

Advent

2015 Devotional Guide



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Advent 2015

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Introduction: Remembering Jesus

Gospel of Luke

In the Bible's Great Story, there are multiple appeals to God to be remembered by Him. Among them is Psalm 25:7: "Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love **remember me.**" Or Jeremiah's prayer: "You understand O LORD; **remember me** and care for me" (Jeremiah 15:15a). How significant it is to be remembered by God! How frightening it would be to be forgotten!

To remember is to call to mind, to recollect, to gather past, present, and future around the thought of a person. To re-member is to bring something back together, restoring what was parted.

It is a tender, strong, relational request. We want what matters most, what we hope will last. Our requests reveal both the value of the relationship and our trust in the one we ask.

I have been meditating lately on Jesus' appeal to His disciples to share and repeat their final supper together "**in remembrance**" of Him. Along the way, Jesus asked his disciples to do several things: deny themselves, take up their cross, follow him... forgive... love... and, at the last, to remember Him. Here is God-With-Us, asking not to be forgotten, to be among them again in their minds and hearts... To be re-membered.

Hours later, the thief by His side asked to be remembered by Jesus. Calling from one cross to another, he says, "Jesus, **remember me** when you come into your kingdom." (Luke 23:42) Whatever else he thought about Jesus, he believed 1) He was the kind of person who would remember him, and 2) He was coming into a kingdom. What did this mean to Jesus in that moment?

These two requested Rememberings, so close together, touch my heart.

It reminds me of this quotation from Frederick Buechner:
"When you remember me, it means that you have carried something of who I am with you, that I have left some mark of who I am on who you are. It means that you can summon me back to your mind even though countless years and miles stand between us."

What if we remember Jesus like that? Carry something of who He is with us? Bear His mark on who we are? Call Him back to mind often?

The following Advent devotionals help us remember Jesus by seeing Him through the lens of the gospel of Luke. I pray we will see and hear Him afresh... and know and love Him in our remembering. I pray that this Advent season will be done in remembrance of Him.

Dr. Shawn Shannon, Baptist Student Ministry Director

Week 1

Hope



November 29th
That You May Have Certainty
Luke 1:1-4

. . . it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. (ESV)

As we let Luke guide us through the Advent season, we will be reminded that Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, is also the Savior of the world. Luke, the beloved physician and colleague of the Apostle Paul, was well aware of the oral traditions and other written accounts of the gospel story, but Luke's concern in writing his own "orderly account" was more than the mere communication of information. Luke's desire was to show that the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth were nothing less than the intervention of God in human history to bring salvation to the entire world.

Luke is the one who tells us that Jesus was born under the reign of another "savior" of the world, the divine "son of god," Emperor Caesar *Divi Filius* Augustus. This Roman ruler had defeated all his enemies, abolished the Roman Republic and ushered in the *Pax Romana*, a new era of peace. Luke, however, wrote to show the true Prince of Peace, the true Son of God, was not a Roman warrior but the incarnation of God Himself in the baby of Bethlehem.

Luke wanted Theophilus and all other "lovers of God" to have the certainty that in Jesus, God had finally come bringing his rule and reign. The kingdom of Jesus was not only the long-awaited hope of Israel but also the long awaited hope of the entire world for good news for the oppressed of all nations. The poor, the outcast, the sick, and the sinner had not been forgotten by their Creator. In Jesus, God was now turning the world upside down. Those who celebrated their positions of honor in the Greco-Roman world would soon find out that faith in the "shame" of the cross, the denial of self and the following of Jesus are the only certain ways to live honorable lives in His new kingdom.

Dr. Bill Carrell, Professor of Christian Studies



November 30th
For nothing will be impossible with God.
Luke 1:26-38

As I read through these scriptures, I am humbled by the obedience displayed by Mary. She is just a young teenager and yet her maturity is incredible. She willingly offers herself as a bondservant (a slave offered freedom but chooses to continue to serve) to the Lord. She could turn away or challenge what Gabriel is telling her but instead she offers her body as the vessel to carry the Messiah. To prove his point, Gabriel tells Mary that her cousin Elizabeth has her own miracle and has conceived.

The statement made by Gabriel, “For nothing will be impossible for God,” refers to Elizabeth and her barren state. After 60+ years of hoping for a pregnancy, the Lord opens her womb and shows that He is in the miracle business. To me that seems like a pretty impossible task; even with our medical advancements we do not see 80 year old women pregnant. What an incredible reminder that we serve a God who is capable of the impossible. He is able to do fulfill every promise made or prophesied; that is His nature.

Wendi Fitzwater, Resident Director, McLane Hall



December 1st
“Blessed is the fruit of your womb.”
Luke 1: 39-45

The choice to bear a child requires trust. Trust that the body is capable. Trust that the child will grow and develop normally. Trust that the mother will have a healthy pregnancy. Fear, excitement, and wonder merge into an inexplicable emotion revealed in the joy that exudes from an expectant mother.

Mary’s favor with God resulted in an extraordinary event that brought forth the Savior of the world. He, too, was knit together in the same manner as every human being ever created. Jesus was to become Immanuel through the miraculous process of birth, and Mary “believed that what the Lord had said to her would be accomplished.” She trusted. Despite supernatural circumstances, God’s young, faithful servant embraced the blessing bestowed upon her.

What blessing is God bestowing upon you, this Advent Season? Is God asking you to trust Him as He leads you down an unexpected path? Is it an unconventional path? A path that should not be possible?

Open your body, mind, and spirit to the miracles God desires to pour into your heart. Embrace the awe and wonder of what God wants to bring forth from your life. Trust God to escort you into the majesty of His perfect, creative, and loving will.

Mrs. Christi Emerson, Assistant Professor, College of Nursing



December 2nd
His Mercy is for those who fear Him
Luke 1:46-56

Luke, the writer of this gospel, is traditionally identified as a gentile, a non-Jew. But his gospel is remarkable for its pervasive, subtle and not so subtle use of the Old Testament to tell the story of Jesus. In this passage, Luke has Mary model her prayer on that of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2. There is a twist in the comparison of the two women since Hannah desperately wants a child while Mary's life will be made much more difficult in the short and long term by the birth of hers. And yet, both rejoice. Both see their coming sons as deliverance of the downtrodden, one who will both judge the powerful and exalt the weak.

Mary's prayer of praise is known in Roman Catholic tradition as the *Magnificat* for her first words, "my soul magnifies the Lord." Although this birth will make her life much harder, she rejoices to be chosen for service to God. Mary knows what the wise and faithful of every age know: she realizes that the Lord is God and she is not. Mary knows that peace comes with this perspective. As God's servant (many people, especially in the early chapters of Luke call themselves God's "servant") Mary trusts that God will do what is right. The Old Testament prophets would say that God wants righteousness and justice. Mary gives examples instead of using the terms. By scattering "the proud" (v. 51) and bringing "down the powerful" (v. 52) God works righteousness. By lifting up "the lowly" (v. 52) and feeding "the hungry" (v. 53) he shows justice. What is more, those who are God's people will also work to be both righteous and just (Amos 5:24; Micah 6:8; Isaiah 1:16-17). In both the Old Testament and the New (Mark 12:28-34) the two concepts are inextricably joined: you cannot be one without the other.

At the center of Mary's prayer is verse v. 50 "His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation." While fear is not fashionable, it is wise. It has been said that "those who fear God need fear nothing else." But this is not so much about being afraid as it is about having perspective. Mary fears the One who desires righteousness and justice and works to bring them about. Her model Hannah said of her Lord "(there) is no one besides you"... "the Lord kills and brings to life; He brings down to Sheol and raises up"... "the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them He has set the world" (1 Samuel 2:2, 6, 8). It is wise to fear this One.

It is also wise for us to follow their example. The rest of the verse says "from generation to generation." This includes us who fear this God. We are the spiritual children of Abraham, Hannah, and Mary, when we live in a right attitude of fear toward the God who made all things, who both desires and works toward righteousness and justice.

Dr. Timothy G Crawford, Dean of the College of Christian Studies



December 3rd
The hand of the Lord was with him
Luke 1:57-66

Elizabeth had waited a lifetime to have a child and her prayer was being answered at an age when she had all but given up hope for a child. Isn't that just like our Lord to come through for us when we least expect it? We got the grade we needed, were accepted into that desired program or finished a course successfully that was a stretch for us.

We must remember that with that answer comes responsibility – in Elizabeth and Zacharias' case, their son, John had to be circumcised and named. All expected the baby to be named after the proud father who still could not speak. Elizabeth was true to the word she had been given and said the child's name was to be John. The well-wishers could not believe this until they turned to Zacharias and he wrote that his son's name would be John.

After this Zach could speak, and what was the first thing he did? He praised God. These two parents honored God in the words, deeds and actions with the birth of their son.

Do we remember to thank God and show gratitude when our desired outcome comes? What about when it does not happen as we expect? God is deserving of our praise and gratitude above all. So gear up that sport enthusiasm and give a shout out to our God.

For not only was the Lord with John, He is also with us and if we are His; He is in us through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, whatever we do with or to our body we do to Christ. Are we honoring Him in our actions, words, deeds and body? God's hand is on you today – is He holding your hand, blessing you or touching you to get your attention about something?

Cleanse us Father and make us clean. Amen.

Nurse Debbie Rosenberger, Student Life



December 4th
The Sunrise shall visit us from on high.
Luke 1:67-80

When Zechariah's tongue was loosed, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and burst into praise. While he was thankful for the birth of a son in his and Elizabeth's old age—and he understood the role John was to play: “*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways*”—the focus of Zechariah's praise was the Lord God of Israel, “for He has visited and redeemed his people!”

Zechariah addressed God's ultimate purpose—a great deliverance for His people—“that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us,” including Satan, death, and even fear itself. We are saved, “that we ... might serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.” We are saved from death to life by the trustworthiness of God's Word, “the oath that He swore to our father Abraham.”

Why did God visit and deliver us? Because of His “tender mercy.” God extended grace to us because He loved us. He cared so much that He could not allow us to continue in bondage to sin. He knew we could not save ourselves, so He visited us.

And how did He visit us? By sending his Son. Jesus is “the sunrise,” or “dayspring,” that “visits from on high.” Isaiah wrote, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (Isaiah 9:2). Malachi, who also predicted the birth of John the Baptist, wrote, “But for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings” (Mal. 4:2). And the Apostle John wrote of Jesus, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4-5).

Jesus offers light in the darkness; life in the face of death; and peace in the midst of trouble. In His light we experience God's grace—the forgiveness of our sins. His light removes our fear of sin, death, and hell, and gives purpose and direction to our life on earth. May we walk together in His light.

Dr. Ken A. Smith, Dean, McLane College of Business



December 5th
The Time Came
Luke 2:1-7

Mary didn't plan for any of this. She was an engaged woman getting ready to live a simple, domestic life in a quiet corner of a remote nation. Then a rapid succession of the supernatural and the everyday resulted in her delivering a baby while accompanying her fiancée on a business trip out of town. She had been told this would be an extraordinary baby but could she possibly have imagined the spiritual explosion for which she was ground zero?

This was a new Genesis. Just as in the creation eons before, the Spirit of God combined with the stuff of earth to make a new thing. The Eternal One inserted Himself into particular time and space. The miracle of creation was performed again.

This was a new Adam. In the Genesis 1 creation, God had taken days to prepare the earth for His man. In our text for today, the days were finally fulfilled for Mary to give birth. Everything was prepared. The time came and Immanuel was born.

This was the new covenant. From now on there would be a new way for man to relate to his Maker. The chasm between man and God was bridged. Once again God would walk with man upon the earth and sinful man could finally come into the presence of the Holy One.

The tremors from that explosion continue to rock the earth. Every time we avail ourselves of that Divine Presence, every soul who submits himself to the lordship of Christ, fuels that eruption. We too become the new creation, the new man, and enter into the new covenant. When we celebrate the events of "that day," let's join them in our day – participating in the new creation inaugurated by the birth of Christ.

Week 2

Love



December 6th
Good news of great joy.
Luke 2:8-20

We are bombarded with messages these days that tell us about all the things we should be afraid of. Politicians tell us we need to build a wall to keep illegal immigrants out. We wait in long lines with our shoes off because we're afraid someone might try to blow up a plane. We're told that choosing the wrong major means we'll never get a job that pays well. I don't think many of us really believe those things are likely.

But sometimes we are afraid. Mostly, I think we're afraid we're not good enough (or smart enough or pretty enough or *whatever* enough) to deserve love. And that's why I love this verse. The angel's first words are, **"Do not be afraid."**

And the angel goes on to tell us why we have no reason for fear. Because "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord."

What better news could we possibly receive? We are good enough. We are worthy enough. So much so, that Jesus gave His life for us. And He told us over and over again, throughout His ministry, that we should be at peace. In John 14:27 we read that Jesus spoke to His disciples saying, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

So, amidst all the noise, all the clamor, all the shouting about what a scary place this world is, remember that the angel says we have no reason to be afraid. There is good news of great joy for all people. Remember that you are worthy. Remember that you are loved with a love beyond all measure.

This Christmas season, rejoice in the good news of great joy – the gift of Jesus Christ the Savior.

Jen Jones, Director, Institutional Research



December 7th
My eyes have seen your salvation.
Luke 2:22-35

Do you have a bucket list (a list of things you want to do before you die)? If you do, what's on your list? Among over 300,000 people registered on bucketlist.org, some of the most common bucket list items are to: swim with dolphins, learn a new language, float in the Dead Sea, and go skydiving.

In the section of scripture referenced for today, Dr. Luke writes about Simeon. Simeon was told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. We could say that "see Jesus" was on Simeon's bucket list. Mary and Joseph had taken Jesus to the temple to have Him consecrated and to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Simeon sees them, takes Jesus in his arms, and praises God with these well-known words:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

Simeon had seen his Savior. It was like a final item he could check off of his bucket list. Now he could die in peace with the reassurance that God had kept His promise to send a Savior.

This same promise and reassurance are ours. We will see Jesus one day! We, too, will see God's salvation and can rest in peace knowing we will see Jesus in heaven.

Jesus isn't only the reason for the season, He's the reason for everything.
Put Him on your bucket list!

Dr. Michelle Reina, Associate Professor, Business & UMHB Study Abroad Coordinator



December 8th
"The favor of God was upon Him."
Luke 2:39-40

It's hard to talk about the nature of God, particularly during the incarnation of Christ, without inadvertently slipping into some form of heresy. However, I will risk this and put myself at the mercy of your good grace by confessing I sometimes wonder about Father God, and Holy Spirit God, while Jesus God was asleep.

How often as a new father, did I watch my boys sleep in their bassinet? What was I looking for? What was I wanting? What was I doing?

Countless times. Nothing. Nothing. Loving.

What was it like for the *triune God* who had been, was, and always will be *eternally one* during the time Christ took on flesh like ours with all of its weakness? Jesus got hungry. Jesus' perspiration caked up dirt between his toes as he walked. Jesus became tired. Jesus wept. Jesus slept.

A couple of Jesus' conversations with the Father before a meal have been recorded. I can imagine Jesus God in communion with Father God and Holy Spirit God as he walked. But what happened while Jesus slept? What did Father God and Holy Spirit God do while Jesus God's body was restored in sleep from the exertions of his day?

Luke, the physician and historian, tells us Jesus grew. Jesus became strong in body. Jesus became filled with wisdom. "And the favor of God was upon Him."

The 'favor' of God, the 'χάρις', the 'grace' of God was upon Him.

What was this *χρηρισ* that God continually placed upon Jesus?

In Strong's Concordance *χρηρισ* (khar'-ece) is defined as: 1) grace 1a) that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness 2) good will, loving-kindness, or favor.

The joy of God was upon Jesus. The pleasure of God was upon Him. The delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness, good will, loving-kindness, and favor of God was upon Him.

Those were my feelings as well as I watched my babies sleep. And if that describes the feelings this wretched man was able to have I can hardly imagine how perfect were these feelings Father God was favoring Son God with all of the time, even as Jesus slept.

During this Advent season, you remember Jesus drawing near to you in his birth. However, if you have also drawn near to Him in His death and resurrection, you should remember that you, too, are a child of God and a coheir with Christ. Therefore, the perfect joy of God is also upon *you*. He looks upon *you* with complete pleasure. He delights to look at *you* and hold *you* in His heart and thoughts. His good will, His loving-kindness, His grace, and His favor is upon *you*, His precious child.

Rest in this grace.

Dr. Roger L. Russell, Construction Technician II, Physical Plant



December 9th
They were astonished.
Luke 2:41-52

Parents are often proud of their kids. But “astonished?”
Seldom.

Jesus’ parents seemed to be filled with sudden and overpowering surprise at the intuition and awareness the young twelve year old offered at the conclusion of the Feast of Passover.

This holiday, Passover, was a time Israel gathered to remember. The generations faithfully passed on the tradition about the sacrificial lamb that was at the center of the celebration. Children would ask inquisitive questions. The older generation would impart knowledge. Stories were told. Not uncommon for a boy to sit at the feet of a teacher; listening and asking questions.

However, it was very unusual that a youngster, the boy Jesus of Nazareth, would stay around an additional “three days listening and asking questions.” The Bible says “And all who heard Him (the boy Jesus) were amazed at His understanding, and His answers.” Even His parents were *astonished!*

They were so amazed that his mother “treasured up” what had just taken place.
He was no ordinary child. Noteworthy.

From this point forward in the story, Jesus displays His favor with God and man.
Be prepared to be amazed.
It is life changing.

Something a Father can be proud of.

Dr. Byron Weathersbee, Vice President for Student Life



December 10th
The People Were in Expectation
Luke 3:1-22

Only fifteen days remain until Christmas. The child in me can't wait. Here's what I'm expecting during the week of Christmas. I'm looking forward to visiting family. My church, Trinity Baptist Church of Harker Heights will host homeless family with the Family Promise ministry. And then there is the opening of presents on Christmas morning.

The highlight of the week will be worshipping at Trinity on Christmas Eve. Trinity's folks are expecting an uplifting worship time when we will celebrate the birth of Jesus with a Service of Lessons and Carols. This service is the most well-attended gathering of the year. Activities in the community offer little competition. For a few moments, Jesus occupies center stage.

Our world all but stops for Christmas Day. Such was not true when Jesus was born. That day was a day of activity and commerce like any other day. Jesus entered the world on a day when the world was engaging in its normal activities.

Luke frequently dated the events surrounding Jesus' coming in secular terms. Zechariah was ministering in the temple "in the days of King Herod of Judea" (Luke 1:5). In the days of Jesus' birth, "a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria" (2:1-2). Jesus' public ministry began with the appearance of John the Baptist "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas" (3:1-2).

At the first Christmas, Jesus intruded into our world bringing hope, peace, joy, and love. I look toward this Christmas expecting Him to intrude in our lives again, once more offering hope, peace, joy, and love.

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



Date: December 11th
“The Son of...”
Luke 3:23-38

Mankind is often trying to discover where they came from. Who were my ancestors? What did they accomplish? What mark did they leave on society? This can be a life-long pursuit that can result in finding fascinating facts, but can also reveal shameful facts that we may be less than willing to share. And it is through these findings (no matter how successful, unsuccessful, or troubling they may be) that motivate us to either write a new chapter or continue a legacy.

In Luke 3:23-38 we are shown, as Jesus is set to begin His ministry, a detailed list of His earthly (and heavenly) genealogy. Jesus is the Son of God born of a virgin, but it is easy to overlook His earthly lineage. Looking at this line alone (while aware of a differing one in Matthew 1) we see a vast array of names. Among these names we see some that are obscure and easy to skip. But we also see the names of men who have prominent roles in the Bible story. Amongst the names are men who followed the Will of God and therefore did and accomplished great things. However, as is our human and sinful nature, great mistakes and terrible things were also done among the men in the list. Mistakes done would make anyone human feel shameful or regretful about where they come from.

Thankfully we find our identity in Jesus Christ. That’s all the truly matters. It’s important to learn and understand where we come from. We can strive to not make the same mistakes our ancestors made. It’s also necessary to learn from the great things our ancestors did and accomplished thus presenting a model of sorts of how to present yourself, treat others, or take pride in what you do.

This season consider where you’ve come from, what others have done before you so you can model or learn. Most importantly, don’t forget where you find your identity. Jesus Christ, being both God and man, is the Son of God, a perfect and holy being.

Brian Street, Resident Director, Student Life



December 12th
“Led by the Spirit in the wilderness.”
Luke 4:1-12

Every child of God at some point will have to deal with temptation. Because Jesus was completely human, the **wilderness** temptations were very real. Jesus had the same desires and needs that any other human would have. Jesus had to make a choice to **yield** to the temptations of Satan or to refuse. He choose not to yield to the manipulation tactics of Satan.

Jesus was tempted to take care of Himself first. Satan told Him to use his power to change rocks into bread. After all Jesus was hungry after having fasted for 40 days. The selfish desire to take care of oneself is what our culture teaches us. Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3. In effect He was saying His relationship with His father was more important than taking care of His physical desire to satisfy His hunger for food.

The next thing Satan did to Jesus was to show Him all the kingdoms of the world. He told Jesus they would all be His if He would bow down and worship him. Satan appealed to the greed and desire for power that we all have in some way. Jesus quoted form Deuteronomy 6:13 stating He would only worship God and serve Him only. His relationship with God was more important than all the riches and power money can buy.

Then Satan took Jesus to the top of the temple and told Him to jump off. Satan even quoted Psalms 91:11-12, which says the angels will catch Him before He will get hurt or die. Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:16. He said He trusted God totally and did not need to test Him.

Jesus was tempted in all ways just as we are every day. The only defense Jesus used against the lies of Satan was scripture. We have the same defense against temptation that Jesus had.

“I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you”. Psalms 119:11

During this Advent Season, may we be intentional about discovering and learning more about Gods word. It will make a difference.

Dr. George Louthback, University Chaplain

Week 3

Joy



December 13th
“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me.”
Luke 4:14-30

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Luke 4:18-19

Let’s be honest. Christmas is supposed to be a happy time. But let’s be real for a few minutes.

What is holding you prisoner? What has you blinded? What is oppressing you?

Maybe it would help to say it in 21st century terms. What is your addiction, bad habit, hidden secret, depression, anxiety, family issue, personal issue, or any “*issue?*” We have issues. That seems to sum up much of our society and lives if we are honest with ourselves. If I’m honest, that seems true of me.

I need hope and I believe you do too. We don’t do very well without it. Think for a minute about what it would be like without any hope. Yet, many people live and die daily without any. Before you put today’s devotional down because it’s depressing, let’s move on to some good news.

Imagine (seriously) for a moment what it would be like if you were set free from your *issues?* What would it be like to find nice cool, clean water in the middle of your personal desert? Remember? That’s what Jesus calls *living water*. Life-giving relief, right where you need it. That water would make an excellent Christmas gift! Thank God it’s available year-round.

Jesus proclaimed, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me.” Think of the incredible power behind that. He came to set you free. He came to set me free. He came to free us from our personal prisons, our blindness, and our oppression. He came to set us free from our *issues*.

May the things we call issues (no matter the labels), point us to the One who has come to set us free by the power of the Holy Spirit of the Living God.

Nate Williams, Director, Counseling, Testing & Health Services



December 14th
“You Are The Son of God!”
Luke 4: 38-46

Who is this Jesus whose birth we celebrate at Christmas? Is this not the most important question asked by those of us who embrace this season?

He is the son of Adam as are we all. He is a descendant of the first man. As it turns out He is the embodiment of what Adam was intended to be. He is a second Adam, a man without sin. In Adam we all sinned but through this second Adam, we have the promise of eternal life. (Romans 5:12-21)

He is the son of Abraham. He is the fulfillment of the promise God gave to Abraham that “all people on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:3) God’s revelation through the life and history of Abraham’s descendants culminates in Jesus.

He is the son of David. The great King David wanted to build a House for God, but God said no and then promised to build a house (a line of kings) for David that would in time produce a son whose throne would be established forever. (II Samuel 7: 1-16) Jesus is the King, the anointed one (messiah) who fulfills that promise.

He is the son of Mary. He is the offspring of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). It was hard for Mary to understand how she could be a mother when she was still a virgin. But through her the promise of Isaiah 7:14 is fulfilled, “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel (God with us).”

He is the son of God. This is the verdict of the demons in our text who were victims of His mighty works of healing and deliverance. Jesus was not ready for this testimony from the demonic which even though true could be misunderstood. But over time it would be clear that this is the ultimate answer to the question of his identity. He is at once human and divine. **He is the Son of God!**

And to God be the Glory!

Dr. Leroy Kemp, Professor, College of Christian Studies



December 15th
Put Out Into the Deep Water
Luke 5:1-11

When I was a young teenager living in Michigan a group of us from our church set off for a week of summer camp to learn about missions at Acteen camp. That week was fun but proved to be a life changing-moment for me. I remember that one particular night when I begin to feel God speak to my heart regarding surrendering my life to serve. I was already a believer but being exposed to the stories of missionaries started to impact me. I knew that He was asking me to leave everything that I was comfortable with and follow Him. It was a struggle and the struggle was real. I thought God was calling me to serve Him as a missionary in a far away country. Inside I thought, “I don’t want to go to Africa”, but as I sat there His Spirit gently persuaded me that all He was asking of me was to “let down into the deep water” like He was asking of Simon in Luke 5:4 and trust Him with the details. I said yes that night: “Take me where you want: I will follow you.” I have discovered on this journey that those words of “let down into the deep water” would be repeated.

Fast track to today: I know that He called me to serve here at UMHB and not overseas like I had thought as a young teenager. We are nearing the end of the semester and I wish I could say that the waters have mostly been calm but the truth is that many times this semester it has been a raging storm with situations that have caught me off guard. I also have found that in the very midst of that storm He still asks, “Put out into deep water”. How can I put out more? Can you put out anymore? Like Simon, we are overwhelmed and exhausted. All we want to say is, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night (semester) and haven’t caught anything.” We just want to stop and rest! But it is in that moment, that very moment, we must decide to trust and declare as Simon did, “but because you say so, I will let down the nets.” It is not an easy undertaking. But this is exactly what the scripture says. It is so difficult because it means letting go of what we want to control and allowing Him to be in control and continue to follow Him. Once we do we will find that the results are amazing. Our nets will be so full that they will begin to break. What once seemed overwhelming is replaced by joy over-flowing. And all because we like Simon we decided to trust and follow Him.

How many unexpected raging storms have you had this semester? Are you ready to get off the boat? Could it be that in the midst of these unexpected raging storms that He might just be calling you to “Put out into deep water”? So how about it? Are you ready to do some real fishing? During this time be encouraged by what our passage says, “Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.’” So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Him.

Ms Rebeka Retta, Resident Director & Coordinator, Training and Publications, ResLife



December 16th

“We have seen extraordinary things today.”

Luke 5:27-32

A woman who was knocked down and trapped under a two-ton taxi in central London on Monday was freed after a crowd of City workers and tourists lifted it off her. In dramatic scenes caught on camera, about 30 passersby are seen lifting the taxi, a white version of a traditional black cab, to free the woman, whose leg and pelvis were pinned under a wheel.

Physiological researchers across the world attempt to explain the ‘extra ordinary’ ability of bystanders to lift cars off of injured folks, to move gigantic boulders or face raging waters to rescue the stranded. They would attribute it to extraordinary secretion of epinephrine or testosterone, etc.

The men of Luke demonstrated extra ordinary...extraordinary faith as they climbed on the roof...faith it would not collapse; faith to let their friend down through a hole; faith the ropes would not break; faith to set him in front of Jesus; faith that He was who He said He was and faith that He would do something extra ordinary for their friend. Their faith paid off in ways their hearts and mind could have only hoped.

Everything Jesus did was extra ordinary, from His teachings when He was only 12, to the calling of the disciples, to walking on water...to well... everything He did.

Yet we are called to remember very ordinary things...have faith as these children do; love me first and foremost...pick up your cross daily and follow me.

We are only required to have faith, as small as an ordinary mustard seed.

This Christmas, let us have extraordinary faith as we remember the miracle of the manger that led to the extraordinary majesty of the cross so that our future is eternally and extraordinary and secure.

Dr. Sharon Souter, Dean, College of Nursing



December 17th
Follow Me
Luke 5:27-32

One of the most surprising things that happens in the gospels is the calling of the disciples. Jesus walks up to several of them, including Levi (Matthew) in this text, and just says “follow me.” The amazing result is that Levi leaves his livelihood and his lifestyle and does just that. It’s not clear from the scripture whether Levi knew Jesus at all. He has probably heard Him teach, at the least, but his decision to follow is still remarkable. The remainder of the story in Luke makes it clear that neither Levi nor any of the others really understood what they were getting into when they chose to follow Jesus, but they still made the choice to get up and go.

Eventually, Jesus would tell the twelve that anyone who wasn’t willing to give up his life wasn’t worthy of being a disciple. At the time He called them, though, all He asked them to do was follow. Sometimes we ask a lot of people when we want to introduce them to Jesus. We ask them to make a life-changing commitment immediately. Jesus just asked Levi to follow. Levi was not a good person, and neither were his friends. Yet, this one act by Jesus led Levi to introduce his friends to Jesus. It’s clear that Jesus knew what kind of people he was partying with. He caught some criticism for his decision to be there. He was willing to risk his reputation hanging out with disreputable people if it gave Him a chance to move them closer to God. I’m glad Jesus thinks that way. Perhaps we should too. Christmas reminds us that God is not in a hurry. There is room to be patient in just inviting others to follow and learn that God really can be trusted with our lives.

Dr. Marty McMahon, McBryde Professor, McLane College of Business



December 18th
Amazing Love
Luke 6:12-16

While most people look forward to Christmas, the holiday season can be quite painful for those who have lost loved ones or experienced personal tragedy. Many members of our UMHB family are coping with overwhelming loss and grief this year. They may be feeling lost and alone right now.

During difficult times, I find comfort from Isaiah 43:2 – *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.* In other words, God is right there with us!

Emmanuel: God with us! The Isaiah Scripture becomes even more meaningful to me during Advent. As we read in Luke, Jesus came to live among us. He dwelled with his disciples, prayed with them, and healed the multitudes. As Jesus chose His apostles in Luke 6, He was fully aware of their sinful nature. They were every bit as weak and selfish as we are. Yet knowing His disciples would deny Him and betray Him, Jesus still shared His last supper with them. He was willing to endure the most excruciating, agonizing death imaginable to pay for our sins. What Amazing Love!

If you are struggling with grief this Christmas, remember that even Jesus Himself felt forsaken on the cross. But you are never alone. Just as it states in the beautiful “Footprints in the Sand” poem, God is always there to carry us through our darkest days. He is always there to heal our deepest wounds. May you find comfort in His Amazing Love.

But remember that the Son of God Himself needed companionship. Therefore, may you also find solace in your church, your loved ones, and our UMHB family. If you are hurting, please do not suffer in silence. Reach out to someone. You are loved by more people than you can possibly imagine! Amazing Love is always surrounding us – a gift to restore our soul.

Dr. Michelle Roueché, Director of Choral Studies, Music Department



December 19th

This Beats Charlie Brown

Luke 6:27-36

Do you remember the very first time that you heard the Christmas story? Perhaps your earliest recollection was that of you as a toddler hearing it while seated in a loved one's lap? Maybe you heard it first in church as a child? Or perhaps, like me, you did not grow up in a Christian home as a young child. I vaguely recall hearing a story that had something to do with a baby and some sheep. . . . You see, my elementary school teacher in the Netherlands, who was a big Peanut's fan, drew scenes of the Charlie Brown Christmas Story on the blackboard with beautiful, colorful chalk that would smear if one leaned against the board.

What about Theophilus, the guy to whom Luke wrote his Jesus story? Can you see his reaction in your mind's eye when he heard the Christmas story for the first time? Imagine him hearing the words of the angel to Mary as penned by Luke, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will receive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name Him Jesus. He will be great, and be called **Son of the Most High** . . ." (Luke 1:31-32). How amazing to hear the story of the baby in the manger for the first time.

Next, Luke's gospel told Theophilus about the greatness of this child as He grew, ministered, taught, and healed. Picture him next reading the words of Jesus as He speaks to His disciples and explains what it means to be part of His community, to be His followers—to love one's enemies, to bless those who curse you, and to pray for those who abuse you (Luke 6:27-28). This was unheard of in the Roman world. "Really? Love my enemies? Perhaps this was a cute story when Jesus walked around but this does not fit my life's circumstances. If only Jesus knew my life!" He did.

Jesus came to dwell among us in a world devoid of peace. His message was radical, offensive even. In His Sermon on the Plain, Jesus said that if someone strikes one on the cheek, a deeply offensive gesture in the culture of that time, one should offer the other cheek as well. I think I liked the Charlie Brown story drawn in colorful chalk much better. What about you?

Jesus spoke of selfless love, and of mercy that does not retaliate. He presented a way of life that does not hope to receive in return of doing something good. When you live like that, Jesus said, "Your reward will be great, and you will **be sons of the Most High** . . ." (Luke 6:35). Wait a minute! The baby born at Christmas would be called **Son of the Most High!**

I wish I could have been a fly on the wall when Theophilus made that connection. This was an invitation to participate in the life of the Divine. The Son of the Most High invites us to become **children of the Most High** by living life as intended from the beginning of creation. Now this beats Charlie Brown! It is in a strange way both radically offensive and yet precisely what we need in our lives. I think I like this colorful Jesus version since it speaks of true peace and sincere community. What do you think?

Dr. Renate Hood, Professor of Christian Studies, Biblical Studies Dept.

Week 4

Peace



December 20th
“Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.”
Luke 7:18-23

John the Baptist’s life purpose was to prepare the way for and proclaim the arrival of the Lord. He did just that... and then was imprisoned by Herod the tetrarch. There he... waited.

John’s message was that the “one who was to come” was ultimately worthy, would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, and would winnow the world, separating wheat from chaff. Perhaps John anticipated seeing all of that burst forth from Jesus soon after His baptism. ...And then perhaps he waited to see if Jesus would release him from prison.

From his prison cell, he sent two of his disciples to Jesus with the poignant question, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

Luke tells us that in that hour Jesus healed people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and He restored the sight of the blind. Jesus responded with the evidence of His life on display.

This may have reminded John of the description of the Lord’s anointed one recorded in Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor; He has sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn...” Isaiah 61:1-3a

Jesus was clearly doing what the anointed one was expected to do... except... what about the part about releasing those in prison? What about... John?

Jesus sends John’s disciples back with a message for him: Tell John what you have seen Me do. And then this: “And blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.” (Luke 7:23)

I trust this was assurance enough for John. John had been right about Jesus. And Jesus blessed him.

What do we do when Jesus doesn’t act like we expected Him to or hoped He would? May we move toward Jesus during those times, and observe Him at work, and hear His compassionate blessing for those who press past disappointment to trust His heart.

“With Thee, O my God, is no disappointment. I shall never have to regret that I have loved Thee too well.”
Henry Martyn, missionary to India

Dr. Shawn Shannon, Baptist Student Ministry Director



December 21st

“Held it fast in a noble and good Heart.”

Luke 8:4-15

Often it is easy to get distracted into the fast and fun season that is Christmas. We are racing to buy the perfect gift for everyone. We are headed to this Christmas party and that one. We are baking, and eating, every Christmas goodies we can get our hands on. We forget to pause and “hold fast in a noble and good heart” to what Christmas is really about. We forget to bear fruit.

The Savior has been born! We can hold on to what He is and continues to be in each of our lives and share this sweet news. In this particular section of Scripture Jesus paints the picture of four different seeds. The seed represents the Word of God and how there are four different ways to respond to it:

- The ones who have heard, then the devil comes and takes away the Word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.
- The ones on the rock are those who hear the word, receive it with joy, but have no root and after a while fall away.
- The ones among the thorns are those who hear, but are choked by the pleasures of the world and their fruit does not mature.
- The ones among the good soil hear the word, hold it fast in a noble and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

This reminds me of the great need to share the Gospel with those around us. It is our job to hold fast to what we know and to bear fruit. The way to bear fruit is to share the sweet news that we know to be true about Jesus Christ and what He did for us on the Cross. Will you bear fruit this Christmas season?

Mrs. Lauren Wells, Resident Director of Johnson Hall, Residence Life



December 22nd
To Seek and Save the Lost
Luke 19:1-10

Almost everyone loves the story of Zacchaeus. Children have a way of identifying with Zacchaeus because he was a “little man” who had to climb a tree in order to see Jesus.

The story is filled with meaning in regard to the sovereignty of God, the grace of Jesus, and the forgiveness of the sinner. We often think of Zacchaeus as a first-century seeker, and there is some truth in that idea. But in reality, Jesus is the real seeker of a man’s soul. Jesus goes through Jericho with purpose, stops on the road, finds Zacchaeus in the tree, speaks to him, calls him to come down, and invites Himself to the home of Zacchaeus for a life-changing visit. The transformation in Zacchaeus is dramatic. The story should remind us of God’s call to our own hearts.

The text concludes with the clearest statement in all of Scripture as to the reason for the coming of Jesus, God in the flesh. He “came to seek and to save what was lost.” The Lord seeks us far more intensely than we seek Him! The purpose of our celebration of the season is found in Luke 19:10. He came to seek and save us. Joy to the world!

Andy Davis, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Belton



December 23rd
“Do this in remembrance of Me”
Luke 22:14-23

Christmas is one of my favorite times of the year. It's flooded with annual traditions, decorations, coordinating outfits for Christmas cards, and reunions. For the past 9 years I have lived in a different state than my family. I've also been fortunate to be able to never miss a Christmas with my family.

Because I'm only home for a short time, my family makes my favorite meals leading up to my absolute favorite- momma's walnut crusted pork chops and homemade apple sauce. I fight back every urge to inhale it and I sit back to take in the moment. I know it will be a long time until a similar moment happens again. In this moment the sounds are amplified, the spices of the food are savored in every bite, and I feel the weight of the love that is embodied in the room.

In John 22:14 it states "when the hour came, Jesus and His apostles reclined at the table." This moment that He spent His whole time on earth preparing for has now come and we find that Jesus "reclined" to take it all in.

He was about to voluntarily sacrifice Himself for the sanctification of all human kind. In His final hour, He takes a moment to tell the symbolism of breaking bread and drinking from the cup as Himself "breaking His body and shedding His blood for purification of our sins". He tells them to "do this in remembrance of me."

Christmas has become known for the "hustle and bustle", the over commercialized pressure of preparing the right foods or getting the perfect present. This Christmas I challenge you to "recline at the table" take the precious moments in, and remember what The Lord has done for you.

Tiffany Wurdemann, Director of Student Organizations, Student Life



December 24th
Jesus, Remember Me...
Luke 23:26-43

⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³ Jesus answered him, “*Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.*”

How desperately most of us desire to leave a lasting legacy. We go to great lengths to “make sure” that those left behind do not forget us – that they remember us. We build reputations that we desire to linger long after we pass. We build buildings to stand tall in our name long after our bodies can no longer stand. We build fortunes to make sure that we have taken care of our spouse, our children, our grandchildren – and their children – long after they have said to us their final goodbyes. We desire to be remembered.

Even so, those remembrances become memories because they become reality only to those left behind. However, Luke writes of a different “remember me”. He writes of a criminal who knows he, the criminal, does not deserve to be remembered by Jesus when Jesus arrives in paradise. However, the criminal does not wish to be remembered by those left here on earth. He, the criminal, desires for his cries of mercy and grace to enter into Jesus’ memories as Jesus moves forward as the criminal is left behind – just the opposite of what we try to accomplish so that those left behind remember us.

What is your real heart’s desire? Do you wish to only be remembered for what you did while you walked the earth? Or do you desire to follow after Jesus’ own heart – to follow the path that the criminal on the cross next to Jesus followed. Do you believe that Jesus knows that your heart desires the same mercy and grace as the criminal? Do you know if Jesus will “remember you”? If not, choose the path that the criminal took with his dying breath, “Jesus, remember me...”

Dr. Jim King, Professor, College of Business



December 25th
Concerning Jesus of Nazareth
Luke 24:13-35

At the time of this passage it had been three days since Jesus died. Just that morning His tomb was discovered empty. Two followers of Christ were walking to a village named Emmaus. As they are talking about the events that have unfolded in the past four days they are approached by a man. This man is Jesus, but they are unable to recognize Him until later that night when they invite Him to break bread with them.

What sticks out to me as I read this passage is that their “eyes were kept from recognizing Him.” Why would Jesus want not to be recognized by His followers? I believe it has something to do with faith. Jesus wanted them to have faith in what He said and in what was prophesied in the scriptures. How many times have we been unable to see Jesus? Unable to see what He is doing or where He is moving in our lives? We can either walk in sadness that we don’t see Him or we can seek Him.

This lack of sight is a time to re-center. To sit down with Jesus and break bread with Him. I find it amazing that the followers had no idea that they were in the company of the Messiah until He broke bread. That is something significant. If you are in a time of blindness where you just cannot see Christ, stop and break bread with your savior. I am not saying go out and eat or anything, but instead be alone with God. Bow low and seek His face. He is there; He always is. We just need to have our eyes opened.

Lord we come to you asking that you open our eyes to see your glory. Open our eyes to see where you are moving. May we sit alone with you and break bread with you. Sustain us with your Word as we seek your face. Amen

Jesse Malina, Campus Missionary Intern, Baptist Student Ministry