

*"What are you seeking?"
"Come and you will see."*



UMHB ADVENT GUIDE 2014



Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus **John 1: 38, 39**

Jesus made an impression and had an impact on those who saw Him. Troubled men cried out to Him to deliver them; lepers approached Him for healing; blind men asked for the impossible, the restoration of their sight; women asked for their lost loved ones to be restored to life. And the gospel of John tells us about a couple of men who simply started following Him.

So Jesus turned and said, “What are you seeking?”

Great question.

What are you seeking this season? And where will you look?

This year’s Advent reflections focus on what we see of Jesus as we look through the lens of the gospel of John. We will also see what others see in Him through their reflections on specific things Jesus said or did. (Thank you to all who wrote entries in this year’s Advent guide!) Their perspectives will add facets to our own vision of Jesus.

So the first ‘red letters’ in John have Jesus asking these men about what they are seeking. Thoughtful of Him. Their awkward response: “Rabbi, where are You staying?” Jesus offered the invitation, “Come and you will see.”

He did not give them information; He gave them Himself. He did not offer directions; He took them with Him on a journey.

Let us, you and me, look around for Jesus this season. When we spot Him, let’s follow Him. If He catches us following and asks us what we are seeking, let us ask in our own way if we might go where He is going. And let us stay with Him awhile.

And be changed.

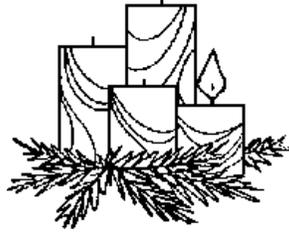
“Turn your eyes upon Jesus; look full in His wonderful face;

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim

In the light of His glory and grace.” (Helen H. Lemmel)

Dr. Shawn Shannon, Director, Baptist Student Ministry

100%



November 30th
The Advent of the Word
John 1:1-2

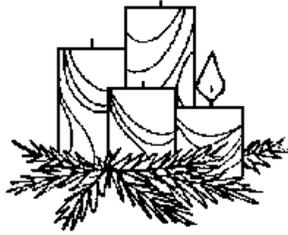
“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2 NRSV).

Advent is the season in which we participate in the waiting, anticipation and hope for the coming of the Messiah and the salvation He will bring to the world. John’s Gospel tells us that the Messiah for whom we wait is not only the human child of Bethlehem, but also the physical presence of the spoken Word of God.

Unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke, this writer does not give us the story of Zachariah and Elizabeth, of Mary and Joseph, of the manger, of shepherds, or of Herod and the magi. Instead, John gives us a window into the most mysterious moment in all the Bible: the opening verses of the Book of Genesis, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth . . . God said, ‘Let there be light . . .’” (1:1, 3 NRSV). In these verses, there is no explanation of who or what God is; God appears and God speaks. For John, the person of Jesus is that divine Word now spoken into the fullness of human existence. The connection between God’s Word and Jesus’ human existence is more than metaphor. The Word is truly the Person. Here we have arrived at the deepest mystery of our faith.

Reading the Gospel of John throughout the season of Advent awakens us to the mystery and magnitude of the season. We join together with those in ancient Israel who waited for a new Word from God, a Word that would overcome their oppression and suffering. Oppression and suffering are still very much a part of this world. So like the ancients, we too wait for God to speak His salvation into our world. In this Word we hope.

Dr. Bill Carrell, Professor of Christian Studies/Director, ChurchRelations



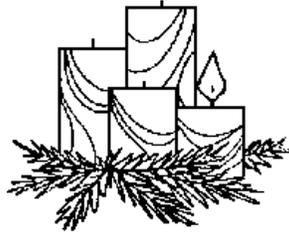
December 1st
All Things Were Made Through Him
John 1:3

At Christmastime, we celebrate the birth of Christ when He became fully man. However, Jesus was present long before His physical birth as an infant. John 1:3 tells us that from the beginning, “all things were made through Him.” In fact, “without Him NOTHING was made that has been made.” The order and structure of nature reflect Christ. The diversity and beauty of nature reflect Christ. Even the dangerous aspects of creation were made through Him. Christ’s presence is evident in creation.

The Lord has a purpose in every creation. The Lord created each of us through Him (John 1:3) and in His own image (Genesis 1:27). That is pretty hard to fathom. For me, it is easier to apply this truth when I look at each of my four precious children. Children are miracles, and I can see God’s handiwork in them. First, the biological process of human development is one of God’s most amazing works. Two cells join, and then divide and divide and divide to form tissues and organs that result in the miracle of a baby. This does not happen by chance. Secondly, I see goodness and hope in my children. My children have taught me so much about Jesus – about unconditional love, about grace. At the same time, they have taught me about rebellion, about deceit, about selfishness. They have taught me about myself and allowed me to understand God’s love a little bit more. It is such a privilege and a responsibility to be entrusted with them. When I think of my children, I can see Jesus’s work in their lives; I know that God is good.

“All things were made through Him.” And, what a blessing it is that this truth applies to me, too. Without Him, nothing was made. I was made through Him. You were made through Him. Take time today and observe Christ’s presence in God’s creation – perhaps in nature or in another person.

Dr. Christie Bledsoe, Assistant Professor, Education



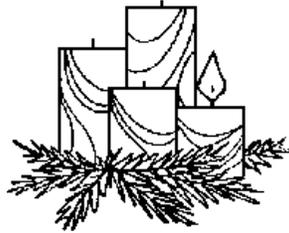
December 2nd
Life and Light
John 1:4-5

Life and Light. As a nurse my view of both may be different from yours. **Life** – breathing and a heartbeat but oh so much more. These two are so important to sustained physical life hence, CPR classes. Through Jesus we have our physical birth and our spiritual birth. Our existence is not a surprise to Him. One of the things He desires from us after our spiritual birth is to look at our life through the lenses of Jesus. How would He respond, act and walk in each of life’s situations? Now that is the hard part – our pride, wanting my way or to be acknowledged or however it presents for you. Do I react in my flesh (my “unlighted” way) or in His “lighted” way?

John 5:1 says, “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” **Light** – the way to see, follow and complete a task. When we first undertake a new project, task or skill most of us don’t get it the first time but need repeated guidance to comprehend and get the results that are desired. If we do not use this skill often enough we may forget how to use it. Can you recall when you first gave your heart to God? Remember that overwhelming relief and joy? You wanted your whole world to know about Jesus. Where are you now in that walk? Are we still telling others about our Jesus?

During this Advent season recall that enthusiasm and energy and turn up that light source so that others will see Jesus in your thoughts, actions, words and deeds. Our world is full of fear, yet we know Who is in control. Don’t let the busyness of the season distract you from the real reason for this time of year. It is NOT a holiday but the birth of our Savior. Angels rejoiced, along with shepherds and wise men – what about us? Let our faces show we are rejoicing and be glad in heart too!

Debbie Rosenberger RN, Coordinator of Health Services, Student Life



December 3rd
Bearing Witness to the Light
John 1: 6-8

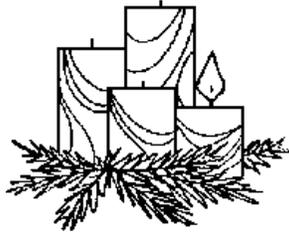
Imagine the most beautiful sunrise you have ever seen. Waiting in the still silence of the pre-dawn darkness, the hope of a new day begins to shimmer in the distance. As the first glorious rays stretch upward, the light breaks to streams of breathtaking color that ever so gracefully bend into hues of pure joy. The fiery orb peeks over the horizon and the light dispels the darkness. You are mesmerized.

As you marvel at the glory of God's artistry, you have an overwhelming desire to share what you have witnessed, to tell everyone what you have seen so that perhaps they too can experience the feeling that stirred your spirit. You search for words to convey the vision and emotion of the scene, yet you remain silent. Mere speech seems inadequate when your heart wants to sing.

John had seen the Son. He knew the hope of the new day that was dawning. God placed within him the revelation of redemption through Christ, and he could do nothing less than shout the coming of the Messiah. God called John to bear witness so that man would see Jesus in all of His splendor as Savior of the world.

The Creator of the sun and every color in the spectrum sent His Son to redeem us. Words can seem insufficient to capture the beauty that is salvation; however, as you anticipate the celebration of the Advent Season and marvel at the grace of God, do all that you can to bear witness to the Light.

Christi Emerson, Assistant Professor, College of Nursing



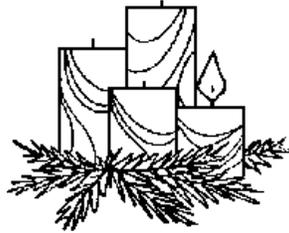
December 4, 2014
To All Who Receive Him
John 1:9-13

One of my favorite Christmas traditions is to read the book The Polar Express with my nieces and nephews. I love the pictures and the beautiful story it tells about the great need to believe in something. For those who have not read the book, it is about a little boy who is on the verge of giving up believing in Santa Claus, but then he hears something... a train. He is welcomed aboard a train called the Polar Express and engages in an adventure to send off Santa Claus to bring toys to all the little boys and girls on Christmas Eve. He, however, is chosen for a really special job: he is to receive the first gift of Christmas. What he chooses surprises all: he asks for a bell from the reindeer so that he will remember to believe. Santa explains to the little boy that only those who believe can hear the bell. He found this to be true as he sits on Christmas day with his family. He rings the bell and it rings the purest of notes. His parents, however, cannot hear the bell and tell him how sorry they are he got a broken bell. The little boy did not keep the secret to himself, he shared with his little sister, and so she too could hear that sweet ringing of the bell.

The same can be said about our faith in Jesus Christ. If you look at the Scripture John 1:9-13, John tells us that the world did not know the true light that was coming; the world did not know Jesus. However, those who did believe and did trust in Him, Jesus gave the right for them to become children of God by dying on the cross. All you have to do is believe and you will be born “not of blood, nor of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of GOD” (John 1:13).

Jesus is inviting all to hear that special bell, but as Scripture tells us not all believe. The King is coming. He will be born. Can you hear the bell? Believe this Christmas in the One who gives us true light. However, do not stop there; tell others of the sweet ringing you have found in Jesus so that they may believe in the only One who can give us true life!

Lauren Wells, Resident Director, Johnson Hall



December 5th
Grace and Truth
John 1:14-17

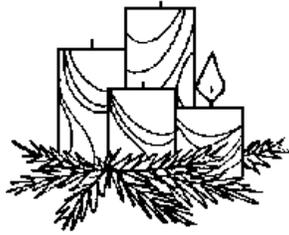
God provided the Israelites with 613 laws—laws for their benefit, not their bondage. Like a house framed with wood, so God’s Law provided boundaries and support for His people to know Him and to know how to represent Him to the world. His commands were clear, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5) and “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). This was the pulsing purpose of the Law God gave the Israelites—a purpose woven throughout the tapestry of God’s story. But His people lost sight of this purpose and failed—again and again and again—they were inadequate. *We are also inadequate.*

The Most Holy God came to live among the inadequate in the form of His Son. Though the world is lacking, He is not. He came full of grace, to redeem us from missing the point. There is no inconsistency with Him. He is full of truth. Jesus came and met every command of the Law for the inadequate. God’s purpose, *our purpose*, did not change with the arrival of Jesus. Instead, Jesus brought a new means for meeting that purpose. We can know God through Him, and His life on earth showed us how to represent God to the world. He came, full of grace and truth, to reconcile us with our purpose and to restore us through Him forever.

Brennan Manning wrote, “I have, and have always been, more than the sum of my deeds. Thank God.” Jesus came full of grace and truth. His love is greater than our inadequacies, stronger than our strongholds, and more faithful than we will ever comprehend.

God’s story is not over, and therefore our purpose remains. How will you seek to know God more deeply this Advent season? How are you actively representing Him to those you encounter?

Dani Beth Crosby, Assistant Director of Alumni Relations



December 6th
Grace upon Grace
John 1:16

From the fullness of His Grace we have all received one blessing after another.

Over the years I've found myself caught up in the whirlwind of Advent and Christmas activity more than a few times. Neighborhood parties, Sunday school progressive dinners, work parties, children's school parties and musical programs, shopping, traveling to see family, parades, lights, candlelight services, wrapping presents, decorating, cookie exchanges, Christmas caroling and Christmas plays. It sounds exhausting to me now, but I wouldn't trade a moment.

It's natural to want the Christmas holiday to be special for you, your friends and your family. However, sometimes the holidays can leave us feeling like we've fallen short. Social media has taken the stress that can sometimes accompany the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas to a whole other level. With photos of gorgeous homes and beautifully decorated mantels, packages and trees, perfectly baked turkeys, perfect families and family gatherings, it's easy to feel untalented, uncreative, stressed out, and maybe even unloved. Maybe you're one of the creative and talented ones, but you've spread yourself so thinly and committed to so much that you're anxious and irritable and are finding it difficult to find the joy in Christmas.

Step back and take a deep breath. It sounds trite, but remember what Christmas is all about. Lean in to Jesus just a little bit more. Trust that what you're doing and who you are becoming is sufficient for today. God has a daily supply of grace for us. Grace is the generosity of love reaching out toward us, giving itself to us. To those who come to Christ, God's promise is that every day we can take a new supply of His love. We can trust God to guide our steps and we know we are cherished, protected, and blessed.

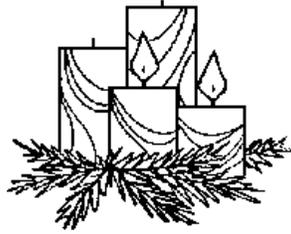
God's grace comes from an infinite and glorious fullness. It is the absolutely free gift of the loving kindness of God to us. It is unearned and unmerited. God did not send an angel to us that Christmas morning, but His only Son to deliver His fullness. The fullness of the Son is a fullness of grace.

During this advent season, remember that you are covered with His love and grace. Photos are just photos. We don't see the messy lives behind the picture perfect images on Pinterest and Instagram and Facebook. You don't have to measure up to anyone or anything because of God's grace.

Lord Jesus, we are tempted to compare our lives with others and to worry about so many things. Forgive us God, for focusing on anything or anyone but You. Please help us to remember that You are really in control and You're making it all turn out just right. Thank You for Your never ending grace and love. In Jesus's name, amen

Sue Weaver, Director of Campus Recreation,

love



December 7th
He has made Him known
John 1:18

When I was a kid we didn't have iPads or XBOXs. We played pick-up sticks, jump rope, and jacks. And we played with string. Yes, string. Have you ever made a Jacob's Ladder or Cat's Cradle with a simple loop of string before? The Wikihow that talks about the Jacob's Ladder lists 20 steps that sound something like this: *Move your thumbs over the first string on your index finger, and hook them beneath the second string on your index fingers.*

But I could show you how to do it in about 30 seconds. You wouldn't even know that there were 20 steps. And you'd be able to repeat it in just a few minutes.

We don't always understand when someone describes something to us. Sometimes we have to be shown.

God tried to make Himself known to us over time. He gave us the Ten Commandments as rules to live by. He sent the prophets to proclaim His Word. But we still didn't get it. We needed an example.

So He sent Jesus, "who is Himself God" (NIV translation) to show us what He meant. Jesus took those Ten Commandments and made them two simple rules:

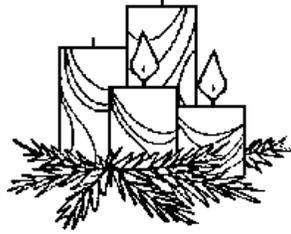
Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

And He showed us how we do that.

- He healed the sick
- He fed the hungry
- He taught His disciples patiently and loved them even when they fell short of His expectations
- He gave up His life for us

So when we are wondering what God is like, what He means for us to do in our lives, Jesus is our Wikihow. He shows us step by step through the example of His life, ministry, death, and resurrection just what God is. And He asks us to do our best to be that example for others as we live each day.

Jen Jones, Director, Institutional Analytics, Institutional Research



December 8th
Knowing Who You Are and Aren't
John 1:19-23

Who are you?

How do you introduce yourself? How would you describe yourself? Complete the sentence: I am a ___ (parent, spouse, child, rebel, failure, motivator, hugger, leader, peacemaker, loser, winner, Crusader, professor, multitasker, blessed child of God, etc.).

Who do others say you are?

The way you see yourself doesn't always match the way others see you. Who do others say you are? There's an expression in Spanish: *Dime con quien andas y te digo quien eres*. Loosely translated, it means - Tell me who you hang around with and I'll tell you who you are. It's similar to the English expression, "Birds of a feather flock together." Are these expressions accurate? Look around. Who are your friends? Who do spend time with? Jesus spent time with lepers, Samaritans, tax collectors, and a group of sinful, selfish disciples.

Who is Jesus?

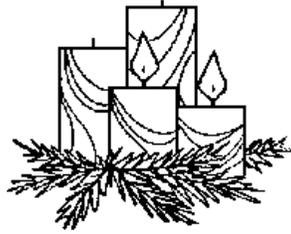
Some people claimed that Jesus was Elijah or a prophet. Jesus asked Peter, "Who do you say I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Messiah" (Mark 8). At Jesus' baptism, God said, "This is my beloved Son" (Matt. 3). Throughout the book of John, Jesus Himself told us who He is. Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life" (John 6). "I am the light of the world" (John 8). "I am the gate" (John 10). "I am the good shepherd" (John 10). "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11). "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14). And finally, "I am the vine" (John 14).

So, who are you in Jesus?

Because Jesus is the bread of life, your spiritual hunger is squelched forever.
Because Jesus is the light of the world, you have the gift of eternal light and life.
Because Jesus is the gate, you have an open door to heaven through Him.
Because Jesus is the good shepherd, your life and safety are guaranteed.
Because Jesus is the resurrection and life, you will never die.
Because Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, you have a clear path to salvation.
Because Jesus is the vine, you are called to be a spiritual fruit-bearer demonstrating His love through your words and actions.

May this Advent season bring you closer to knowing who you really are because of who Jesus is and what He came to earth to do for you.

Dr. Michelle Reina, Assoc. Prof., Management & Study Abroad Coordinator



December 9th
The Lamb of God
John 1:29, 35, 36

The wild man was emphatic, “I’m telling you, there is NO question about it:
This is the Son of God.”

But he said it in a way that made cultural sense at the time,
“Behold, the Lamb of God!”

In other words, “Here He is, God’s Passover Lamb!”

Passover meant something to Israel. It was the type of festival that if not careful, one could miss or grow numb to the meaning. Annually, families gathered to sacrifice a yearling sheep or goat. They ate hastily and kept their sandals on their feet as a sign of readiness for a quick departure. They understood that blood had been smeared over the door frames so their firstborn would be spared from the death angel. This blood came from the lamb that was slaughtered.

They gathered to remember. The generations faithfully passed on the tradition. Everyone knew something about the sacrificial lamb that was at the center of the celebration.

So when this renegade wild wanderer named John connected the dots,
it made sense.

John the Baptist’s main job was to
get Israel ready to recognize Jesus as the “God-Revealer.”

Jesus the lamb. Sacrificed one.

Blood being smeared on the portals of our lives, so we might be granted life. Eternal Life.

There is no question about it. The Son of the Living God is walking among us, scrubbing sins from our lives, and giving us a fresh start with God.

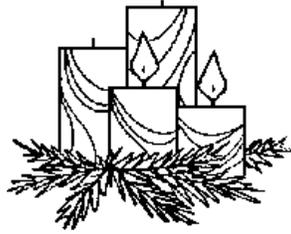
There is no question about it – God is with us.

Behold the Lamb of God!

Don’t miss connecting the dots this Christmas.

It’ll bring meaning to our celebration.

Dr. Byron Weathersbee, Vice President for Student Life



December 10th
The Spirit Remains on Him
John 1:32-34

**And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove,
and it remained on Him.”**

I could try to say that I understand such words but such perceived understanding would certainly drop off past, “I saw the...” Beyond this point honesty would demand I admit that on the other side of “the,” the bottom truly drops out.

I can't see the whole; the Spirit expands far past any horizons.

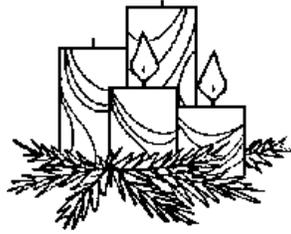
I cannot trace His lines: I am too small.

That said, He still really is, and the Spirit still really remains on Him: this One called Jesus of Nazareth still really intercedes for me; such is a glorious hope and stay for my soul in the struggles of this life.

Who can make sense of God walking among us, dipped and pulled from water by one like us; the Greater raised from water with small stained hands. I really don't understand it though my eyes read the words of John.

In my office is a cherished gift from a former student that conveys this constant message of Christmas that we are reminded of in these blustery dark days of the year. It is a cross stitching with the words, “Good and upright is the Lord: therefore He teaches sinners in the way.” Thank God He has come; thank God He calls it good to teach sinners like us.

Dr. Paul Primrose, Associate Professor, College of Science/Chemistry



December 11th
What are you seeking?
John 1:37-39

“What do you seek?”

This is John’s account of the question Jesus asked his (John’s) disciples when they encountered Him. It’s a loaded, yet simple question and I often wonder what my response would have been if placed in their shoes. Would I even have an answer that would be satisfying to Him?

As a kid, the Christmas season (despite my understanding what it really was about) dwelled on what gifts, no matter how large or small, I was going to receive. Then once I returned to school the Christmas “brag fest” ruled the topic of conversation. We all wanted to outdo the other. However, when my dad passed away my freshman year of college, Christmas meant so much more to me. I relish the opportunities to spend time with family and loved ones, times that seem to be far more infrequent as you get older and move farther way.

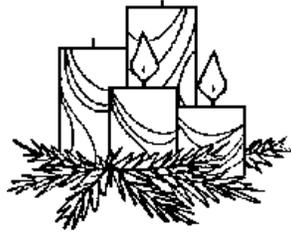
“Where are You staying?”

This is the perfect response that the disciples gave. Their response displayed their desire to fellowship, learn from, and be in the presence of Jesus. How often do we seek this during the hustle and bustle of the season? Every day? Being in the presence of Christ is when we achieve the peace and understanding that many of us are seeking.

It is so extremely easy to get distracted during any time of year. Responsibilities, work, commitments, family, friends, and life in general provide distractions that are not dictated by a specific time year. This season and the year to come ask yourself the question....

What are you seeking?

Brian Street, Resident Director, Gettys Hall



December 12th
Follow Me
John 1:43

One of my favorite all time children's games is Simon Says. The instructions are pretty simple: the leader of the game (Simon) says "Simon Says." Then those participating simply follow the command. If Simon gives a command without saying this first, the group is prohibited from following the command. Those playing are eliminated if they follow a command that is not preceded by the expression, "Simon Says." Simon can use different tactics to throw those playing off. For example I have seen some leading (honestly I have done it myself) say one thing and do something completely different. For example Simon will say touch your nose and while saying that will touch their eyebrow. Trying to stay focused when Simon throws a curve like that might not seem fair, but after all the goal of the game is to eliminate those playing until you have one person who has followed all of Simons commands. The key is to stay focused and follow the commands of Simon.

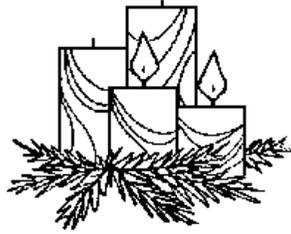
In our scripture today, we see Jesus's encounter with one of the disciples. His command was simple: "Follow me."

"The next day, Jesus decided to leave Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, Follow me." John 1:43

I am sure that on this side of those words the disciples had no idea what it meant to follow Jesus. They would endure so much to take up His cross. But unlike the Simon of the game, Jesus did not and will not ever use tactics to eliminate them or us from the game. The scriptures states in 2 Peter 3:9 that He does not wish anyone to perish. If you ask me that is great news in the game called life. Jesus is for us and desires us to be on His team. But like the game Simon Says, we as the participants will be challenged to stay focused.

During this time of the year, we have presents to purchase, food to prepare, Christmas cards to mail...the list can go on and on. Even though the focus is on the birth of our Savior, it can be so easy to lose focus on what this season is all about. The challenge is real but in the midst of all the hustle of the holidays, take time take a deep breath and listen to the quiet still voice saying to us "Follow me". I guarantee you will find those words not as a challenge like the game Simon Says, but rather peaceful and calming because the Leader of the game called Life is for us.

Rebeka Retta, RD & Coordinator, Training and Publication, ResLife.



December 13th
“Come and See”
John 1:44-46

There is, perhaps, no set of images more important to the Gospel according to John than those associated with vision. John's gospel is, in a manner of speaking, nothing but an extended meditation upon the fact that Jesus Christ is the manifestation of God, the true vision of God (*visio Dei*). Jesus, the Word made flesh, is the 'light of the world' (John 8:12) which enlivens that which is dead and offers a vision of the world set aright (John 3:21). The Nicene Creed powerfully testifies to John's vision in its designating the poor man from Nazareth as "God of God, Light of Light." It is as an invitation to "see" this transformative light that we encounter John's account of Christ.

Into a post-exilic Jewish community still longing for the return (or advent) of its God, the call goes out to the first of those who will become Jesus' disciples, His new people: 'Come and see' (John 1:39). Then, they in turn invite Nathanael to see the light of God, the poor rabbi from Nazareth. That God's anointed, the redemptive figure for which the law and prophets yearn, comes in the shape of a poor rabbi from an inconsequential village is beyond belief to Nathanael. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael may be a man without fault, but his vision remains faulty. Even in his longing along with the faithful of Israel for God's return, Nathanael cannot yet see God's activity in the world in the small, ordinary, even mundane work of Jesus Christ. Thus, the invitation remains—'Come and see'—until he, and we, finally see rightly (John 1:46).

While the church now stands "on the other side of the resurrection," we remain people who yearn for the advent (or return) of God, wherein our faith will become sight. The early church rightfully called this reality the *Beatific Vision* (the blessed vision/the vision that blesses). The invitation to discipleship remains for us to "Come and see," where discipleship is a training of our vision for the *Beatific Vision*. While we wait, and while we recount the stories of the God made flesh, the God who loved the lowly, the social outcast, the beggar, the prostitute, we and the entire world are invited to "Come and see." Our waiting is thus a seeing. We train our vision by recounting the story that overturns our false messiahs of power in favor of a rabbi who loved the weak. In waiting we see the slow love of God and we see where God is at work in the world so that we may partner with Him. May we be such people who learn to see Christ and body-forth God's love until our Advent hopes are fulfilled.

Professor Christopher Moore, Adjunct Professor, College of Christian Studies

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December 14th
“Do whatever He tells you.”
John 2:1-11

When I was applying for jobs right out of graduate school, I was applying all around and nothing was promising. When I gave up on “my plans” I came across a job here at UMHB. I thought it would be a long shot to get the job but felt I needed to apply nonetheless. Once I interviewed on campus, I had this overwhelming feeling that God wanted me at this school and if I went anywhere else, I would be settling on the gifts He had given me. It was then I learned that we see ourselves at our current state, while God sees us at the epitome of what we were designed and created to be. This is similar to the passage when Mary saw and knew what Jesus was capable of even though up to that point she had not seen it yet.

We also learn in this passage, when a need came about, Mary’s first response was to go to her son, Jesus; although she did not know the “hour” Jesus was going to start showing His glory, she was confident He would have the answer and provide. Do you know our Savior like that? How often is He the first one we run to? How often do we take time to hear what the Lord is trying to tell us?

Not only did He fulfill the need in the passage, He did more than what was asked to the best imaginable option. During this Holiday season, listen to what the Lord is guiding and telling you to do. From reading this you know I accepted the job offer and can attest when you “*Do whatever He tells you,*” it will be like the miracle in the passage, He will give you His ultimate best by providing the *finest wine* and *will fill it to the brim*.

Tiffany Wurdemann, Director of Student Organizations, Student Life



December 15th
Consuming Love
John 2:13-22

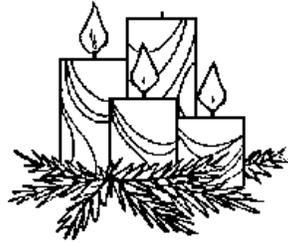
Our timing seemed to coincide each morning. I was usually preparing breakfast in our Johannesburg apartment as our neighbor rushed out her backdoor onto the patio, slipped out of her shoes and bowed toward Mecca. The young Muslim woman had great zeal. Unfortunately, her zeal was toward the wrong place and for the wrong reason. As I watched her, I began to wonder about my own zeal for my God, the one true God. Was I consumed with love for Him?

Zeal is defined as enthusiasm, passion, fervor, ardor. Christ's love, His zeal for His Father's house and all that belonged to His father, consumed him. As children of God, Christ's love for us is consuming. Should not our love for Him be consuming as well?

During this beautiful Advent season as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, let us reflect on our spiritual life. Do we have a consuming commitment to follow Christ? Are we daily in His Word, before the throne in prayer, involved in ministry? As Christ followers should we not be zealous for the body of Christ? Should we not be zealous in sharing the Good News with the lost? If not, shouldn't we be?

Thank You, Father, for Your Son, Our Savior. How grateful we are that He gave His life that we might have salvation. What consuming love!

Harlene Dorman, Missionary-in-Residence, Baptist Student Ministry



December 16, 2014
He Himself Knew What Was in Man
John 2:23-25

This past year I fell in love with a man named David. I continue to fall more in love with him as every day passes. The more we “live life” together, the more he gets to know me – the good and the bad. He knows how much peanut butter I like on my toast; he knows how frustrated I get when I hear the consistent “ding, ding, ding” from the car when he leaves the key in the ignition and the door open. On the phone, he knows when there is a thoughtful, good silence, and when there is an awkward, bad silence—meaning I’m frustrated on the other line. He can look into my eyes and know if I’m sad, tired, or happy. It’s scary how well he is beginning to understand who I am. At the same time, it’s comforting to know he still chooses to know me—each and every day. He chooses to love me on the good days and the bad days, and I choose to be known by him in the good and in the bad days.

It bewilders me to ponder on the reality that there is someone who knows me infinitely better than David can or ever will know me. As our creator, God is intimately acquainted with every inch of our being—He created and understands our physical, emotional, and mental needs and desires. Despite our sinful thoughts and actions, He chooses to love us. Before we existed, He sent His son to die on the cross for our brokenness, knowing full-well how wretched we would be. “He Himself knew what was in man.” Wow!

One of my favorite verses in the hymn, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” is:

“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it;
Seal it for Thy courts above.”

I am humbled every time I dwell on the fact that our God knows every flaw in us, but He still has chosen to redeem us.

Thank You, Father, for loving us and sending Your Son for us. We celebrate Jesus’ birth knowing that because of His birth among men, we can have eternal life through the salvation that comes from You alone. Thank You, Father, for loving us and revealing Yourself to us, despite knowing what is in us. Thank you for continuing to show us signs of Your existence, and giving us the eyes to see Your work done on earth.

Lord, thank You for community—friends and family. Thank You for giving us the privilege of fellowship and the opportunity to be loved by and cared for by others. May we love and know others in a grace-giving way just as You have done for us. Lord, allow our actions to reflect our understanding of Your great love for us.

During this season when stress and tiredness abound, may Your love abound all the more, and may You be given the glory. *Amen.*

Crystal Donahue, Editor & Senior Writer, Communications & Special Projects



December 17th

“That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

John 3:1-8

Thank goodness the Spirit of God regenerates me. I am glad the Spirit challenges and shifts my prospective to see the world anew each day.

My two-year-old niece is a joy. She is kind, affectionate, loves to help, and quick to want what she wants. When I tell her what she does not want to hear, she cuts me the cutest evil eyes, then takes a swing at me.

As I move my face from her reach, I think, “Whoa! Where did that come from?” No one taught my niece to be violent and selfish; she was born with those tendencies. If left to my first birth in the flesh, I would still have a heart overruled by those things of the flesh.

Now, have I mastered the things of the flesh? No. Yet because I have been given a new beginning through my birth of the Spirit, I have divine tendencies.

I am given a life of communion with God and the power to defeat the flesh which so often consumes me.

What a relief to hear and know, “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” So often I am distracted by what I am not. I forget to embrace or adopt the truths of God’s great promises.

This Christmas I am thankful for a loving God who doesn’t give up, who cares enough to be an example of a life lived in the Spirit, and helps me become more in His image day by day. May I live as one born of the Spirit.

Jena Coulson, Assistant Director, Baptist Student Ministry



December 18th

“Whoever believes in Him should not perish...”

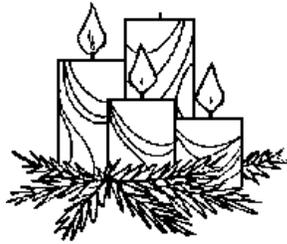
John 3:16-21

What a wonderful promise of hope and freedom God gave us. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). We often stop right there and never dig deeper but there is so much more. In John 3:17-18, God didn’t send His Son to condemn the world but to save it. Anyone who does not believe in Him was already condemned. This is so huge! Men have already condemned themselves by choosing the darkness over the light. God didn’t do that. But, we also have the choice to believe in God and that He sent His Son to die on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins and turn away from our sinful ways. We have the choice to save ourselves and live in the light. I can remember a time when I blamed God for circumstances that happened in my life not wanting to see that it was my own choices that put me there. That is choosing to live in the darkness rather than in the light. I will never forget the first time someone shared these words in the Gospel with me and I just got it. It was the greatest gift I was ever given.

The scripture even digs deeper in John 3:20-21 to provide a moral compass on how to live. Evil works in the darkness never wanting to be seen or exposed. Clearly this is teaching us right from wrong. If we feel our deeds need to be hidden and cause us shame, these are works of evil. Now, if we walk in the light never fearing that someone is watching or listening, these are works pleasing to God.

For believers, it is so empowering to share these words of hope and the great love God has for us all. I believe these verses are the cornerstones of evangelism and the light beckons to be shared with anyone living in the darkness. There is no greater gift to give this Christmas season.

Traci Squarcette, Resident Director, Independence Village



December 19th
“He must increase but I must decrease”
John 3:22-30

I am Third, Put God First, and He>I are common monikers of the Christian faith meant to remind us of the appropriate priority of our lives. John the Baptist, in his characteristic way, points out that in order for Christ to increase, not only must we put Him first, but we must decrease. He, of all people, was quite qualified to make this assertion.

John the Baptist’s father was a priest, an important position of authority. Both his father and mother were highly revered as living blameless and of pure lineage. He had the pedigree to be a man of high regard and importance. Instead he followed his calling to a life of poverty in the wilderness. Some even thought he was demon possessed. Ultimately, he gave up his freedom and finally his life to follow his calling. As the Hebrew Prophets and Gabriel foretold, John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit and played a critical role in leading the way for the Messiah and establishment of the Christian Church.

Advent is meant to be a time of preparation for the coming of Christ. During the excess that inevitably marks our holiday season, may we be reminded that preparing the way for the coming of Christ is marked by sacrifice.

Holy Father, as I prepare for the coming of Christ, make me aware of the things to which I hold too dear that I might decrease and Christ would increase.

Brent Harris, Associate Vice President for Information Technology



December 20th
Bread of Life
John 6:22-51

Jesus often used metaphors to refer to His deity. Bread, Water, and Light are the ones He used most frequently. He would use the metaphors to connect His audience to Himself. These metaphors provided a picture of His calling and purpose.

In John 6:22-51, He used “Bread of Life” to refer to His relationship with God and God’s purpose for those who were listening that Day. He had just fed the 5,000 men at Bethsaida. The people who received the miraculous food that day became interested in following Jesus because He could provide food for them. They wanted to make Him a king, a political ruler, as He would provide for their material needs. The next morning, Jesus met the same people He fed the night before on the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee. They were hungry and wanted Jesus to feed them again. Jesus responded to their request for physical food by offering spiritual food. The spiritual food was referred to by Jesus as “The Bread of Life.”

He used an Old Testament reference when God provided for the Children of Israel as they wandered the desert with manna or bread as their daily meal. However, this response did not meet their expectation for food. Jesus continued to direct them to this spiritual food that only He can provide by telling them that He is the manna which had come down from Heaven. He tells the people that anyone who eats of this Bread will live forever.

This is not what the people wanted to hear. They wanted free food without any spiritual demands.

Because Jesus did not give them what they wanted, many of them left and no longer followed him. Even the twelve disciples were given the opportunity to leave. That day all His followers had to make a choice. Were they following Jesus because of what he could do for them, or were they following Him because they believed Him to be the Son of God and had faith in His leadership? Peter spoke for the other eleven disciples as he stated that they were committed to Jesus because they had faith in His leadership and they believed He was the Son of God.

The question of why a person is following Jesus must be asked daily. Are we, who carry the name “Christian,” following Jesus because of what we can get from Him or because of who He is?

The Christmas season is known for gift-giving among family and friends. May we not forget that God gave us the perfect gift in His Son, Jesus. As the materialistic focus of this season is all around us, may we not forget that this “Bread of Life” is the only gift which promises eternal life.

Why are you following Jesus? What would you have done had you been a member of the crowd when Jesus offered the “Bread of Life” to you?

Dr. Louthback, University Chaplain, Spiritual Life

BOON



December 21st
The Light of the World
John 8:12

Light/Dark,

Luminous/Melancholy,

Day/Night,

Graceful/Lumbering,

Sunny/Gloomy,

Brilliant/Murky

“You are the highlight of my day.” “You brighten the room.” Just the suggestion of light helps to bring a cheerful attitude. Light and goodness go hand-in-hand. He is the Light of the world.

When the sun is shining we have a lighter heart and feel as if we can tackle almost anything. When we turn on a lamp in a dark room we feel secure to enter. In the light of day the shadows and dark corners no longer hold scary mysteries. When we walk with a flash light our steps are firm. Jesus is our Light.

God has promised us this sanctuary: Jesus is the Light of the world. When we look to Him, He will guide our path and show us the best way. He is the Light that gives life.

Carol Robinson, Administrative Receptionist, Controller's Office



December 22nd
The Good Shepherd
John 10:7-18

For those who have grown up in the church, the picture of a shepherd is probably of a kind-faced man carrying a sheep on his shoulders. Many people in Jesus' day, however, might have suggested that the phrase "good shepherd" was an oxymoron. Even though many great leaders of Israel's past were shepherds, the first century picture of a shepherd was that of a hired hand who wandered around with someone else's sheep and pilfered what he could.

Jesus seems to recognize that as he pits the hired hand—who cares nothing about the sheep—against the shepherd to whom the sheep belong. The good shepherd cares deeply about the sheep because the sheep belong to him. The hired hand might run away in danger. The owner is willing to put himself between the sheep and danger. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

Being compared to a sheep isn't exactly flattering. Sheep are defenseless, often dirty and just a tad stupid. They need the shepherd. In our independent society, that's not an appealing picture. Yet, Jesus knows that we still need the shepherd. The world is a dangerous place. It helps to have strong friends. Jesus chooses the picture of the shepherd for the fourth of His "I AM" statements. In doing so, He ties to an image that is vivid even to us "The Lord is my shepherd." Part of what it means to be "God in the flesh" is to be the one who lays down His life for the sheep.

During the Christmas season, we have a tendency to focus on the babe in the manger. Jesus did not come to be cute, though. He came to lead us to a better life and to lay down his life for us. The shadow of the cross lies across the manger in Bethlehem. More than that, though, the life that Jesus lived shows us the way to go. He chose the path of laying down His glory and becoming one of us. We honor the shepherd when we listen to His voice and follow.

Dr. Marty McMahon, Claude McBride Professorship, College of Business



December 23rd
The Resurrection and Life
John 11:17-27

Christmas is, without a doubt, the most wonderful time of the year. Listening to the carols and songs of Christmas is special. One of my favorite Christmas songs, Silver Bells goes like this: City sidewalks busy sidewalks, / Dressed in holiday style / In the air there's a feeling of Christmas. / Children laughing / People passing / Meeting smile after smile / And on every street corner you'll hear / Silver bells silver bells / It's Christmas time in the city / Soon it will be Christmas day.

Moods change during the holidays. People smile more (except Scrooge). Laugh more. Share more.

But Scrooge's creator Charles Dickens reminds us that this may be the best of times and the worst of times. Lurking just underneath the happiness of Christmas is a sadness of lost dreams and loved ones. Poking its head through the pleasures of giving gifts is the burden of debt. Amid the expectations of children, we sense dreams dashed by reality. And if we're not careful, we'll fall in post-Christmas doldrums.

The happiness of Christmas may be fleeting. The moods vary—unless one focuses not on the trappings of the season, but instead on God's Son who became flesh that first Christmas. John's Gospel heralds that Jesus reveals God to God's creation. Seven signs in this Gospel unfold Jesus' coming to reveal God and give life.

Jesus' raising of Lazarus is the seventh and final sign. Lazarus had been dead for four days when Jesus showed up. Martha lamented Jesus's delay, stating that had Jesus been present her brother would still be alive. Martha affirmed that her brother would rise but her hopes seem to have been for a distant future. Jesus reminded her that He was the resurrection and the life. Jesus brought eternal life, life rooted in a personal relationship with God. Soon, Jesus would call Lazarus out of the tomb, a sign that Jesus would defeat death in His resurrection.

We celebrate Christmas in a secular and sacred way. Enjoy both. And celebrate that in both the best of times and the worst of times that Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Dr. David Morgan, Adjunct Instructor, College of Christian Studies



December 24th
The Way, Truth, and Life
John 14:1-7

Which way do we go...

Most of us have that question while driving, trying to find a restaurant, or someone's home. We ask, is it to the left or the right...and even at times, the GPS has left us questioning and led us astray. A couple of analogies come to mind when we think of the GPS and our spiritual walk.



First, did we input the address correctly? It is often human error that results in bad outcomes.

The same can be said for our Christian journey. Thomas asked... "Lord, we don't know where you are going...how can we know the way?" In John 14:7, Jesus says, "I am the way the truth and the life." The Bible is full of promises about asking and receiving. When we are like seeds that were cast among the weeds or on the hard path, our input is off and perhaps, like the GPS, we have entered incorrect data, miss the still small voice that says, "right turn ahead."

Second, when we fail to follow the GPS and make a wrong turn or exit too early, the system begins to chirp, "Recalculating. Recalculating." Then we receive new instructions.

These are the times in our Christian lives when we have to come back to the Father for our own recalculation. We seek guidance from the Holy Spirit to 'get back on the right track.' This recalculation might involve seeking forgiveness, restoring a relationship, getting back into the Word, returning to church, rekindling our quiet time.

In the culmination of the passage, Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really know Me, you will know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him."

There is probably not a better time than Christmas, the time we celebrate the arrival of our King, to reset our spiritual GPS and make resolutions for the New Year to walk in manner worthy. As Jesus promised... "if you really KNOW Me, you will know My Father." All relationships take cultivation and development and correct entry information and appropriate "followness." This is how we come to know our own "way, truth and life."

Dr. Sharon Souter, Dean, College of Nursing



December 25th
Abiding in the True Vine
John 15:1-11

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.” John 15:1-4, ESV.

In the last of the 7 “I am” statements in the Gospel of John, Jesus declares He is, “the true vine.” The vine was an important symbol to first century Jews. The vine represented the nation of Israel. It reminded them of Old Testament texts like Isaiah 5:7 which referred to them as “the vineyard of the Lord of hosts.” It even appeared on some of their coins. What the eagle is to the American people, the vine was to first century Jews.

So when Jesus says He is the true vine, He is saying a lot. To be of the nation of Israel meant to have an inheritance in the land, a plot that was designated for your family since the time of Joshua that would always revert to you. It also meant to have access to the temple, to the place where your lamb could be sacrificed at Passover to secure your forgiveness. It meant, too, to be a recipient of the Torah, the ways of God that distinguished you from all the nations of the earth. To be the true vine meant, really, to be everything. And that is what Jesus is saying to His followers, including us. Jesus is our inheritance, our forgiveness and our way. He is everything.

Throughout this Devotional Guide we have seen Jesus depicted in numerous ways, the word, the life, the bread, the lamb, the light, the good shepherd, and others. He is all those things and more besides. He is everything we need and we need to remain in all that He is. As this advent season ends, let’s begin, or begin anew, to seek to know Christ for all He is and to remain in all of Him. Let’s take the fullness of Christ with us into the New Year. Let’s abide in Him continually for the days ahead.

If abiding in Christ is something you seek, but do not know, we can help. Contact any of the authors of this Devotional Guide. They would like nothing better than to share Christ with you, so that you, too, can abide in Him forever.

Merry Christmas, one and all!

Larry Locke, Assistant Professor, McLane College of Business



Acknowledgements
And this is Eternal Life
John 17:3

If we moved deeper into the gospel of John, we would eventually read of Jesus revealing, “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:3) Eternal life is relational richness: knowing God and Jesus.

I pray that we have gotten to know Jesus better through this Advent journey with John and through the multiple opportunities to see Jesus through the perspectives of others. Surely that gladdens God’s great heart!

The Advent guide is a communal effort. The community that contributed to that includes:

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And thanks be to God who makes Himself known in Jesus, for our good and His glory!

Dr. Shawn Shannon, Director, Baptist Student Ministry