – a “no brainer” I thought. But I can’t help it! There’s so much truth in this story and its powerful conclusion. And if there’s one thing I know – one thing I believe – it’s those very words: “as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

Right after we were married, Tim and I went on a rather long trip that took us, at one point, to Kolkata (Calcutta) India. Sitting in the lobby of the Fairlawn Hotel, we had a conversation with a young American woman who was a pediatrician. She told us she had been volunteering with the Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata for some time, and, as one would expect, had been tending to the orphans and sick children brought there for care. What was most interesting to us, however, was a story she shared about her first few days in Kolkata. Upon her arrival at the mission, she was asked first to simply help with bathing the sick and dying – mostly elderly people – who had been found on the streets of Kolkata. When the young physician questioned whether this was the best use of her training as a pediatrician, she learned the philosophy behind the requirement – she must first learn to simply see Christ in every person and serve each as though they were Christ himself.

During our time in Kolkata, Tim and I had the great privilege of visiting the Missionaries of Charity orphanage and attending mass in a small room where worshipers sat barefoot on the floor and Mother Teresa herself participated in serving communion. That visit has been one of the highlights of my life, and I so often recall our conversation with the American physician and try (though often fail) to let the Missionaries of Charity philosophy guide my encounters with all people at home and abroad.



Writer:

Joan Lehning has been a member of NFBC since her family moved to Nashville in 1971. For the last seven years she has been teaching Biology, Anatomy and Physiology, Environmental Science, and Health at Gateway Academy, Nashville. Joan and her husband, Tim, have three young-adult children – Hank, Maggie (soon to graduate from Belmont), and David (Trevecca).

Monday, Dec. 13 – Lisa Wooley, RoofTop

John 1:3b-5

All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:3-5, CSB)

John invites the reader to experience the Word coming into the world with a hymn-like celebration. Jesus is life and light, shining in the darkness, revealing to us the glory of the Father. During this season of Advent, I would invite you to take a moment and experience the dawn of a new day, beginning in darkness.

Toward the Light

*Too often our answer to the darkness
is not running toward Bethlehem
but running away.
We ought to know by now that we can't see
where we're going in the dark.
Running away is rampant. . .
separation is stylish: separation from mates, from friends, from self.
Run and tranquilize,
don't talk about it, avoid.
Run away and join the army
of those who have already run away.
When are we going to learn that Christmas Peace
comes only when we turn and face the darkness?
Only then will we be able to see
the Light of the World.*

From: Kneeling in Bethlehem, 1987, Ann Weems, "Used by Permission of Westminster John Knox Press."

Have you experienced darkness of this world in the past year? Be touched and renewed as light enters the world. Connect to the dawn! Take a moment to be filled with longing, adventure, discovery, and joy.

Allow yourself the gift of Advent, actively waiting, preparing for the birth of Christ. Ponder the ways Christ brings light to your life. Anticipate Christ's return. Celebrate the gift of light that shines in the darkness, which the darkness will never overcome.

Writer:

Lisa Wooley is the Executive Director of Rooftop Nashville, a local nonprofit with offices at Nashville First Baptist. Lisa is a certified Christian Educator with the Presbyterian Church USA and is a member of Westminster Presbyterian Church. She has worked on church staffs, in a private school teaching Old and New Testament, and on the staff of several nonprofits assisting with transitions. Lisa and her husband, Mike, have two children Chris (22) and Rachael (20). They are having fun being empty nesters! You will most often find Lisa in her office during the work week, but as a self-described church geek, you may also see her popping in at different church events.

Tuesday, Dec. 14 – Fred Turner

John 1:6-8

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. (John 1:6-8, NRSV)

John the Baptist was the last of the prophets. (Read his description in Matthew 3.) He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" While preaching salvation through repentance of sin and baptism as a symbol of redemption, he was also preparing Israel for the long-awaited Messiah—the true light sent to enlighten the world. Jesus came to John for baptism at the beginning of his ministry. John testified: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ... And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God" (John 1:29-34)

In the early 1990's Muriel Blackwell, a member of FBC, was asked to teach Preschool and Children's ministries at the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary in Cochrane, Alberta, Canada. Texas Baptist Men had constructed the first buildings on the 100-acre property. Around 1995, FBC Nashville sent a team of about a dozen volunteers to help complete a new building and update an older building. For 23 years, until the pandemic has prevented it, volunteers have gone from the church for a week or two each year, cleaning, painting, gardening, and more, to prepare the campus for the Fall semester.

Much of the world needs the light that John witnessed about. Canadian Seminary students come not only from Canada but from around the world. Many graduate to serve in "hard places," as bi-vocational ministers where there is no evangelical witness. About 3% of Canadians are evangelical. The vast majority are unchurched and do not have a Christian witness where they live. In this vast spiritual wilderness, the seminary is working at training leaders to proclaim Christ. Nashville First Baptist continues to support this work.

There is a spiritual wilderness *outside our doors*. The crosses on our building are a silent witness. We have church members living and witnessing in our downtown neighborhood. Humphrey's Street has now opened a coffee shop in hopes of attracting unbelievers. We have some cooperative ministries to other language groups. As a church we do many things. Are they the right things? Is it enough? Is this all God would have us do?



Writer:

Fred and Glenda Turner moved to Nashville in 1969 when Fred began work in Church Architecture at the Baptist Sunday School Board. He received the Career of Excellence Award before retiring in 1993. After visiting a few other churches, they joined Nashville First in April. Fred taught Preschool Sunday School and VBS for many years. He bowled on the FBC team for about 20 years, sang in the choir, and is a Life Deacon. Fred and Glenda have been married for 65 years. Their five children include three sons and two adopted daughters, the surviving children of his youngest brother from a collision in July 1969.

(Photo: Fred Turner and Sam Talley on mission in Canada)

Wednesday, Dec. 15 - Chris & Valerie Michel

John 8:12

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12, NIV)

Light. Something that we often take for granted but that held great significance for Jesus' audience as He spoke. For them, a candle was treasured for the small amount of illumination it could bring. Jesus started by telling them that He is the light of the world, but then He went on to say that for those who follow Him, He is the light of life.

Just as the sun is the physical light that reveals what we see on earth, Jesus is the spiritual light that reveals what is in our hearts and the sin that ultimately keeps us from Him. Without Him, an individual is in the dark, clueless, and unable to see.

The thought of truly being able to see reminds me of when I was about 15 years old and got eyeglasses for the first time. I did not realize how bad my eyes were until that moment when I put on my new glasses. All of a sudden, I could see clearly all kinds of things that I could barely make out before and sometimes not at all from a distance. One main thing I remember seeing was the letters and numbers on license plates, but there were so many other things I had not noticed, both good and bad.

Sin is the darkness that keeps us from seeing. However, Jesus is the light that illuminates and shows us the sin we need to get rid of. He lights the way for us to see our need for a Savior and a personal relationship with Him. With Jesus as our light, we are able to see and, by seeing, we can know Him. We can find fulfillment in having a relationship with Him when He is our Guide.



Writers:

Christopher and Valerie Michel have two daughters, Charlotte (15) and Ellie (10). Chris works in business intelligence for the State of TN; Valerie is the assistant librarian at Donelson Christian Academy where their girls are in the 9th and 5th grades. At First Baptist, Chris has served on the Finance Committee, taught RAs and Mission Friends, and currently teaches Preschool 3s and 4s in Sunday School with Charlotte. Valerie has served as WMU Director, as GA Director, and on the Missions Committee; she sings in the Sanctuary Choir.

Thursday, Dec. 16 – Ruth Raughton

John 12:35-36

Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” (John 12:35-36, NRSV)

When we moved to our current home, we found ourselves in the country with no houses around us. As I took our beagle out at night, he often followed his nose further and further from the house. I would find myself in unfamiliar territory and often stumbled over roots and rocks. I quickly learned to take a flashlight when I walked the dog.

Have you ever taken a walk or been in the woods at night when the darkness was deep and frightening? Shadows and dangers lurk, but you can't see them. With a flashlight, things are not as ominous because you can see the path. It is a much more pleasant walk.

In these verses we find Jesus a few days before He went to the cross. He is responding to the question of unbelieving Jews in verse 34, “Who is this Son of Man?” While many believed the Messiah would be a conqueror who would never die, Jesus tells them his death is imminent. He pleads with them to believe while they still have the Light with them, because once He is gone, it will be even harder to believe. Jesus is the Light and they were choosing to walk in darkness.

The best time to walk or to work is while we have light, so we must make the most of our time before it turns dark. Christ urges us, “Believe in the light that you may become sons of light.” If we believe the Gospel, we must submit to its truths, because it is a light to our eyes and a lamp to our feet. Just as taking a walk with a flashlight shows us the path and illuminates dangers, so God's Word illuminates lies versus truth and keeps us on the right path.

In an appeal full of love and grace, Jesus gives two commands in these verses: “Walk in the light” and “believe in the light.” While most people say, “Seeing is believing,” in this case, “Believing is seeing.” We must believe before we can see and walk in the light of Jesus Christ. As “Sons of light” we read His word and communicate with Him daily through prayer. This prepares us to be a light to others, illuminating their path until they believe and walk in His light.



Writer:

Ruth is a retired elementary music teacher who now enjoys time with her children and grandchildren. She teaches first and second graders in Sunday School and enjoys sewing, paper and fabric crafting, and Bible art journaling. She is the wife of our Pastor of Christian Education and Discipleship, Alan Raughton. They have been married for 41 years and have two children.

Friday, Dec. 17 - David Miller

John 12:46

“I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness!” (John 12:46, NASB)

On the evening of September 9, 1965, Hurricane Betsy, Category 4, was heading straight for New Orleans, LA, where I lived, born and raised. I remember as a 10-year-old the things my family had to do to prepare for the storm. We boarded up all the windows, brought the front porch furniture in and made sure the car had gas. We had food and water provisions, especially extra batteries and oil for the flashlight and oil lamp.

We lost power not long after experiencing Betsy’s 100 MPH winds. I had never experienced total darkness before. Our house, so familiar, but now impossible to navigate. We lit the oil lamp that provided light for one room. What I remember most during the night was walking with my father through the house holding the flashlight checking on the windows. I felt secure walking with my father because of his assurance of being safe, even with flying debris and pounding wind.

In John 12:48 Jesus uses an incredible metaphor contrasting light and darkness. In Hebrew thinking, light symbolized goodness, knowledge and truth. Darkness meant stumbling, fallen, lost or blind. Jesus referred to himself as “the Light of the world” in John 8:12. It is the last public statement prior to His crucifixion.

Jesus didn’t point us to the light or say that He has the light, but He has become as light. “In Him was life and that life was the light of us all” (John 1:4).

Jesus was fully aware of the spiritual warfare taking place. We could no longer have an intimate, loving, and worshipful relationship with God, broken by the act of outrageous rebellion in Eden. We were not to live or function on our own wisdom.

Jesus had to come to earth to be the Light! To believe in Jesus is to believe He is Light and all life comes from Him. Those who by grace believe in Jesus are promised the Light of Life and no longer live in separation and darkness. We now can walk by faith with our Heavenly Father because we are assured of our salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. We are called to become light-bearers of the truth to our world.



Writer:

David Miller joined Nashville First in 1980. Tricia actually joined in 1979 and they were married in Clarksville in 1981 at her home church. They have two adult children, Patrick (Ashley) with three awesome grandchildren, and Stuart. David is an architect with the local firm of ESa. He recently served on the Master Plan Implementation Committee for the new building on Broadway. During his 41 years as a member, he has taught Sunday School in the college department, choir member and Discipleship Training Director back in the day. He is an active deacon and serves on the Baptism Committee. David and Tricia are members of the Connecting Sunday School Class. Interests include but are not limited to gardening/landscaping, golf, and art.

Saturday, Dec. 18

The Shepherds and the Angels (and Us)

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)

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 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!"

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." 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. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Luke 2:8-20)

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:8-9)

During this Christmas season, you may wish to listen to some of these pieces from YouTube. "CG" refers to a hymn number in our *Celebrating Grace* hymnal:

- **I Have Seen the Light - (with lyrics)** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdPSxqa9TLU>
- **We Are Singing, for the Lord Is Our Light (CG 155) (Junior Choir)** - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4E_Zlruw_DA
- **Christ Is the World's Light (CG 154) (solo with lyrics)** - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ne5MOMp6W_Y
- **Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence (Duke Chapel) (GC 81)** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmtqYfRB1wA>
- **Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence (solo with lyrics) (GC 81)** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lJsX-9laeK4>

Week 4



Jack Wedekind

Gulf Shores, Alabama

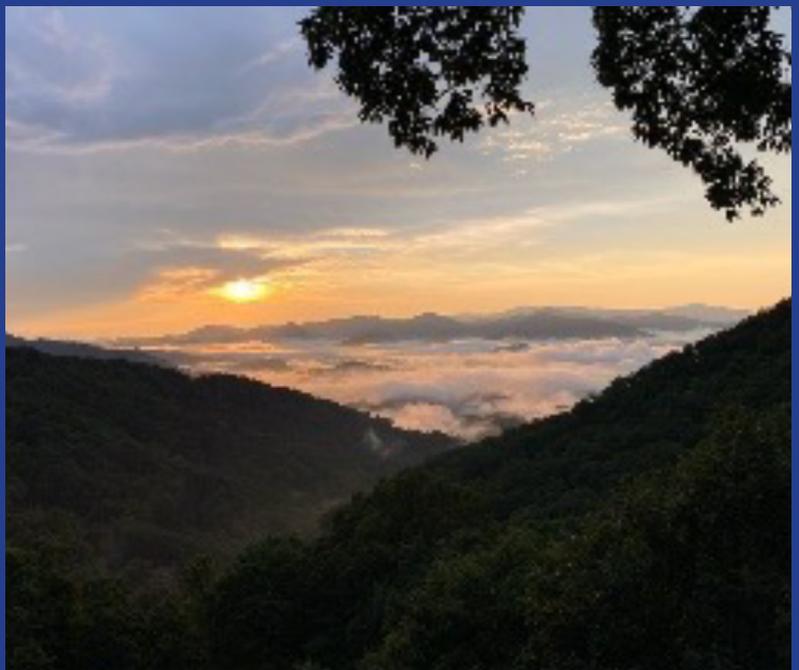
Elaine Williams

Clouds in the Mountains



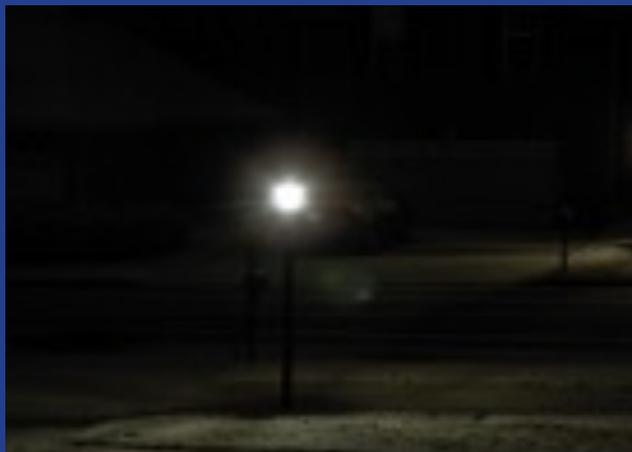
Barry Roberson

Morning in Haiti, the day before Hurricane Irma arrived.



Randy Smith

“Light in the Darkness” was taken during the big power outage on January 20, 2011.



Sunday, Dec. 19 – Pam Stockett & Greg Patterson

Philippians 2:14-15

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world. (Philippians 2:14-15)

As we focus this season on “Looking for the Light,” I find myself reflecting on the children’s song,

“This little light of mine / I’m going to let it shine, /
Let it shine, all the time, let it shine. ...
Hide it under a bushel? No! / I’m going to let it shine.”

Are we taking the time in our warped, crooked, and crazy world today to be the light Christ would have us be to others? Reading these verses from Philippians makes me think about how all of us, especially educators, are called on to be shining lights wherever we go.

Our resident tour guide, Greg Patterson, shared a recent experience he had with a tour group from New York state. On a tour bus, Greg divides his guests into two groups: the “Bold and Beautiful” for people sitting on the side of the bus behind the bus driver, and the “Young and Restless” for those sitting on the door side. The groups take turns debarking from the motorcoach first. After the tour, one of the New York tourists announced, “We should call our tour guide the ‘Guiding Light!’”

Sometimes we may not even realize that we are being lights. After recent surgery, many of Greg’s former students called to tell him they were thinking of him and praying for him. He was amazed and surprised to hear from them and was humbled by their effort to contact him.

We may never know who is watching us, trusting us, and learning from us. The responsibility of “modeling” requires a lot from us: caring for people, not grumbling or demeaning others, but trying to shine before them as children of God, being lights in their world.

Although we all have our troubles and our own “stories,” we have the confidence that Christ is with us to guide us. I often remind myself that He said, “I am with you always even until the end of the earth” (Matthew 28:20). Jesus IS the Guiding Light, and He helps us each day to “let our little light shine.”



Writers:

Pamela Stockett and Greg Patterson have been colleagues and friends in Metro Nashville Public Schools for 30 years. Greg began attending church events with Etta; Pam attended their wedding. Greg and Etta plan First Adult events together with Pam.

Pam joined the Nashville First staff in 2013 as the front desk receptionist and administrative assistant to the pastoral care minister, Rus Roach. She began learning about our senior adults as he shared their stories. She moved to full time senior adult ministry in 2017 and loves working with an amazing group of people. Pam is a single mother with one son, Jason (Mary Beth), and three grandchildren, Addison-9, Carson-7 and Emerson-15 months. She lives in the Del Webb community of Mt. Juliet and has wonderful neighbors.

Monday, Dec. 20 – John McHenry

James 1:17

**Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.
(James 1:17-18, NIV)**

Faithful Jews prayed daily; “Blessed art thou our Lord, creator of the luminaries” or “Blessed be the Lord our God who hath formed the lights.” Out of his Jewish heritage, James made a natural reference to God as the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

As navigator of ships while in the navy, I studied stars and planets and was fascinated by their predictability. Using the right tools and the proper books, I could (to some degree) fix the position of my ship in the middle of the ocean. But, although my books told me where to look, the sun, moon, stars and planets were never exactly the same from hour to hour. The sun, moon, and stars seem to be constantly moving and are periodically concealed. The Father of lights however, who made them all and directs them in their courses, is constant, steady, and unchanging. No shadow comes from Him, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

Nothing in this world is more majestic and awe inspiring than the night sky in the middle of the sea. The same night sky that the shepherds saw as they kept watch over their flocks. So how amazing is our God who created them all? Our God who gives to us only good gifts, all the time, and only in the right way. New creation, salvation, is the perfect gift given to us by the word of truth, Jesus the Christ.

From the great hymn*:

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father, / there is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not; / as Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.
Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest, / sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness / to Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

* Thomas O. Chisholm, William M. Runyan, 1923 Hope Publishing



Writer:

John McHenry, native of Nashville, retired for good, is a husband (Debbie), father, and grandfather. He is privileged to team teach in the Mosaic Class.

Tuesday, Dec. 21 - Betsy Wedekind

1 John 1:5b-7

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:5b-7)

While living and serving in Ephesus late in his long life, the Apostle John wrote this letter (First John) to several congregations under his pastoral care. The Christians in these churches had been hearing false teachers who denied the truth about Christ. John's letter concisely and simply confirmed important basic truths of Christianity to those Christians. John was the ultimate eyewitness of Christ's miracles, power, and love! Just think of everything he witnessed! If anyone could absolutely proclaim from personal experience that "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all," it was the Apostle John!

This letter also conveys these basic truths about Christ to future generations of Christians everywhere so they—we—can be reassured of God's light and love during difficult times. Light exposes the truth—good or bad. Those who do not treasure and practice the truth but claim to be Christ followers will be exposed eventually. God's light is the best disinfectant! We can walk in God's light because He Himself is Light and because the blood of His Son Jesus cleanses us from sin.

When we experience the dark side of life, we need to remember that the real, true Light prevails! In dark times, we must turn to God as our source of comfort, strength, and direction. When we trust in Christ, we can have true fellowship with the Father and the Son and with other believers. Knowing, believing, and trusting that "God is light" is how we can make it through another breath—another day.

Today, as we approach our celebration of our Savior's birth, let's pray asking God to shine His cleansing, penetrating light through us to others.



Writer:

Betsy Wedekind and her husband, Jack, have been members of Nashville First Baptist Church since July 2010. They are members of the Encouragers Class. Betsy is retired from Lifeway Christian Resources where she served for 26 years. She still enjoys opportunities to work freelance for them. Betsy and Jack live in Hendersonville with their sweet little dog Nelson.

Wednesday, Dec. 22 - Jasmine Jordan-Lake

Revelation 21:23-24

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. (Revelation 21:23-24, NRSV)

Tonight's the night
 For the sinners and the saints
 Two worlds collide in a beautiful display
 It's all love tonight
 When we step across the line
 We can sail across the sea
 To a city with one king
 A city on our knees

-TobyMac, "City on Our Knees"

When I read these verses from Revelation, I immediately was reminded of a song by TobyMac that was released in August of 2009 entitled "City on Our Knees."* TobyMac explained the song's meaning as "a moment. A moment that we all come together to a place where there's no judgment, but really love. And we choose to recognize one God together. And it's really a reminder that the moment could be right now, tonight." Both this song and Revelation 21:23-24 display the unique sense of comfort and love that believers are able to feel through God's presence.

When I was a child, I was constantly fearful of the dark. Fearing the dark, I began to sleep with my closet light on at night, the one thing that I felt could give me comfort. Revelation 21:23-24 states that "the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb." For the "moment" that TobyMac describes to happen, we must accept that God is our light, our comfort. And when this happens, "the nations will walk by its light" and "two worlds will collide in a beautiful display." With this sense of comfort and security that God encompasses us in, fear no longer has a hold of our life because God always prevails.



Writer:

Jasmine Jordan-Lake is a current senior enrolled at Brentwood High School. At church, Jasmine can be found in the Youth Group and the Youth Choir. In her free time, she enjoys working at Chuy's part-time as a hostess and doing Cross Country with her school. Jasmine also enjoys playing Guitar/Piano and spending time with her family and friends.

(Photo: Kendell Wedekind, Jasmine Jordan-Lake, Carrington Bible - at the 2021 fall youth retreat)

Thursday, Dec. 23 - Meredith Williams

Revelation 22:5

And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or of sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:5)

When I think about the Advent season as we celebrate each Christmas, I think about Advent's text-book definition: the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event. In this case, the arrival of our Savior in the form of a tiny baby.

However, when I read Revelation 22:5, I was struck by what will be another season of Advent. Leading up to the fifth verse, John wrote a stunning description of the new heavens and new earth, even better than Eden and without the potential for sin, which is ultimately what we as children of God are waiting for. We are so often consumed in our work and our family challenges and our worldly matters, that it is easy to forget we are in a season of Advent right now, waiting for what we can only see as "in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face."

I invite you to join me during this season of Christmas Advent in celebrating the advent of our future in a new Eden; a future where the light of the glory of God replaces the light of the sun and we need no lamp to guide us on the right path. I pray that you will take time to experience the joy of the promises of God yet to be fulfilled but sure to come during this advent, and I pray that you will carry that joy on into the next season of your lives.



Writer:

Meredith Williams is in the orchestra and adult choir at NFBC, as well as a teacher in first grade choir on Wednesday nights. During the day you can find her at First Preschool, just downstairs, teaching in our two- and three-year-old classroom. She is currently in a "gap semester" between her first and second years of college, and she is looking forward to going back to school in a few weeks!

Friday, Dec. 24 - Hymn

Silent Night, Holy Night

Silent Night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright
round you virgin mother and child! Holy Infant so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent Night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight.
Glory streams from heaven a far, heavenly hosts sing "Alleluia,
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born."

Silent Night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure light
radiant beams from Thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth, Jesus, Lord at Thy birth.

Silent Night, holy night, Son of God, wondrous star, lend thy light;
with the angels let us sing alleluia to our King;
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born.

*Words: Joseph Mohr, 1818, Music: Franz Grüber, 1818 | STILLE NACHT
This classic hymn was written only two years prior to the founding of our church.*



Saturday, Dec. 25 - Frank Lewis

2 Corinthians 4:6

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)



I'm going to miss telling the story behind our magnificent sanctuary windows to guests who come to our church. I have lost count of the times I have done that, but the story never changes.

The theme of our windows is the revelation of God. The four, tall windows (to the left as you stand near the Communion Table) depict earth, sea, day, and night, reminding us of God's revelation in creation.

Looking across the room there are four windows representing God's revelation in Scripture. First, Abraham offering Isaac, his son, his only son, the one he loved, yet stopping as God provided a ram as the substitute (Genesis 22). The next window pictures the burning bush, reminding us of our need for a redeemer to rescue us from the bondage of sin (Exodus 3). The third window presents the star over Bethlehem declaring our Savior's birth (Matthew 2) which is followed by the cross of Christ with His blood running in sufficient supply to save the elect of God (Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19).

Towering above the baptistry stands the Resurrection Window picturing the twists and turns of life, the journey from darkness to light, and the promise of the resurrection represented by the glorious sunburst at the top of the window. As I end the explanation I always ask "Have you ever heard this story before?"

Have you? More importantly, have you put your faith and trust in the one who died for your sin so that you might know the life-transforming glory of God that is found in none other than Jesus Christ?

You can trust Christ right now and seal that act of faith in a prayer using words like these:

Dear God, I know that I am a sinner and I know there is nothing I can do in my strength to earn your salvation. I am broken and stained by the power of sin. Yet God, you are rich in mercy and grace. You sent your Son Jesus to die for my sin. I confess my need for Christ to be my savior and I give Christ the complete control of my life from this day forward. Thank you for saving me. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

If you prayed this prayer and meant it, then by the authority of God's word, you are now a Christ follower! Let others know of your decision. Find a church, get into a Bible Study, be baptized, and let the Glory of God shine through your life!



Writer:

Dr. Frank R. Lewis has served as Senior Pastor of Nashville First Baptist Church since 1997. He steps down as pastor at the end of this calendar year, serving our church and community for over twenty-four years.

Shining as Lights in Our World

Through the years, First Baptist Nashville has found different ways to spread the light, meeting needs as times change. Today, working through our ministry partners, we continue to engage in many of the same kinds of ministries, meeting spiritual, physical, and educational needs.

Room in the Inn

Provides programs that emphasize human development and recovery through education, self-help and work, centered in community and long-support for those who call the streets of Nashville home. For more information, contact Ken Curtis. (<https://www.roomintheinn.org/>)

United4Hope

Connects churches to public schools. NFBC's schools are Cameron Middle & High Schools. For more information, contact Andrea Overby. (<https://united4hope.org/>)

Nashville World Outreach

Supports and serves refugees and immigrants living in South Nashville (Tusculum Hills) through tutoring, music, Basic Bags Project, and more. For more information, contact Pam Stockett. (<http://www.nashvilleworldoutreach.com/>)

Second Harvest Food Bank

Provides a central distribution center for groups and individuals who wished to help provide food for hungry people in Middle Tennessee. For more information, contact Lauren Lewis. (<https://www.secondharvestmidtn.org/>)

Project Connect

Provides hope, job training, financial counseling, and support for families – Psalm 147:3. For more information, contact Kathy Wilcox. (<https://projectconnectnashville.org/>)

Habitat for Humanity

Future homeowners meet income qualifications, attend education classes, and work with their sponsor(s) and volunteers to build their homes.

They pay an affordable mortgage made possible because of funding partners, including its social enterprise, the ReStore, which sells new and gently used office and household items at a fraction of the cost. ReStore accepts donations. For more information, contact Vic Hatridge. (<https://www.habitatnashville.org/>)

Humphreys Street Coffee Shop

Is a social enterprise of Harvest Hands CDC; it was born out of a desire to raise up leaders within our neighborhood by creating jobs, providing mentorship opportunities, and teaching job skills that empower youth such as customer service, marketing, and craftsmanship. 100% of our profits are reinvested into programs and scholarships that support our students. For more information, contact Gary Morgan. (<https://humphreysstreet.com/>)

Begin Anew

Empowers individuals to overcome the obstacles caused by poverty by providing education, mentoring, and resources - nationally affiliated and certified by Christian Women's Job Corps CORPS (CWJC®) and Christian Men's Job Corps (CMJC®) ministries. The vision: Teaching one generation to change the next. For more information, contact Rebekah Woods, office located at NFBC, or Shane Hitchcock. (<https://www.beginanew.org/>)

The Next Door, Inc.

Provides a continuum of evidence-based substance abuse and mental health services for women in an environment of faith and healing to restore hope and a lifetime of recovery. For more information, contact Andrea Overby. (<https://thenextdoor.org/locations/nashville/>)

Nashville Rescue Mission

A Christ-centered community helping the hungry, homeless, and hurting by providing programs and services that focus on a person's entire life-physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and social. For more information, contact Tony Rankin. (<https://nashvillerescuemission.org/>)

Rooftop Nashville

Builds stability through a compassionate and collaborative rental/mortgage assistance program through a partnership with local congregations. For more information, contact Lisa Wooley, Executive Director, office located at NFBC. (<http://rooftopnashville.org/>)

The Joseph School

Educates and empowers Haitian children to become the next servant leaders of their country. This faith-driven non-profit strongly believes that service can transform lives. For more information, contact Brad Dunn or Susie Roberson. (<http://thejosephschool.org/>)

Hope Clinic

A faith-based safe and confidential place for anyone dealing with life choices regarding past, present, and future pregnancies. Hope Clinic provides medical care, professional counseling, education, mentorship, and practical support regardless of age, race, or religion. (<https://www.hopeclinicforwomen.org/>)

Men of Valor

Is committed to winning men in prison to Jesus Christ and discipling them. Their purpose is to equip them to re-enter society as men of integrity – becoming givers to the community rather than takers. For more information, contact Russell Brothers. (<https://men-of-valor.org/>)

Missionary on Furlough Residence

NFBC provides a house for furloughing missionary families. For more information, contact Steve Walsh.

“Martha’s Pantry” Nashville First Baptist food pantry & clothes closet

Because NFBC has immediate opportunities to assist families in the community and beyond who stop by our church during the week, who are within our own congregation, and those who receive assistance, aid, or education from our ministry partners that meet in our building during the week. For more information, contact Gena Carter Edwards. (<https://nashvillefirst.org/marthas-pantry/>)

North America Church Plants:

▪ La Casa Church

(<https://www.lacasachurch.org/>)

▪ Send City - St Louis, MO

(<https://www.namb.net/send-network/send-city/st-louis/>)

For more information, contact Gary Morgan.

Campers on Mission

A national fellowship of Christian campers who desire to share their faith as they go. Typical service projects include helping with Backyard Bible Clubs, Vacation Bible School, campground ministries, booths at fairs with tracts, cold water and information, and providing labor for construction projects. For more information, contact Joe & Charlene Carter or Doug & Eve Ellis. (- <http://www.tncom.org/>)

Ukraine ESL/Bible Study

Weekly Zoom meetings for English grammar, conversation practice, and Bible study with friends in Ukraine. For more information, contact Billy Hoffman.

Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary & College

Vision: to train God-called men and women for twenty-first century leadership in tough places. The seminary wants to foster in the next generation of leaders a desire to go into difficult places and confront challenges.

Volunteers help prepare the campus for fall term. However this opportunity is currently on hold because of travel restrictions during Covid. For more information, contact Joe & Charlene Carter. (<https://csbs.ca/>)

NASHVILLE

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

The 2021 Advent Devotional Guide is a Christmas gift to your family from Nashville First Baptist's Devotional Service Group: Judith King, Martha Kirkland, Grace Wilkinson, and Helen Owens

Credits: Layout: Katie Shull; Coordinator: Helen Owens

Note: Unless otherwise noted, printed Scripture passages are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) or Christian Standard Bible (CSB).

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