



2023 ADVENT GUIDE



NASHVILLE
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

*All church events are free and open to the public.
Free parking is available in lots surrounding the church for all church events.
For more information about any of these events, visit NashvilleFirst.org.
Services will be livestreamed at [YouTube.com/FirstBaptistChurchNashville](https://www.youtube.com/FirstBaptistChurchNashville)*

Worship Services & Events

Service of Remembrance and Hope

Sunday, November 26 | 5 p.m. | Sanctuary

time of worship for all supporting those who have experienced the death of a loved one

Christmas at First

Sunday, December 3 | 10:30 a.m. | Sanctuary

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

Keyboards at Christmas

Sunday, December 3 | 5 p.m. | Sanctuary

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

Christmas with Selah

Sunday, December 10 | 5 p.m. | Sanctuary

Selah is a contemporary Christian vocal trio consisting of Todd Smith, Allan Hall, and Amy Perry

TubaChristmas

Thursday, December 12 | 11 a.m. | Sanctuary

free concert featuring Christmas carols played by a mass choir of over 100 tubas

Carol-Candlelight Celebration

Sunday, December 17 | 5 p.m. | Sanctuary

service of celebration with the Sanctuary Choir, and the Sanctuary Orchestra

Christmas Eve Morning Worship

Sunday, December 24 | 10:30 a.m. – Sanctuary

special time of worship featuring carols, candles, and communion

Christmas Eve Worship & Communion

Sunday, December 24 | 5 p.m. – Sanctuary

special time of worship featuring carols, candles, and communion



Hallelujah!

*How good it is to sing to our God,
for praise is pleasant and lovely.*

(Psalm 147:1)

Have you noticed how much singing there is throughout the Bible? Often angels or multitudes of people are singing together.

- At creation: "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)
- Describing the Exodus: "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord. They said: I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted; he has thrown the horse and its rider into the sea" (Exodus 15:1)
- People singing different kinds of songs: songs of praise, thanksgiving, warnings, pleas. Songs to remember what God has done for His people.
- Psalms is a songbook. It instructs us to sing: "Praise the Lord! / Sing to the LORD a new song, / his praise in the assembly of the godly!" (Psalm 149:1)
- Jesus sang with His disciples at the end of the Lord's supper. (Mark 14:26)
- Revelation concludes the story of the Bible with glorious songs.

In Revelation 19, John "heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters

and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, 'Hallelujah! / For the Lord our God / the Almighty reigns.'" There in heaven, a great multitude – from all centuries and places – rejoice together. On Earth they would have looked different, spoken different languages, played different instruments, and praised with different styles. But there are no tryouts for this heavenly choir ... just glorious singing together, with one accord, as Scripture commands.

The Bible tells us to sing! "Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts" (Colossians 3:16). Before many people had access to written Scripture, or couldn't read it even after the printing press made it possible, how did they learn? One way was through church art, stained glass, and architecture. Another way was, and is, through singing. When we think about the words we are singing, we will remember the truths we have sung.

Let us remember that we are celebrating the first Advent, when Christ came at the Incarnation, and we are looking forward to the second Advent when He will return to judge humanity at the end of the world – two parts of God's grand plan. This Advent season, let us sing together with joy.

Helen Owens

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- Listen to or sing along with the links to the hymns.
- Read "We Worship Together" about our renovated sanctuary where we sing together!
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- Notice some of the art created in Music Arts Camp this summer and by others in First Kids.

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Waiting ...



Abbie Harper



Rebekah Hitchcock



December 3 – Waiting (Three Advents)

Art Burcham

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

The promise which was made ... God hath fulfilled. (Acts 13:32-33, KJV)

As an educated 92-year-old, I can hardly imagine not being able to read or write. But, during Charles Wesley's lifetime, in 18th century England, approximately 50% of the population was illiterate. Hymn singing was a significant way to share the gospel and to educate Christians about their faith.

Wesley's hymn, "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus," dated 1744, is often sung during the Advent season before Christmas. But surprisingly, the hymn mainly expresses a longing for Jesus to return – what is sometimes referred to as "The Second Advent," Jesus' second arrival.

However, the words "long-expected" remind us of the centuries of time the world was in need of a Savior long before Jesus' first arrival. Early biblical stories – the creation, the flood, and the attempt to build a tower to heaven – illustrate how sinful humankind had become in the attempt to live outside the will and presence of God. Hope arrived with God's covenant promise to Abraham, whose descendants became the nation of Israel out of which was born "a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). The Scripture passage related to this hymn, Acts 13:32-33, is quoted from a sermon by the Apostle Paul in which Jesus' first

Advent is proclaimed as the "good news of the promise made to the fathers."

We are now awaiting Jesus' return – the "second Advent," fulfilling prophecies of His coming as King. As we wait, a third Advent is implied in this majestic hymn. It is the arrival of Jesus in the human heart. I can remember, during the early days of my personal faith journey, sitting around the campfire at youth retreats and singing, "Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus." Accepting Jesus as Lord of one's life opens up a floodgate of blessings, many of which are in the lyrics of this hymn. To mention only a few: forgiveness of sin, membership in God's kingdom, rest (peace and security), joy, and the hope of one day seeing Jesus face to face.

May we have a strong sense of Christ's presence as we celebrate the Advent season.

Art Burcham, writer and member since 1968. Mary Frances Turner, editor and member since 1953.



Sing along:

Christy Nockels - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWj9sDXIT0A>

Virtual choir lyrics video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dAolkjPVh64>

Family Connections:

SHARE about a time you had to wait for a really long time for something you really wanted to happen.

READ Galatians 4:4-5. When did Jesus come? Why did He come?

REFLECT on God's people in the Old Testament. They had to wait a really long time for the arrival of the Promised Messiah. How does that compare to our waiting for His second coming?



December 4 – Waiting
Alene Harris

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

“Daughter Zion, shout for joy and be glad, for I am coming to dwell among you”—this is the LORD’s declaration. ... Let all humanity be silent before the LORD, for from his holy dwelling he has roused himself.” (Zechariah 2:10,13)

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly-minded,
for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
our full homage to demand.

On what do we “ponder” as the yearly celebration of the gift of God’s Son approaches? What lays claim to our minds – trees, cookies, decorations, wrapping paper, appropriate gifts for friends and family, possible snow, Christmas dinner? The list goes on We hear the phrase “Keep Christ in Christmas,” but the world presses in. How do we press back?

“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” is a hymn that calls us to rise above the secular noise and busy-ness of the coming holiday and to focus on it as a holy day.

The first three lines of this most ancient of all hymns* call us to silence, to awe, and to a focus on Christ and away from the world.

The fourth and fifth declare our Lord is not coming empty-handed. He brings the blessing of peace, joy, and hope with Him. Is it possible that sometimes our hands (and hearts) are so full with “holiday stuff” that we fail to grasp His blessing?

In the sixth line, the word *homage* calls us back to the

holiness of the season. Christ as God commands our worship, reverence, and praise.

As we move into and through this season of Advent, let us examine what fills our thoughts and demands our attention, and let us make time to be silent, to meditate on the gift of God’s Son, and to receive His blessing as we lift our hearts in worship and our voices in prayer and praise.

* “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent” is the oldest of all hymns we sing today, with origins tracing back to the apostle James, Jesus’ half-brother, first Bishop of the church at Jerusalem. In the fourth century it became part of the *Liturgy of St. James* and was sung in its entirety as a communion hymn. Though the four stanzas of this hymn encompass both Jesus’ first and second comings, congregations of Baptist, Anglican, Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches associate this hymn with its first stanza seen above and sing it as an Advent hymn.

Tom and Alene Harris are members of the Encouragers Class. Both taught college and senior adult Sunday School classes for over 20 of the 35 years they have been members of FBC. Both are retired professors from Vanderbilt University and currently reside at Richland Place Independent Living.



Sing along:

Fernando Ortega - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8Hip1F8kY8>
(With lyrics for congregations) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynzuVpmrRQM>

Family Connections:

SHARE places you are expected to be quiet. Is it difficult for you to be quiet?

READ Luke 2:19. What was Mary’s response to the birth of Jesus?

REFLECT on how you could take time to ponder during this very loud season.

Love - Who is He?



Gentry Claire Moore





December 5 – Love (Who Is He?)

David Thomas

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

*From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you,
who acts for those who wait for him. (Isaiah 64:4, CSV)*

I don't know how you feel when this happens, but I always feel a sense of disappointment and let down when I go to the cinema to see a film adaptation of a book I read and enjoyed, and the movie version simply doesn't live up to my anticipation and expectation. I really enjoyed the book, but the film makers portrayed something different in the movie than what I had experienced when reading the book. This happens because the imagination dynamics of our minds are so fertile and unique that no outside source can possibly duplicate what our brain can conceive. ... Except when it comes to God! "But as it is written: What no eye has seen and no ear has heard, and what has never come into a man's heart, is what God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9) The actualization of God always supersedes what we can vainly imagine.

This is one of the many reasons why I love the simple little Polish Christmas carol, "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly" (#139 in Celebrating Grace). In its simplicity, it provides rich, fertile soil for the roots of our imagination to take hold and grow deeply! It takes the Luke 2 nativity narrative and condenses that wonderful story into quasi bullet points that activate and spur on the imagination: Holy baby, lowing cattle, angels singing, flocks sleeping, shepherds watching. Tunefully stated, each of these little nuggets of suggestion conjures up vibrant, fantastic mental images that swiftly wing us back across time and space to experience the richest

imaginings of the magnificent incarnation of Jesus, our Redeemer, God's precious gift to humankind!

One final thought. A common way to emphasize a point of major importance is to repeat it. This carol reminds us, twice at the end of each stanza, not to miss the major truth of this Holy incarnation ... "Christ the Babe is Lord of all!" So, when next you sing this carol, let your imagination soar; and remember that what God actually did that night in Bethlehem, and what He has prepared for us in an eternity with Jesus, is even beyond the wildest imaginings our hearts and minds can create!

David Thomas is an active Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, and tenor section member of the Sanctuary Choir. Along with his wife Theresa, he serves as a leader in our Wednesday evening Preschool Music Activity. David and Theresa are the parents of Melita Thomas, LifeWay team leader, and Nathan Thomas, a Nashville music professional. David and Theresa live in Gallatin, along with their cat Soxy.



Sing along:

DiscoverWorship - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Q_nyGKcwP4

Family Connections:

SHARE the best thing that has ever happened to you.

READ 1 Corinthians 2:9. Is there something God has done for you that you could never have imagined?

REFLECT How does this verse help you trust God?



What Child Is This?

Then the angel told her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. ... And his kingdom will have no end." (Luke 1:30-33)

A rhetorical question, a haunting melody. Mary looked into the face of her beautiful baby boy and was overwhelmed with love. Mothers and fathers can identify and can also recall those first moments of pride and wonder when holding their tiny baby. Mary and Joseph were no exceptions. Jesus was not Joseph's child, but he willingly became the husband and father that God needed him to be. Can you even imagine being chosen by God to be the parents of His Son?

No one can know the mind of God as He looked at His tiny baby, His Son. The angels were rejoicing because they knew what this meant for mankind —redemption. The glorious appearance and singing of the angels was just a glimpse into the depth of that joy. God's love, wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying on Mary's lap, sleeping. Amazing love, wondrous love.

The words were written in 1865 by Englishman, William Chatterton Dix, when he underwent a renewal of faith during an illness. No one knows for sure who wrote the melody, *Greensleeves*, or who paired it with the Dix's poem. "What Child Is This?" did not become a beloved Christmas hymn until after it was published in 1871.

The question asked by Dix, "What child is this?" is answered throughout Scripture. Hebrews 1:3 captures the significance. The first part of that verse reads, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact

representation of His being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." What child is this? This is Christ the King. The second part of verse 3 tells the rest of the story. "After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." (NIV)

I'm sure when the shepherds and angels surrounded the little family in the stable with God's glory, Mary and Joseph were also filled with questions of their own. But I also think they felt a peace that passed all understanding. God was there. He was with them. They had responded to His plan with faith.

What has God asked you to do for Him? Mary and Joseph were young and yet had a deep relationship with God so He could accomplish amazing things because they believed and obeyed. Believe and obey.

Janis Aston taught elementary music over 30 years. She and Don, have been married 50 years and members at NFBC for 39 years. Her mother, Jane Montgomery, is also a member at NFBC. Their daughter, Somerlie, and son-in-law, Jared, are parents of Jordan (13) and Asher (10). Janis is chair of First Grands and serves as a nursery greeter. She has worked in children's music and sang in the Adult Choir.



Sing along:

Sing along: Bebo Norman - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VnnjWrgy6A>

Carrie Underwood - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOA-rUic-A8>

Choral Music (with lyrics) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2Un5nwIL5w>

Family Connections:

SHARE other names you know for Jesus.

READ Luke 9:18-20. Who does Peter say Jesus is?

REFLECT on how you would answer the question, "What child is this?"



December 7 – Love (Who Is He?)

Jim and Carol Ann Shull

Mary, Did You Know?

He is the image of the invisible God, / the firstborn over all creation. ...For everything was created by him, / in heaven and on earth.... He is before all things, / and by him all things hold together.
(Colossians 1:15-17)

Several months ago, Carol Ann and I went to a concert in the Fisher Center at Belmont hosted by Mark Lowry. At the end of the concert, Mark sang "Mary, Did You Know?"

In 1984, Mark was asked to write the program for his church's *Living Christmas Tree*. As Mark wrote, he began to think about Mary. He had always been fascinated with the concept that God came to earth. Mark remembered a conversation with his mother about Mary. She told him, "If anyone on earth knew that Jesus was virgin-born, it was Mary." That profound statement stayed with Mark. As he thought about the manger scene, Mark began to think about the power, authority and majesty that Mary cradled in her arms. He began to think of a list of questions he would ask Mary if he could sit down with her.

For the next seven years, Mark carried the lyrics with him. In 1991, he asked Buddy Greene to write music to go with the lyrics. Two weeks later, Buddy called Mark and sang the completed song to him. By this time, Mark was touring with the Gaither Vocal Band. He asked Michael English to sing it on his debut album and it became an immediate hit.

The song seems simple, but it contains some profound theological truths. It helps explain the Incarnation – the central Christian doctrine that God became flesh and became a man in the form of Jesus Christ, the Son of

God. Matthew 1:23 reads "See the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel which is translated 'God is with us.'"

It also speaks about salvation; that Jesus saved people from sin (atonement) by His death and resurrection. 2 Corinthians 5:21 states, "He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." The miracles of Jesus mentioned in the song are recorded in all four Gospels and include healings, raising the dead, and control over nature.

Certainly, there are many things that Mary did not know at the time of Jesus' birth. But in her own song, Mary did know this: "My soul praises the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior..." (Luke 1:46).

(The information in the second paragraph is adapted from *Story behind the song: 'Mary, did you know?'* by Lindsay Terry on staugustine.com.)

Carol Ann and Jim Shull have been married for 51 years. They have two sons and four grandchildren. Jim and Carol Ann have been members of NFBC for over 50 years and are co-directors of the Encouragers Connect Group.



Sing along:

Maverick City Music - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noMp8DkyzC4&list=RDnoMp8DkyzC4&start_radio=1

Children's choir with words - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1H1-scfD1s>

Mark Lowry - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXmfkFoX-PE>

Family Connections:

SHARE all the things you would need to care for a baby.

READ Luke 1:26-33. What news does Mary receive?

REFLECT on Mary. More than diapers and baby food, what do you think Mary may have needed to care for Jesus?



December 8 – Love (Who Is He?)

Steve Caldwell

The First Nowell

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

For the majority of us, Christmas carols were a very significant part of our childhood, family memories, and religious celebrations. We learned "The First Noel" early in life. "Noel" ("Nowell") has a French origin that can be ultimately traced to Latin. "Noel" means "birthday," and when used in conjunction with Jesus, thus means "Christmas."

The four verses of this English carol tell of two aspects of the Christmas narrative: the angelic annunciation to the shepherds and the visit of the Magi as they followed the miraculous star. The writer took certain license: nowhere in the gospels do we find that the shepherds saw the Christmas star. Likewise, the Bible is silent on the number of Magi who arrived at some later time when the Christ child was in a house, not a stable. However, His birth was announced with extraordinary displays of light. The shepherds saw the glory of the Lord shining around them. The Magi were led to Jesus by the light of a star. The birth of Jesus, the Light of the World, was announced in light.

One can only imagine what the shepherds thought as the calmness of the night was suddenly interrupted by a sky filled with angels in high praise! Their lives were rooted in the ordinary. Nothing could have prepared them for the spectacle that unfolded. The Very God had come to Earth – Good News for the ages! God has a way of showing up unexpectedly, but in just the right

time and way. Shepherds were of low social status and ceremonially unclean. But it was God's will that they be the first to hear the joy of His Son's birth. Everyone is important to God.

There's so much we would like to know about the angelic hosts, the wise men, and the star. But the focus of the nativity account was Jesus and how – even as a child – He impacted the lives of all who encountered Him. Now, like then, whenever anyone comes to Jesus, their life is forever changed. Noel is a story of God's Light shining into human darkness ... into my darkness.

May we, like the shepherds and wise men of old, stand in total awe of the coming of Emmanuel – not merely for a visit but for an indwelling!

Steve Caldwell is a retired Materials Scientist living in Hendersonville with numerous technical and musical interests. He's a member of the Connecting Class on Sundays and part of the NFBC Sanctuary Choir.



Sing along:

Sing along: Hillsong Worship - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1kzrSDA94g>
King's College Cambridge 2010 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mltWsC8RtM>

Family Connections:

SHARE a favorite time or place where you have stargazed. (Or go outside and do it tonight!)

READ Matthew 2:1-2. What did the wise men see?

REFLECT on the sky that first Christmas night and draw what you imagine it could have been like.



December 9 – Love (Who Is He?)

Oliver and Savannah Payne

God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen

Oh, tidings of comfort and joy!

*“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away.”
(Revelation 21:4)*

There’s no shortage of crying in our home. That’s the reality of these precious, fleeting days of being parents to a three-year-old son and a one-year-old daughter. Someone snatched a toy—the victim cries. Someone slipped on the rug—the wails ring off the walls. (For that matter, they also ring through the walls. The house’s outer walls are not as soundproof as we might have assumed, and I know the neighbors are able to hear much of this crying themselves.)

Each time one of our children cries, what seems like – and genuinely could be – dozens of times a day, Mama or Daddy addresses it. Sometimes we meet the child with soothing words or a hug, but other times we meet him or her with our own selfish impatience for the crying to stop.

When we are reflecting the selfless love of our Heavenly Father to our children, we desire to bring comfort and joy to them in place of their pain and tears. In our sin, we often do that imperfectly. We simply want the unpleasantness to be over without offering our genuine willingness to put in the difficult, messy work of giving them what they truly need.

Only our God in His perfect love could bring true tidings of comfort and joy. Only through the selfless love of Jesus and His willingness to do the difficult, messy work could an end finally come to tears and grief and pain and death. And these were the good tidings of great joy the angels sang over the shepherds’ fields long ago when Christ the Savior was born. Through His work of redemption, He would bring us comfort and joy. Through His death, He would crush death, that one day there would be no more tears. Praise Jesus!

Oliver and Savannah Payne have called Nashville First home for the last seven years. Oliver serves in the youth group, and Savannah teaches 3rd & 4th grade Sunday school. They have two children, three-year-old Ivan and one-year-old Audrey.



Sing along:

Hillsong - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-L4RvKKRZ30>

Pentatonix (with words) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXpn2bpUjVw>

Family Connections:

SHARE about a favorite lovey, a blanket or stuffed animal, that has brought you comfort and joy.

READ Luke 2:8-11. What were the shepherds feeling? What good news did the angel have for the shepherds?

REFLECT on how God’s love brings lasting comfort and joy.



December 10 – Love (Who Is He?)

Neely Cotten

The Holly and the Ivy

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made... (Romans 1:20)

The holly and the ivy
when they are both full grown,
of all the trees that are in the wood,
the holly bears the crown.

Refrain:

The rising of the sun
and the running of the deer,
the playing of the merry organ,
sweet singing in the choir.

² The holly bears a blossom,
white as the lily flower,

and Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,
to be our sweet Saviour. [Refrain]

³ The holly bears a berry,
as red as any blood,
and Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
to do poor sinners good. [Refrain]

⁴ The holly bears a prickle,
as sharp as any thorn,
and Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
on Christmas day in the morn. [Refrain]

⁵ The holly bears a bark,
as bitter as any gall,
and Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
for to redeem us all. [Refrain]

⁶ The holly and the ivy,
when they are both full grown,
of all the trees that are in the wood
The holly bears the crown. [Refrain]

Humble beginnings of this traditional song predate the widely-accepted version above; the first iteration began as a pagan tale of nature. The carol was later adapted in 1800s Great Britain to the hymn we know and love depicting Jesus the Christ as holly and His Virgin Mother Mary as ivy. Just as the holly bears a crown, a blossom, a berry, a prickle, and a bark – so did Jesus bear His calling. He was born to his mother Mary as a sweet gift for perishing sinners. As we look at the anatomy of a holly leaf, we are reminded of the bitter gall he suffered as His blood was shed under a crown of thorns. For you. For me.

Do you think Creator God knew about this hymn when He was creating holly bushes? Per the refrain, as He was watching that first sun ... as He watched that first deer run ... is He that wise, that infinite, that gracious to gift us visible reminders of His sacrificed Son even at the dawn of creation? Even if the pagans couldn't describe the life and death of Jesus, could they sense there was something special?

While we humans would, no doubt, like to take credit for "spotting redemption" in a holly bush, maybe this bit of nature was intentionally put there for us to find – much like a parent hides Easter eggs in the easiest spots for their youngest child.

The love of Jesus Christ is inescapable. There are beautifully crafted reminders of His precious life just outside our front door. May we see them more clearly as we grow to know Him more.

Andrew and Neely Cotten have been members of NFBC since 2017. While they are involved in many different ministries on campus, most of their time is spent chasing after three precious Cotten kids – Mac, Natalie, and Anna James.



Sing along:

Holly and the Ivy with Lyrics - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLHLnPZ7Mcl>

Family Connections:

SHARE how the holly reminds us of Jesus: blossom/birth; berry/blood; prickle/thorn; bark/bitter gall; crown/king.

READ Matthew 1:16, John 19:34, John 19:2, John 19:29-30, Revelation 19:11-13, 16.

Can you connect these verses to the birth, berry, prickle, bark, and crown of Jesus?

REFLECT and create an arrangement of holly for your home (real, plastic, or cut paper).

Peace - Now and to Come



Nicky Johnson



December 11 – Peace (Now and to Come)

Susan Owens

Silent Night

But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.” (Luke 2 : 19 ESV)

Silent Night.
It probably wasn't.

The story of the night Jesus was born tells us a couple of things that substantiate this.

“... all the world was to be registered...each to his own town.”

It was family time.

“... there was no place for them in the inn.”

It was a bit chaotic in the house.

“And suddenly there was...a multitude of the heavenly host praising God...”

It was not a Silent Night.

Somehow in the midst of all of this, Mary found stillness:

“... Mary treasured up all of these things, pondering them in her heart.”

Our days aren't always calm and bright. God knew this. Christmastime is often not a time for stillness, but it is a time we are given for joy with our people. One way we find our joy is through the familiar songs of Advent. Singing with friends and family is a thing to be treasured and pondered. It helps us to understand the season and to make ourselves more accessible to the work the Holy Spirit desires to do in us.

One of the ways I sing and ponder is through sign (American Sign Language). I learn and grow in knowledge of this thing I don't fully understand. Sign language is for communication and accessibility for those to whom all is silent. I am not deaf. My world is rarely silent. Amidst the clamor, I am drawn to the simple beauty and clarity that signs bring to words and thoughts that I wouldn't ponder the same way audibly. I don't know what purpose God has for drawing me to this form of communication, but I trust He will use it to access something in me or in His Kingdom because of it.

“Silent Night” is a beautiful hymn of Advent. I think it's not so much about that night Mary and Joseph had in Bethlehem, but about the escape from the noise that we can have because of it. Listen to its words again. Or look at them silently.

Because of the Holy Infant born into our clamor, we can sleep in heavenly peace.

Susan Owens enjoys playing trombone in the orchestra and supporting our youth as a youth choir sponsor. She and her husband, Philip Owens, have two daughters, Sara & Alysa.



Sing along:

Kristin Getty - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pEndgvJe2s>

Family Connections:

SHARE the ASL signs for 'loud' and 'quiet' (YouTube). Which one would you use to describe the first Christmas night?

READ Mark 4:35-39. What was Jesus able to do?

REFLECT on a chaotic happening in your life. How did you see God provide in your storm?



December 12 – Peace (Now and to Come)

Jamie Nabakowski

Away in a Manger

Inspirations from a Manger Scene and Song

*"... it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones perish."
(Matthew 18:14)*

One of my fondest and most reoccurring Christmas memories as a child is the memory of a small manger scene my mother would put out each year. This manger, about the size of a shoebox, was a rustic piece made from real wood, rough carved figures, and features that gave the scene a wild yet warm and comforting character. The roughness of the manger roof and walls, with texture similar to rocky, brushy hillside, was contrasted by the warmth of the painted figures and their proximity to Christ and each other.

Even as a child, I could glean from this scene the love, warmth, and protection that must come from Christ. In remembering this representation of Jesus's famous manger, I realize similar comforts of closeness and love are stirred by the scriptural truths found in the most famous of manger-themed hymns: "Away in a Manger."

One can hardly think of Christmas hymns without thinking of "Away in a Manger." It is often the first Christmas song we teach our children. As with my mother's manger scene, the verses of this wonderful hymn bring to mind warmth, comfort, love, and peace. The hymn inspires in the mature listener a return to the childlike faith Christ mentions in Matthew 18. This inspiration comes in the hymn's second and third stanzas via requests, which are common in every child

(and really in every adult too): requests to be truly seen, to be comforted through darkness, to be drawn close, to be loved, and to dwell safely in comfort.

My wife and I have four wonderful children, and these verses of request from "Away in a Manger" express so clearly and simply the longing we recognize in their childlike faith throughout their growth. Moreover, each Christmas season, thanks to wonderful hymns like this one, I am reminded of how I am seen and loved by Christ, and comforted by Him, and of my need to draw ever closer to Him, and of his promise of eternal safety and comfort.

Jamie and Ana Nabakowski have been members of NFBC since early 2016. They live in Pegram, TN, on a (very) small farm with their four beautiful children (Charli Mae, Ames, Novalee, and Jolie Grace). The Nabakowskis attend the JOY class each Sunday and are fixtures at the weekly Wednesday night activities.



Sing along:

Phil Wickham - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXXpJeXCJ1w>

Kid's Version w/Lyrics - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2ULTkNmIEY>

Family Connections:

SHARE (or sing) a favorite bedtime song.

READ Luke 2:1-7. Why did Mary place Jesus in a manger?

REFLECT with your nativity. Pick up and put each figure in its place.



December 13 – Peace (Now and to Come)

David Miller

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

*But based on his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth,
where righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:13)*

Edmund H. Sears, a Unitarian minister educated with a degree from Harvard Divinity School, wrote this poem in 1849. It was titled “The Angels Song - It Came Upon the Midnight Clear” and was published in *The Christian Register* that same year. It wasn’t until 1850 that Richard S. Willis put it to music as a carol.

Sears’s inspiration came from his faith that God sent His angels to earth with a message of love. He had previously written the hymn, “Calm on the Listening Ear of Night.” It is believed this hymn influenced and inspired the words to “The Angels Song - It Came Upon the Midnight Clear.”

Sears lived in troubled times, including the end of the Mexican War and the heated political tension that eventually led to the Civil War. Also, the rapid automation of the Industrial Age was changing the economy.

This carol may be the only commonly sung carol in our hymnals that does not mention the birth of Jesus Christ. However, the Scripture found in the first verse, “Peace on earth, good will to man from heaven’s all-gracious King,” comes from Luke 2:13-14. This was the message from the angels to the shepherds. It was the announcement to the world! This was God’s greatest gift to mankind.

It is probably the earliest social gospel hymn written in the U.S. as indicated in the second verse, “angels with peaceful wings unfurled heavenly music to a

weary world.” The third verse follows with: “beneath life’s crushing load whose forms are bending low, who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow, and rest beside the weary road to hear the angels sing.”

I’ve sung this carol many times and never really thought about it not mentioning the birth of Jesus. Because it is sung as a Christmas carol along with others, my brain is conditioned to receive the message and words expressing the birth of Jesus automatically. There are moments I realize that the message of Peace is not fully realized on earth.

We are still troubled with war, political and civil tensions, and a strained economy. Unfortunately, the difficulties of life too often drown out the song of the hope which now (today) the angels sing in the fourth verse. So many people are not listening or hearing it. I have heard it. I have Jesus and I know I have the Peace.

Now we need to announce it to the world!

David Miller joined Nashville First in 1980. Tricia joined in 1979. They were married in 1981. They have two sons, Patrick (Ashley) and Stuart, and three grandchildren. He is an active deacon and serves on the Baptism Committee. David and Tricia are members of the Connecting Sunday School Class.



Sing along:

Steven Curtis Chapman - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKdLvSbk734>

It Came upon the Midnight Clear (lyrics) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQjpDKKPKD4>

Family Connections:

SHARE where you see peace needed in our world.

READ John 14:27. Who gives us peace?

REFLECT on how, when, and where you can help bring peace.



December 14 – Peace (Now and to Come)

John Wilkinson

O Little Town of Bethlehem

"The Savior – yes, the Messiah, the Lord – has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!" (Luke 2:11, NLT)

Whenever a British royal baby is to be born, especially one who is to be a potential heir to the throne, the world's media goes into a frenzy and millions of people follow every update with bated breath. So it is hard to imagine how the birth of the King of Kings generated such little fanfare.

Phillip Brooks, who wrote this hymn in 1868, a reminds us of "how silently the wondrous gift is given while mortals sleep" in the still, small town of Bethlehem. Of course, shepherds watching their sheep in nearby fields came to see Jesus after an angel joined by a multitude of angels praising God shared with them the good news. And the wise men (magi) eventually came bearing gifts. But most people in Judea at that time were looking for a different kind of Messiah: a warrior type who could overthrow the Romans or a king with great wealth and power.

Is it possible today we could overlook the true Messiah/Christ or not hear His voice while being distracted by the world's distorted version of Him? Stanza 3 reminds us, "no ear may hear His coming. But in this world of sin, /where meek souls will receive Him, still the dear Christ enters in." As believers, we tenderly remember the day we realized how great His love for us must be for Him to come from heaven and die on the cross for our sins. And we decided to follow Him as Savior and Lord.

Unfortunately, as Christians, we are not immune to

the influence of the world and Satan's attempts to cunningly twist the truth (Romans 12:2). Social media, politics, and the fear of being canceled can sometimes guide our opinions and actions more than the Bible and the Holy Spirit. We can even potentially become misguided in our Christlike pursuit of loving people. In some cases, humbly and gently agreeing with the Word of God may be unacceptable to some and be misinterpreted as unloving (John 15:19). It is tempting to conform and please people instead of God. However, we must remember loving God is the first/greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37-38) and, since God is both love and truth, love and truth are inseparable (1 John 4:8-10, Ephesians 4:14-15).

O city of Nashville and the world beyond, let our prayer this advent season be as written in the final stanza of this hymn: "O holy child of Bethlehem! Descend to us we pray. / Cast out our sin, and enter in. Be born in us today!"

John Wilkinson is the husband of Grace and father of Caleb and Stephanie. They have been Nashville First members since 2001. He is part of the Open Door Connect Group. He has taught adult and youth Sunday School classes over the years, sings in the Sanctuary Choir, and has served on the Personnel Committee on which he will serve again in 2024.



Sing along:

Shane and Shane - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PiYKiQshCDw&list=RDPiYKiQshCDw&start_radio=1
NFBC 12/25/22 Christmas Service – (minute 36.38)- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBrWchT6lGw&t=690s>

Family Connections:

SHARE where you would want to live if you could live anywhere. Why?

READ Micah 5:2. In what city will the Messiah be born?

REFLECT on Bethlehem. Jesus could have been born in the large holy city of Jerusalem. Do you wonder why God chose a small out of the way town?



December 15 – Peace (Now and to Come)

Joshua Pettigrew

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

The opening line – “Hark! The herald angels sing, ‘Glory to the newborn King!’” – immediately draws attention to the heavenly proclamation of Christ’s birth. This verse reminds us of the divine nature of Jesus and His role as the King and Savior, inviting us to reflect on the miraculous event that unfolded on that silent night in Bethlehem. Such contemplation can kindle our faith by reinforcing the central doctrine of Christianity: the Incarnation, wherein God became flesh to redeem humanity.

The subsequent verses delve into themes of reconciliation and salvation. Lines like “Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled” emphasize the redemptive power of Jesus’ birth. The lyrics remind us that through His coming, the breach between God and humanity was bridged, offering forgiveness and restoration to those who believe. This truth has the potential to deepen our faith by illuminating the concept of grace, underscoring that our salvation is a gift that cannot be earned, but only received through faith.

Furthermore, the song’s emphasis on Jesus as the “Everlasting Lord” echoes biblical references to His eternal nature and lordship over all creation. This recognition can expand our faith by fostering a sense of awe and reverence for the divine majesty and sovereignty of Christ.

As the verses progress, the carol continues to weave together theological truths with poetic imagery, driving home the significance of Christ’s birth for humanity. Lines such as “Born to give them second birth” highlight the transformative aspect of salvation, underscoring the rebirth of believers into a new life through their faith in Jesus.

In conclusion, “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” can greatly enrich our faith by encapsulating the foundational teachings of Christianity within its verses. Its exploration of Jesus’ divinity, His role as Savior, the gift of reconciliation, and the promise of eternal life all contribute to a deepening of one’s faith. Through its beauty, depth, and resonance with biblical truths, the song serves as a powerful reminder of the core beliefs that underpin the Christian faith, fostering a stronger connection to the profound message of Christmas.

Joshua Pettigrew and his wife, Kirby, both attended Union University in Jackson, TN. Joshua is originally from Jackson, and Kirby is from Memphis. They have been members of Nashville First Baptist since 2011. They have two children, Miller and Maxwell. Joshua is the IT Finance Manager at his company, and Kirby is the ER Social Worker for St. Thomas Midtown.



Sing along:

Chris Tomlin - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAUFZbnfLxw>

NFBC 12/25/22 Christmas Service – (minute 9/07)- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBrWchT6lGw&t=690s>

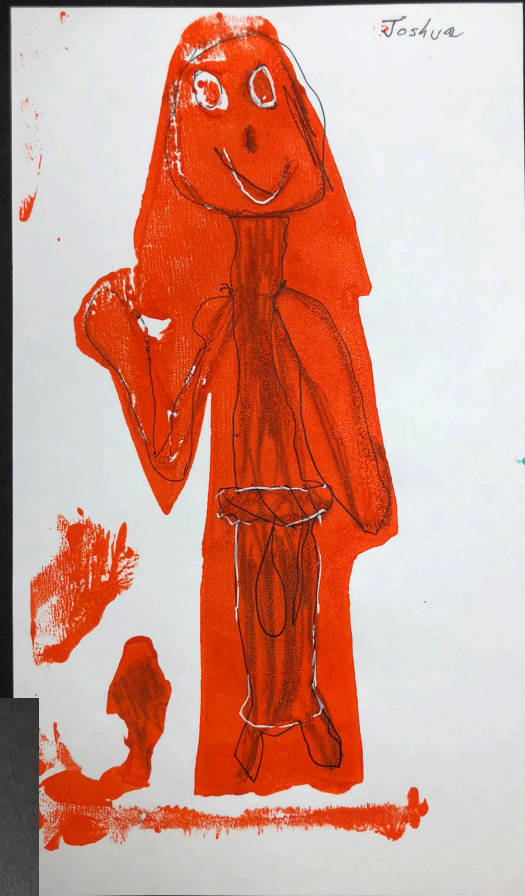
Family Connections:

SHARE about the birth of a baby in your family.

READ John 3:6-7. The birth of Jesus made it possible for us to be born again.

REFLECT on how a baby changes everything. How did the birth of Jesus change everything?

Hope - Personal & Worldwide



Joshua Lowe



Justin Brown





O Holy Night

*Because of the LORD's faithful love we do not perish, for his mercies never end.
They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness! (Lamentations 3:22-23)*

I can only imagine the desperation that Mary and Joseph must have felt as they entered Bethlehem in what we'd refer to today as "crisis mode." As a man, Joseph no doubt felt an enormous responsibility to act quickly and do whatever it took to find Mary a safe, comfortable place to deliver her baby. However, God had the night pre-planned in its entirety, including sending the heavenly hosts to announce His Son's birth to the shepherds as they heard "the angel voices."

It was God's plan for His Son to be born in a humble manger as it foreshadowed the tone of Christ's first earthly incarnation. Practically speaking, how much easier it must have been for the shepherds to find the Christ Child in a specific place where newborns would not typically be found. God plans the details meticulously in every situation that accomplishes His purpose through His trusting creation.

For Joseph and Mary, the night likely felt tenuous and uncertain with the holy anticipation of the event temporarily overshadowed by circumstances. But by God's providence, that night became the quintessential holiest night in all history to that point. God took two trusting, obedient young people and worked through their lives to save humanity. Just when we think God isn't aware of our needs, He shows up mightily as we humble ourselves to His will. The Lord had made promises to Mary and Joseph about who this child

would be, and they no doubt repeated those promises to themselves often. Similarly, holding on to God's promises and faithfulness is what still leads humanity out of crisis mode when it inevitably comes.

"The thrill of hope" was not just for the "weary world" of two thousand years ago, but that hope is still found in 2023 in our darkest nights and in valleys so deep that hope is the only lifeline we have to hold on to. Just as the world found, and continues to find, hope in the birth of the Savior, we now also find hope in that same Savior's return. To us, the "new and glorious morn" that we're looking for is Christ's second coming. Just as Christ's birth changed the world, His second coming will again change the world as we rule and reign with Christ. The Lion will lie down with the lamb, and we shall forever be with the Lord. Those nights and days will be holy indeed for all eternity.

Scott Sloan is a father of four, a Tax Accountant, an active member of NFBC, and sings in the Sanctuary Choir. Scott is a runner and is interested in cars. He and his two youngest daughters, Hope and Joy, live in the Mount Juliet area where Scott grew up and still has extended family.



Sing along:

Christy Nockels - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5yclUtyH0E>
Choir with Lyrics - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ley1aOPDHCE>

Family Connections:

SHARE the hopes you have for Christmas. Are these hopes possible? Why? What traditions do you expect to happen? What unexpected things do you hope might happen?

READ Romans 15:13. What does the God of hope provide? How?

REFLECT on the difference between hope and a simple wish. Hope is an expectation with certainty that God will do what He has said. Without expectation or certainty, you are left with just a wish. We can hope in God because He will always do what He says He will do. Of this you can be certain.



December 17 – Hope (Personal and Worldwide)

Patrick Watts

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

...That Mourns in Lonely Exile Here

... and the ransomed of the LORD will return and come to Zion with singing, crowned with unending joy. Joy and gladness will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee. (Isaiah 35:10)

The carol “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” packs a lot into a small container. Each verse reminds us of the profound longing and hope that characterizes the advent season. Shifting from minor verse to major chorus and back again, each verse reminds us of the advent journey, fraught with frustration, yet stepping forward in the chorus with the promise that Emmanuel will come.

At the start of Advent, we are mourning for the loss of ourselves and of the world around us. We mourn at attempting but never being able to live up to the holiness of God.

We are in lonely exile. As Christians, we know we are separated from our true home, yearning for the presence of our Savior. John 15:19 documents our mean estate as Christians in a world that is un-Christlike. “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you.”

Yet this mourning is not without purpose. It is a reminder that we were created for a better reality. And even here, in the midst of this mourning exile, we rejoice.

We rejoice because Jesus promises “rest for your souls.” (Matt. 11:29)

We rejoice because we know God promises to turn our mourning into dancing. (Ps. 30:11)

We rejoice because God promised to “raise up a Righteous Branch for David” as prophesied in Jeremiah 23:5.

And we rejoice because here, in exile, God calls us, as He called the Israelites in Babylon, to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf” (Jer. 29:6-7)

Advent is a time to rely on the absolute knowledge that the Messiah will return soon. Let us open our hearts to receive Him anew, embracing the hope that pierces through the darkness of exile and guides us towards the joy of His presence.

Patrick and Lydia Watts met and married at Nashville First Baptist and have served in Sunday School leadership, music leadership, and missions leadership. They live in Brentwood with their son Adam.



Sing along:

Crowder, Passion - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqsnHwM7oR8>

12/25/2022 Christmas Service - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBrWchT6lGw&t=690s> (minute 26.14)

Family Connections:

SHARE a time it was difficult to keep a promise.

READ Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23. What promise did God keep?

REFLECT on other favorite promises in the Bible.



December 18 – Hope (Personal and Worldwide)
Kat Hedden

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

“Peace on Earth, goodwill to men.”

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

These days it seems like everywhere you look there is division, unrest, and chaos – in our country, city, religion, and even our own church and families. This season often comes with additional challenges – busy schedules, health issues, work pressures, financial stressors, in addition to the emotional impact of holiday longings, traditions, and memories of those no longer with us. The weight of all this adversity and unrest can become overwhelming and lead us to question God’s presence in it all. This hymn reminds me that God uses the challenges in our lives to draw us together and draw us back to Him.

There is a powerful story behind the hymn “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Longfellow was also living in a time of division, in a nation torn apart by the Civil War. In 1861 he had experienced personal loss with the untimely, tragic death of his wife. On December 1, 1863, he received a telegram stating that his 18-year-old son had been injured in battle and would likely be paralyzed the rest of his life. His life was in shambles, and it would be easy to see how he could be lost in despair.

Instead, that following Christmas day, 1863, Longfellow penned the poem that would eventually become the iconic hymn. In this poem, he describes the battle within his heart as he observed a world of injustice and violence and grief that seemingly was taunting his faith. He then ultimately finds peace and confidence

that God is present through every pain we experience in this life. As the Christmas bells ring, he is reminded that “God is not dead, nor does He sleep.”

This hymn impacts me differently every year; however, I am always comforted by God’s consistency. No matter what phase of life I am in, God’s message rings clearly. As we celebrate Christmas this year, it is essential that we remember that God sent His Son to give each of us broken humans both peace with God and “peace on earth.” As Christians, this belief and hope helps us shine a light to others, despite adversity, and encourage those through their own experiences of pain and suffering. Only Jesus can meet the needs of our heart and soul. Only Jesus can empower us to put everything else aside and love one another to find peace on this earth.

Kat Hedden has been a member of FBC Nashville for her entire life. She is married to Larry Hedden and is mother to 2-year-old Maddie Hedden. She serves as a pediatric physical therapist at Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt.



Sing along:

Casting Crowns - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=haaes9anfvs>

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day Lyrics - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MK7-qA8QJMY>

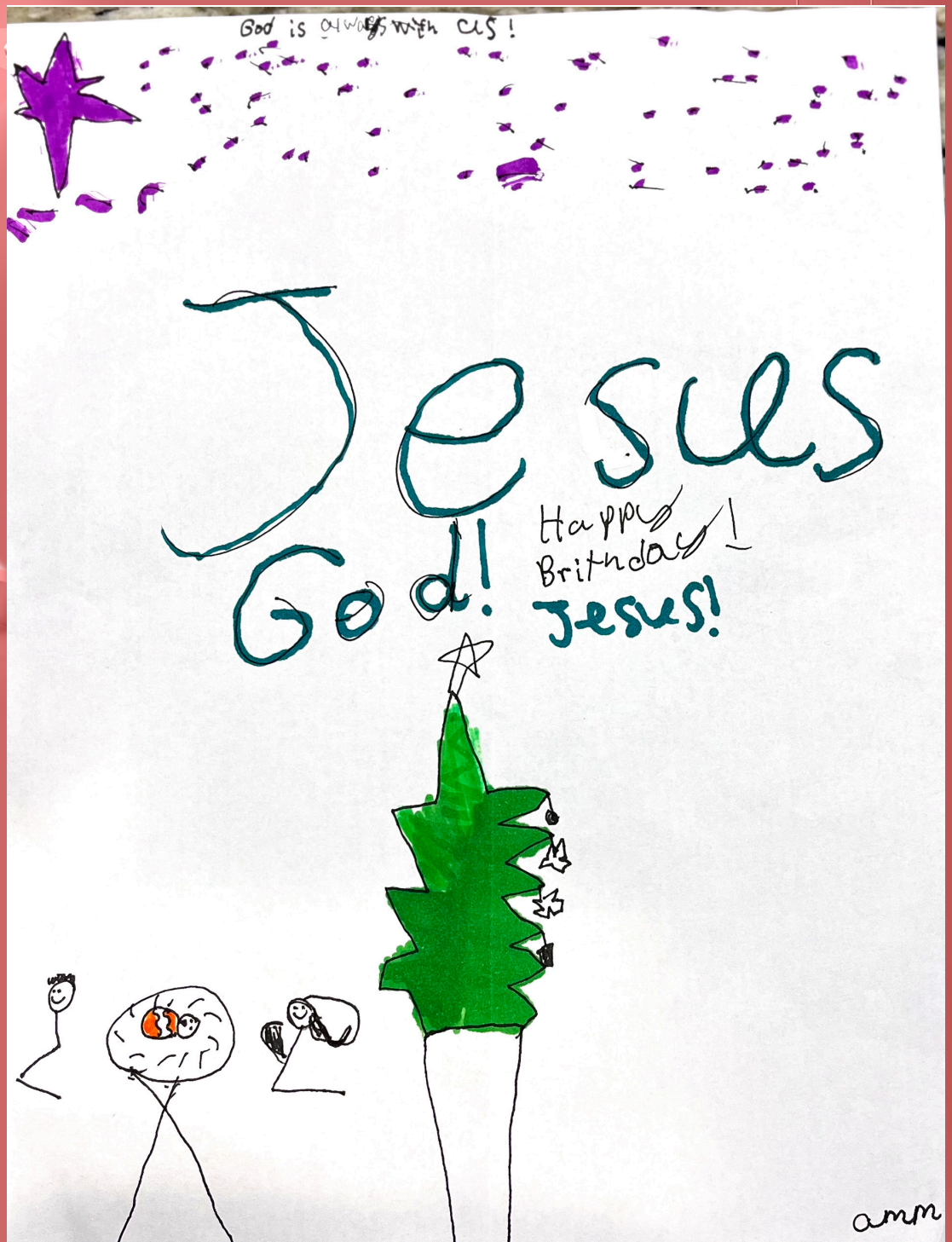
Family Connections:

SHARE a happening in our world that brings you fear or unrest.

READ John 14:27. What does Jesus promise to give that the world cannot.

REFLECT and share Bible verses that bring you comfort when you are afraid.

How do we respond?



Ann Gethers



December 19 – How Do We Respond?

Philip Owens

The Hands That First Held Mary's Child

He went to his hometown and began to teach them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? Isn't this the carpenter's son? ... (Matthew 13:54-55)

Joseph is often pushed to the background of the nativity story. Many miraculous events surround Jesus' birth, so maybe that's why we tend to put him there. "The Hands That First Held Mary's Child" (#115 in Celebrating Grace Hymnal) sets us in the stable witnessing Joseph's perspective. While this hymn is not as familiar to our traditional Christmas hymnody, the text breathes life into the righteous and faithful man described in Scripture.

Matthew 1 begins with an account of Jesus's lineage. Even in that list Joseph seems like a footnote, especially compared to names like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and King David. Yet there's our carpenter from Nazareth, right where God planned for generations upon generations. Joseph doesn't initially want to be there, (Matt. 1:19), at least not until God's plan is revealed. In a dream, an angel of the Lord calms his fears, verifies Mary's immaculate conception, and gives him an assignment – marry her and name the child Jesus.

When the time comes, our carpenter lays aside the wood, the hammer and nails, packs up for Bethlehem, and finds himself in a stable delivering the baby. This lays the stage for our hymn. Here those hands, callused from working wood, cradle the newborn's soft, smooth skin. Joseph marvels at the baby's small breathing frame which carries the power that created the framework of the universe. Joseph calls Him Jesus,

as the angel had said to do – this newborn, Immanuel, "God is with us."

I should mention our hymn is in a minor key, which carries those sad, ethereal tones. The key is foreshadowing, and because we're Easter people, we know what's coming. (This is where I get awestruck by Christmas.) While there is tremendous joy knowing Jesus is our Savior, this infant was sent for one purpose – to die for our sins. The hymn's final verse begins, "The tools that Joseph laid aside a mob would later lift / and use with anger, fear, and pride to crucify God's gift."

While this story is full of miracles and tremendous irony, let's turn our focus back to Joseph and recognize his dedication to God's plan. Maybe we're not sure what plan God has for us, or perhaps we're reluctant to embrace it. Whichever it may be, God sees us and has purpose for us. The final couplet of this hymn can be our prayer: "Let us, O Lord, not only hold the child who's born today, / but charged with faith may we be bold to follow in His way."

Philip Owens has been a member of Nashville First Baptist Church since 1999. He and his wife Susan have two daughters, Sara & Alysa. He enjoys logic problems, spreadsheets, creating music and really bad dad jokes.



Sing along:

Arman Ferrer with Kilyawan Consortium of Voices - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AKI-0Q554s>

Family Connections:

SHARE about your father or grandfather. What qualities do you admire in him?

READ Matthew 1:18-25. How did Joseph know what to do?

REFLECT on the qualities you admire in Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus.



While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks

(Read an immediate response to a godly calling in Luke 2:8-14 which paraphrases the Christmas gospel as the shepherds heard it.)

There you are, comfortable, in the midst of your daily life, when an unexpected appearance from God, so big, so mighty, thrusts you into an epic life event that will forever shape you as a person and call you to an immediate response from the Master, Himself. Some of us have had this calling on our lives. Others may pass it by. Never has there been such a literal manifestation of this godly call that required an immediate response as when the throng of angels heralded the birth of the Christ child to the shepherds in Luke's account of the nativity.

Luke 2:8 begins this recollection of events by saying that "there were in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." No doubt these shepherds had settled down for the night, ready for the rest they had earned from a hard day, when suddenly a call from the Lord himself required of them a response. The shepherds did not hesitate after hearing the wonderful proclamation of the angels. Verse 15 says that when the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us."

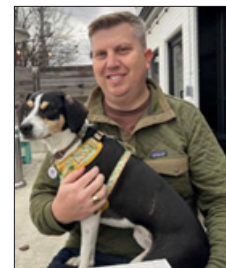
Their response was immediate. They had received a call from God: to be the first witnesses of the birth of the Lord and Savior. It was a calling so powerful that

they had no other choice, so they answered it.

In 1700, Nahum Tate, a poverty-stricken man from Dublin translated the call given to the shepherds into the hymn, "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night." In his tune, he sets to music the same call from God to each of us who sing it that the shepherds received on that glorious night in Bethlehem. This day, in the city of David, a Savior, Christ is born, to the earth be peace, and to those on whom His favor rests, good-will shall never cease.

The call has been given to you. What will your response be? As you sing this familiar tune, will you, like the shepherds, accept this message from the same Lord of hosts and go into the world singing it? There may not be a heavenly host to proclaim it, but God expects the same from us, an immediate response to go and tell!

Zach Williams has been a member of Nashville First for five years. He lives in Old Hickory with his dog, Harriet. Zach is the Dean of Academics at Explore! Community School in East Nashville. He sings in the choir and works with the children's ministry.



Sing along:

Andrew Peterson - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5NTGqYwL68>

Chet Valley Churches (for congregations) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdASbgux6ds>

Family Connections:

SHARE the names of family members and teachers that have told you about Jesus.

READ Luke 2:15-18. How did the shepherds respond to the angel's good news?

REFLECT on your response to the good news of Jesus. Have you trusted Him as Savior?



December 21 – How Do We Respond?

Grayson, Beth, and Lucy McClain

Once in Royal David's City

Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. (Luke 2:11)

Once in royal David's city

Stood a lowly cattle shed
There a mother laid her baby
In a manger for His bed
Mary was that mother mild
Jesus Christ her little child

He came down to earth from heaven

Who is God and Lord of all
And His shelter was a stable
And His cradle was a stall
With the poor, oppressed and wholly
Lived on earth our Savior holy

And our eyes

At last shall see Him
Through His own redeeming love
For that child, so dear and gentle
Is our Lord in heaven above
And He leads His children along
To the place where He is gone

Christmas is a season of contrasts: We have our warmest memories in this cold season. We delight in the newness of gifts while re-telling the oldest of family tales. We have Velveeta cheese dip at one meal and then our great-grandmother's jam cake at the next.

This hymn is also a study of contrasts: Jesus' greatness and Jesus' humility. The tenseness of the past and the promise of the future.

Our family first encountered this hymn on a Christmas eve road trip, as it was broadcast live from England. We could hear that the ornate chapel was abuzz with

anticipation, then quieted to hear one unaccompanied choir boy's small confident voice open the concert with the first verse's contrasting images of Jesus's birth. We have since learned that, since 1919, every Festival of Lessons and Carols at King's College has opened in this manner. Surely, that would be an intimidating year of preparation for such a young boy!

Then we learned an astonishing fact about the selection of the soloist. As the choir boys are warming up before the concert, the choirmaster makes a judgment of which one's voice is in best form at the time. He points, and so indicates which of them will be the soloist. That is all the notice the chosen boy gets for what some call "Christmas's most terrifying solo."

This Christmas tradition models the contrasting ways that we are called to serve. Our service may be to praise His greatness and at other times to join in His humility. The Choirmaster prepares us. And when He points to you, will you step forward and fill the air with your small confident voice for Jesus?

The McClains – Grayson, Beth, Lucy, and Jenny – joined Nashville First in April 2023 after moving from Memphis. Beth plays violin at church and in the Nashville Philharmonic Orchestra. Lucy is a ballet student at Nashville School of the Arts. Grayson teaches engineering management at Vanderbilt University. Jenny (not pictured) is a history major at the University of Alabama.



Sing along:

Carols from King's College 2021 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdMJ9Xz7mnk>

Family Connections:

SHARE your favorite Christmas tradition that also blesses others.

READ Philippians 2:5-11. What was King Jesus willing to do?

REFLECT on your readiness to serve. Are you willing to be brave? Are you willing to be humble? Which is more difficult for you?



December 22 - How Do We Respond?

Di Ann Callicott Perry

Go, Tell It on the Mountain

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the herald, who proclaims peace, who brings news of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7)

Have you ever wondered how Nashville became known as "Music City?" Although John Wesley Work, Jr., did not originally create the song, he was instrumental in preserving the Negro spiritual "Go, Tell It on the Mountain" and keeping it alive. This song has very strong connections to Nashville, Tennessee. In 1831, Fisk University was struggling financially and on the verge of going bankrupt. The Fisk Jubilee Singers took what money was available and went on tour to fund-raise for the university. The tour lasted 18 months and was very successful. Queen Victoria was so impressed with the Fisk Jubilee Singers that she said they must be from a 'city of music.' Although it took more than 50 years, that is how Nashville became known as "Music City." Jubilee Day is still celebrated today at Fisk as "Go, Tell It on the Mountain" is credited with saving the university.

This Christmas spiritual parallels the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:16-20 which states, "Go ye into all nations and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Jesus was on a mountain when He gave this commandment to the disciples. In the song, the message is the same. Just as the angels gave the shepherds the good news that "Jesus Christ is born," we are to go and tell the good news that Jesus Christ is born.

The correlation between the Great Commission and the spiritual includes 3 things:

1. To whom the good news comes - "The angel chorus first brought news to the shepherds that "Jesus Christ is born." Now, we have this good news! We can read, hear, and sing it!
2. What the good news brings - Jesus never said that life would always be easy; rather, He said that He would never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5).
3. Where to tell the good news - There are none so hopeless that Jesus cannot save. Go, wherever He has placed each one of us, and tell that "God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn!"

Di Ann Callicott Perry is a retired elementary teacher who now teaches as adjunct instructor at Cumberland University. She and her husband, Claud, are the parents of two daughters and one son and the proud grandparents of two grandsons. She enjoys music, reading, and spending time with family. Di Ann is a member of the Sanctuary Choir, Keyboards at Christmas, and the Encouragers Class. The Perrys have been members of Nashville First since 2017.



Sing along:

(lyrics for congregations) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14WM2MKulGk>

12/25/2022 Christmas Service - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBrWchT6lGw&t=690s> (minute 19:40)

Family Connections:

SHARE what you like most about living in Nashville.

READ Matthew 28:19-20. What action verbs do you see? What do these verses command us to do?

REFLECT on where your mountain might be. How can you tell the good news that Jesus Christ is born?

Joyfully Sing



Catherine Matthews



December 23 – Joyfully Sing!
Mark and Kayla Fairless

Angels We Have Heard on High

Joyfully Rejoice!

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told. (Luke 2:20)

“Angels We Have Heard on High” depicts the announcement of Jesus’ birth to the shepherds by the angels. The angels brought the news of Christ’s birth to the shepherds through song. Today, we sing of Christ’s birth through many hymns and Christmas carols.

The angels also invited the shepherds to come and see Jesus in Bethlehem. We don’t have the ability to do that in this life, but we can bring others closer to Jesus by sharing the great news of His birth into the world. After all, it is “good news of great joy which shall be for all people.” The word *joy* is found both in Scripture and in this particular song. Luke 2:10 says: “But the angels said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.’”

In a stanza of the song, the angels “echo their joyous strains.” How beautiful was that joyous occasion in sharing the birth of Jesus! When our older son participated in a school Christmas program last year, “Angels We Have Heard on High” was one of the songs he sang. As he performed, he sang so loud and proud, and truly epitomized joy in that moment. This has been

one of his favorite Christmas songs, and he can be heard singing this throughout the year.

So as this Advent season continues, let us joyfully rejoice like the angels and express glory to God, loud and proud. Let us tell everyone we know that there has been born for them a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!

Mark and Kayla Fairless have two boys, Johnston and Maclane. Mark works in software development, and Kayla is a dental hygienist. Kayla says: “We enjoy spending time with our families and being outside! Our boys keep us super busy! We have been a part of Nashville First since 2014. We are in the JOY SS class and love our church community. We’ve made some lifelong friendships that we’re forever grateful for.”



Sing along:

Kim Walker-Smith - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmEcMSWSluw>

Celebrating Holidays - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85EA2fhz1DE>

Family Connections:

SHARE what you like most about living in Nashville.

READ Matthew 28:19-20. What action verbs do you see? What do these verses command us to do?

REFLECT on where your mountain might be. How can you tell the good news that Jesus Christ is born?



December 24 - Joyfully Sing!
Derek and Meredith Rodriguez

O Come, All Ye Faithful

"Sing to the Lord, you His faithful ones, and praise His holy name."

(Psalm 30:4)

The word 'present' has multiple definitions in the dictionary. As an adjective, you'll see it used to describe something or someone "in a particular place (here, near, attending)" as well as an event or circumstance that is "existing or occurring now (present-day, current)."

As we sat with the familiar lyrics of "O Come, All Ye Faithful," one thing that stood out to us was the present tense of every invitation, encouragement, and command. Come. Sing. Behold. Be joyful and triumphant. When we sing these words, we are not merely singing about those who were victorious in the past. We are also not focused primarily on a time long ago when God was given glory. We are singing about a very present gathering of faithful people showing adoration to our very present Lord. Now. Currently.

In Luke 2:13-16, the faithful ones were the shepherds who had just received the good news of our Savior's birth, spoken directly from an angel. Verses 13-14 tell us that a whole multitude of the heavenly host appeared alongside, praising God, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!" In verses 15-16, we learn that as soon as the heavenly angels departed, the shepherds decisively determined they would go to Bethlehem and "they went with haste." Urgently. Immediately.

What does it look like to be among the faithful ones, to have the peace of God, and for Him to be pleased with us? Are we responding to the good news of our Savior with belief and trust, and with urgency and adoration? What God is doing in and through our lives is happening right now. Our ultimate victory has already been won for us, so we are able to live and sing IN triumph, currently, not just in memory of the past or in hope for the future. We also don't stop at simply remembering the faithful shepherds, but as a part of the same Church, the Body of Christ, we get to join these shepherds in obedience and worship. Presently.

May we be a fully-present gathering of faithful ones, in body, mind, heart, and voice. Let us spur each other on in faith and in song. Joyfully come together before the Lord! Behold the King! He is worthy of our adoration and praise and gratitude! Sing in exultation! Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv'n!

Derek and Meredith Rodriguez joined the church as newlyweds in 2006 after moving to Nashville from College Station, TX. They volunteer in student ministry and as youth choir sponsors. Derek is a Market Partner with Waldo's Chicken. Meredith participates in local prison ministry and also homeschools their four children: Lance, Cate, Tatum, and June.



Sing along:

Melodie Malone - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7scclLTaRD0>

Hillsong - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plj6wtHN21s>

Family Connections:

SHARE ways we spread good news today.

READ Luke 2:16-18. How did the shepherds spread the good news?

REFLECT on ways you can spread the good news of Jesus. Choose one idea and do it.



December 25 – Joyfully Sing!

Andrea Overby

Joy to the World

The joy of the Lord is my strength. (Psalm 27:14)

“What brings you joy?” the pastor asked the congregation not long ago. I left the sanctuary without having an immediate answer for that question, but it continued to float in and out of my mind.

Two weeks later as we were walking to the parking lot after church, the bells were ringing forth from our carillon steeple, and the chimes were echoing and reverberating from the buildings surrounding us – from the Music City Center and the Embassy Suites, from Fifth and Broad and the Bridgestone Arena.

Almost without putting words into thought, it hit me: those bells were bringing me JOY! Is this what is meant by “the joy of the Lord”?

If we look for it, we can find earthly joy every day through the senses God created for us:

- I see my husband holding the book he is reading with one hand and patting our sleeping golden retriever with the other. That’s joy and peace.
- I hear and appreciate the melodies of music of all kinds.
- I inhale the fragrance of a newly cut Christmas tree.
- I savor the mixture of flavors in my Thanksgiving sweet potato casserole.
- I welcome the cool fresh air of a Fall breeze.

All of these earthly, temporary sensations are just reminders of our real joy: The Joy of The Lord. How do

we celebrate our heavenly joys ...

- through answered prayer?
- by finding specific guidance in Scripture?
- in a message of encouragement from a friend?
- by feeling God’s Presence?

What brings you joy? This Advent, take time to fill in the blanks as you answer this question, and may we all be overjoyed as we sing “Joy to the World” in our hearts. We may even, as C.S. Lewis says, be “surprised by joy.”

As we consider our church’s ministry to our community, we can let our joy reverberate to others, in the same way the steeple chimes bounce off the surrounding buildings, as a witness to our experience of the love of Jesus.

Charles and Andrea Overby have been members of Nashville First over a span of 53 years. Charles most recently was co-chair of the Pastor Search Committee. Andrea serves as a Deacon. They both enjoy Bible Study, sometimes teaching, spending time with family, and golf. They celebrate their many close friendships which originated church.



Sing along:

Jeremy Camp - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYGVOkDwNyE>

Gettys Sing - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vp-jlymtOrE>

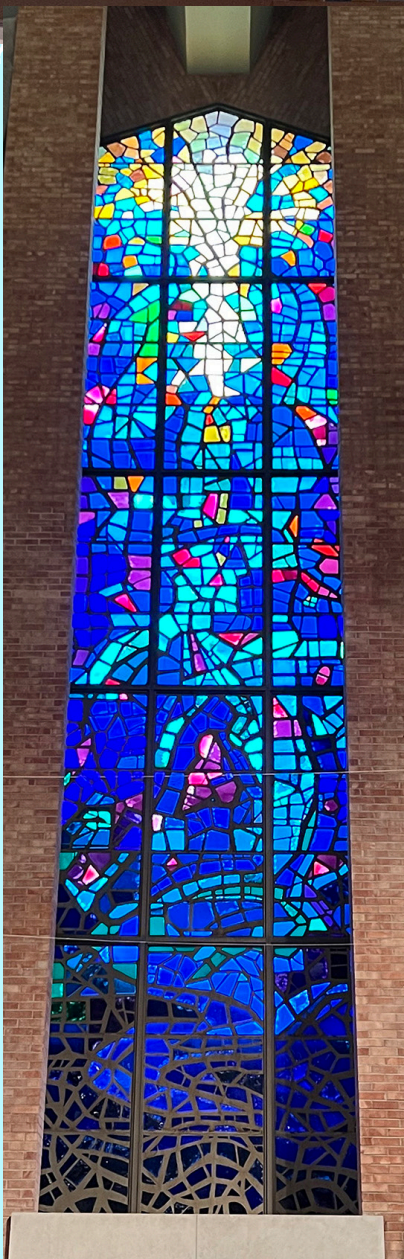
Worship Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5hj518lugk>

Family Connections:

SHARE what brings you joy.

READ Luke 1:46-49. What brought Mary joy?

REFLECT on the gifts you have received, knowing the greatest gift of all is Jesus.



Divine Revelation

The Sanctuary Windows

The theme of the Nashville First sanctuary windows is Divine Revelation. The eternal God wants everyone to know Him. Therefore, He has revealed Himself through nature and in Christ.

The vertical window panels on the south (left) side depict God's general revelation in nature, while the corresponding windows on the north (right) side represent God's supernatural revelation in Christ.

The rose windows are the large circular windows. The south rose window suggests the liveliness and excitement in nature (1 Chronicles 29:11). The west rose window is based on Revelation chapters 4 and 5. It includes the colors from those chapters depicting the throne of God set in heaven (Revelation 4:2). The north rose window depicts Christ. The colors are symbolic of His attributes (Exodus 26:31). The blue center represents His heavenly origin. His royalty and priesthood are symbolized by purple. The scarlet represents Christ's sacrifice. Gold is used to represent the presence of God. Finally, green is symbolic of the eternal hope we have in Christ.

The east window over the baptistry was designed to be the grand summation of the divine revelation. The stream of general revelation in nature (from bottom) and the stream of special revelation in Christ (from top) come together. From the bottom of the window upward, darker gloomy tones transform through the complexity of life. The top features a burst of glory with brighter colors representing the new and eternal life we have in Christ Jesus. The dominant theme of this window is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. In baptism there is the picture of the resurrection of Christ through the raising up of the believer to walk in newness of life. Out of the power of resurrection, the Holy Spirit enables the church to carry on the spirit and power of the risen Christ to all humankind.



Our Sanctuary

Victoria Parker and Katherine Kennon

Where We Worship Together

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.

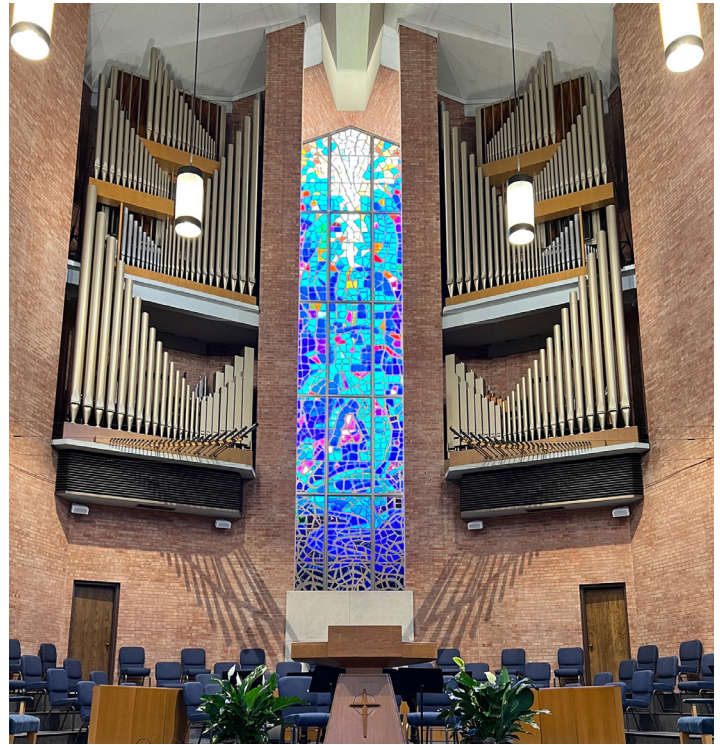
(Psalm 122:1, KJV)

As we celebrate the use of our renovated sanctuary, we remember our past and celebrate our unique history here in Nashville. Our congregation has ministered to downtown for over 200 years and stands together today to continue as hands and feet in downtown Nashville.

The original construction of our sanctuary was a careful balance between the cherished 1889 Victorian Gothic design and forward thinking, modern architecture. Ultimately, the two concepts were unified in the solution we see today – preservation of the original steeple along with the construction of a contemporary sanctuary. The steeple, symbolic and significant, stands at the corner of 7th and Broadway, a beacon of welcome and testament to the history of this location. The sanctuary – dedicated Easter 1970 – was designed to be open, inviting, and modern; with tall windows that bring nature into the design of the space.

When renovation work was discussed, the property committee brought the same attitude of preserving important elements while modernizing to create a more engaging space. In their work, the team referred to the original documents to identify significant design elements. Specifically two features were kept with special care: the pendant lights and the crosses on the pew ends. The original architect, Edwin A. Keeble, designed these custom elements specifically for this church, and the renovation team was able to use the original pew ends as a template for the new pieces. The pendant lights' housing was restored and electrical fixture assembly replaced to preserve the original design. Other renovations made – such as a larger stage, accessible lift, and hearing assistance – help to welcome visitors and members alike.

Come and let us praise the Lord in this beautiful space, joining our voices with the thousands who have worshiped on this site before us.



Other Sources:

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Victoria Parker and her husband, Tripp, have two children, Caroline and Warren. Both from Mississippi originally, Tripp and Victoria moved to Nashville when they graduated from architecture school. They love this city and Nashville First. They are members of the Matthew 18:20 class.

Katherine Kennon has been a member of NFBC for more than 30 years. She is an architect and served as Vice Chair of the Property Committee for the sanctuary renovation. She co-teaches with her husband, James, in the Matthew 18:20 Connect group. She loves ballet and hats!





NASHVILLE
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

**The 2023 Advent Devotional Guide is a Christmas gift to your family from Nashville First Baptist's
Devotional Service Group: Judith King, Kaitlin Febles, Victoria Parker,
Grace Wilkinson, Gary Eaton, 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.