

Advent

God Knows What He's About



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2018 Advent Devotional: God Knows What He's About

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Advent 2018

God Knows What He's About

My seminary roommate and I had great late-night discussions that sometimes seemed to morph into seminars. Oh if I could only read transcripts of those conversations today! I suspect I would shake my head and chuckle.

We often returned to the subject of the sovereignty of God. I was annoyed at the thought that God directed my steps without my knowledge, that He used me for his purposes without my awareness or consent. This made me a bit... huffy. How could He do that?

Yet now I find deep comfort in trusting that His wisdom, goodness, beauty, power, grace, mercy (on and on!) have sway over the smallness of my scope. Who better to take my wee story and write it into His eternal epic? I gladly, gratefully yield to His will, His works, and His ways. I have confidence that God knows what He's about. *

Sometimes, at the end of a day, I wonder *what was the most significant thing I did, event that happened, or interaction I had that day*. I conclude that my perspective is so limited that I do not know what was most important. I trust that God knows even if I don't.

Rahab and Ruth never expected to be in the lineage of the Son of God. Zechariah was simply showing up for his turn in the temple when an angel showed up too, announcing old Zechariah and old wife would have a baby! Augustus Caesar sent out a decree to tax the world, and ended up fulfilling a prophecy. Yet God was at work in all of these people and situations. Because of them. In spite of them.

David trustingly said, "My times are in Your hands" (Psalm 31:15). Paul remarked that God "...determined allotted periods and the boundaries of [people's] dwelling place" (Acts 17:26). He had them where they needed to be, and led them to do what needed doing. I believe He is doing that same thing with us even now!

This Advent, we consider those people who were contributors or witnesses to the first chapters of the greatest story ever told. I doubt that any of them would expect to be mentioned here. I marvel at the work of God. Let us consider "the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4) together! See how He sends forth His Son!

*"God knows what He's about" is the final line of a poem well worth googling!

Dr. Shawn Shannon, Spiritual Life, Director, Baptist Student Ministry

Week 1

Hope



December 2nd, 2018
Luke Writes to Theophilus
Luke 1:1-4

Unlike the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John, Luke begins his Gospel with an explanation of how and why he wrote. Mysteriously, he addresses that explanation to a certain *Theophilus*. The name, *Theophilus*, literally means “friend of God.” Possibly Luke was not referring to a particular person, but to any “friend of God” reading his book. Most scholars today, however, believe that *Theophilus* may have been a prominent person (i.e., “most excellent”) who was Luke’s patron – an affluent official who may have helped fund the copying and distribution of the Gospel.

Luke tells *Theophilus* that he has researched the life of Jesus “from the very first” and intends to write an orderly account. Luke clearly states that there are other accounts (“many have undertaken”), but he evidently feels that he can cover somethings that are not included in the other accounts. Indeed, in the first two chapters, Luke tells us about the parents of John the Baptist, the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth, and the beautiful songs of Mary (*Magnificat*), of Zechariah (*Benedictus*), of the angels (*Gloria in Excelsis*) and of Simeon (*Nunc Dimittis*). Later in Luke’s account, he records parables and stories of Jesus found only in his text: e.g., the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, and Zacchaeus.

In reading Luke’s remarkable prologue, we become aware that we are reading trustworthy history. The people and events in Luke’s account draw us into worship the newborn King alongside lowly first-century Jews and lofty Greco-Roman officials. For Luke, Jesus is the Savior of the whole world, born in a particular time and place - born in Bethlehem of Judea, born under the reign of Augustus the first Roman Emperor, born into a humble family desperately seeking shelter, born into a world in need of hope.

This Advent season, perhaps we too as “friends of God” will read Luke’s carefully studied account and again worship the King.

Dr. Bill Carrell, Professor, Christian Studies



December 3rd, 2018

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

Matthew 1:1-17

Matthew's genealogy of Jesus contains three sets of roughly fourteen generations each. It traces Jesus back to David and then to Abraham.

It is easy to pass over the lists of names and simplify the entire matter by saying "Jesus is royal Messiah in the line of David." If we do that, then we will miss the fact that there are four women in Jesus' genealogy: Tamar (1:3), Rahab (1:3), and Ruth (1:5), and "the wife of Uriah," presumably Bathsheba (1:6).

At this point, you would be right to object, "Every generation has to have a woman in it. What is so special about this?" Indeed, that is the question: what is unique about these women that they would be singled out for mention in Jesus' genealogy. It was odd in first century Judaism to include women in genealogies, so the fact that any women at all are included is significant!

Tamar was the wife of Judah (Genesis 38). Rahab was the woman who assisted in the conquest of Jericho (Joshua 2). Ruth was the Moabite widow who married Boaz in the book of Ruth. Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, with whom David had an affair (2 Samuel 11-12).

Scholars have endlessly debated the question of "why these four women?" The bottom line is that all four were involved in some type of scandal, and three of them were Gentiles. Women caught up in scandal do not seem like good candidates for inclusion in a genealogy of the Messiah. What is Matthew trying to tell us?

Jesus came to save sinners. He came to save the world. If a woman disguised as a prostitute (Tamar) or a lowly Moabite widow (Ruth) can be a part of that salvation story, then you and I have hope as well. If a woman caught up in a royal affair (Bathsheba) can be the mother of a king, or if a Canaanite prostitute can see God's hand at work (Rahab), then God can lead our lives to greater things as well.

The New Testament is the gospel of the second chance. Regardless of what you have done, Jesus Christ loves you and wants to save you. Sinners included.

Dr. Daniel Mynatt, Vice Provost, Academic Affairs



December 4th, 2018
Unlikely heritage
Matthew 1:1-17

What is your legacy? Purpose of your life? When we explore today's text we discover some unlikely people in the family tree of Jesus. Being female, I am going to explore three women.

First, Rehab in verse five. She was a woman who helped the Jews to conquer her land and protected the two spies and was promised that she and her family would be spared. Her profession was the oldest one and yet, we see her listed. God does not hold our professions and/or our country of origin against us (as we sometimes judge folk).

Second, we see Ruth also mentioned in verse five. Ruth was not of their people but converted to their faith after her first husband died and she followed her mother-in-law back to Israel. She was a Moabite. You know one of those dreaded "ites" in the Old Testament. God allowed her to be in the line of Jesus.

Lastly, we see in verse six that Solomon was by David and Bathsheba. Their relationship was one of unfaithfulness, cover up, deception and ultimately the murder of her husband. God used their second son to be in the line of Jesus.

Therefore, what do we learn from this section of scripture? God has a plan for each of us. He desires our greatest good. If we are faithful, He will use the most unlikely of us. The ones usually ostracized by society. During this season of Advent, let us strive to look with God's eyes, heart, and not our own. We are all walking wounded and could use kindness and grace. Speak to someone you do not usually speak to. Invite someone new to have coffee, tea or whatever. Get out of your comfort zone a little and love on some of your brothers and sisters.

Father, thank you that You do not see us as we are – dirty and broken but through the eyes of our Savior perfect and whole. May we choose to love well in this moment. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Nurse Debbie, UMHB Student Life Division



December 5th, 2018
Her Husband Joseph
Matthew 1:18-25

While both Matthew and Luke have stories about Jesus' birth, Matthew has Joseph's story while Luke has Mary's. Here are some things to ponder from Matthew's version, Joseph's story of faithfulness. I think we can see reasons in this brief passage why Joseph was chosen for this crucial role

v. 18, "the birth of Jesus the Messiah happened in this way". By the time this was written, the church had long recognized Jesus. Before (Mark's version) they were content to tell of his ministry, death and resurrection. Now, they also wanted to know about his birth.

v. 19, Joseph is "righteous," not self-righteous. He had to be terribly hurt either because he actually loved Mary or because, culturally, he and his extended family would feel betrayed by what must seem like infidelity. He did not make a public case out of this because his righteousness showed itself in kindness and mercy. I think we may assume that he continued to model this behavior throughout his time with the child Jesus.

v. 20, after he had decided on his plan of action, his plan was interrupted. Like the Joseph of Genesis, this Joseph has dreams. An "angel of the Lord" honors him directly by telling him the nature of this child and that he should "not be afraid" to take Mary as wife. Why would he be afraid? Was it because he would not know if he could trust her in the future? Was it because of what the village and family would think?

vv. 21-23, "you are to name him." Joseph will also have a part in Jesus' birth: his naming. And, he will name him after a famous, faithful leader from Israel's past, Joshua. (Jesus is the Greek version of that name.) The name means "he saves, delivers, rescues" which is what the first Joshua did. But this Joshua/Jesus will rescue in a much more profound way than the first could, because this Jewish child will be God as well as human. Unlike Isaiah's Emmanuel ("God with us") whose birth would mark deliverance from the Assyrians as a sign of God's presence, Joseph's Emmanuel will mark the presence of God himself. He will be greater than Joshua or David or Solomon because Emmanuel is not his name; it is who he is.

vv. 24-25, Joseph was faithful both in taking Mary as his wife and in giving the Son the name above every name.

Let us honor faithful Joseph who had the courage to do the righteous thing when his culture and people would have expected him to merely do the right thing.

Dr. Tim Crawford, Dean, College of Christian Studies



December 6th, 2018
Angelic Revelation Can Sting
Matthew 1:18-25

Should life be a little easier for a Christian than for others? Mary was chosen to be the mother of God's son. Joseph, surely deeply in love with Mary, wanted to believe that Mary was with child from the Holy Spirit. As a mere man, he had to have some doubt until a message came from an angel for him to believe this rather extravagant story.

Just as we see in the world today, many people throughout the life of Mary saw Mary as a soiled woman when she attempted to convince people that the child she carried was from the Holy Spirit. I'm sure the trials and tribulations that she endured felt, at times, to be just too hard, yet this does not negate the fact that she was chosen and called to share God's love with a needy world of sinners.

The decision for Mary to be a part of this plan was revealed by prophets many years prior to the events, and it was devised even before time began. Each one of us is a part of that plan and it is to our benefit to determine how we fit into God's plan. Then our actions can be directed toward that purpose, just as Mary continued to raise Jesus as the key to God's plan.

Mary and Joseph simply did what was commanded of them as obedience to the plan of God. Second thoughts or questioning the commands of God will never lead us to the purpose that God has for our lives. We must remain obedient, even if it takes us from our comfort zones and stretches us to the full extent of our skills and expectations.

God may never send an angel or a dream to guide us in his ways, but we have been given God's Spirit within us that we may be led through our heart and conscience. We have been given the Bible as a source of inspiration and as a map to follow. We have also been given mates, family, and brothers/sisters in Christ to counsel us in our walk of faith. So, like Mary and Joseph, grab hold of what we are given by God, and follow in obedience!

David H. Marek, Manager of Administrative Support, Physical Plant



December 7th, 2018
Wise Men from the East
Matthew 2:1-12

Wise men, kings, magi, astrologers. Who were these guys who traveled a very long way to see “the king of the Jews”? The truth is, we really don’t know. Only Matthew tells us about them and he doesn’t tell us much. Most of us envision three guys with camels bearing odd gifts in a manger scene. That picture dates from well after the event, though.

What motivated a group of guys living a long way from Jerusalem to pack their bags, find some treasure, and travel possibly more than a year to celebrate the birth of a baby? There is no way for us to know for sure, but there had to be stories in the East. God’s people had been held in captivity and had insisted on talking about God’s activity in the world. There were hints of a king who would deliver His people. Perhaps they had heard those whispers. That still may not explain why they saw a random star, even a big one, as evidence of that event, but it may give us some idea why they were looking.

When we talk about the wise men, we usually focus on the number of them and the gifts they bring (who brings a little boy perfume?). Another question interests me here. If I were editing Matthew’s gospel for him, my question would be, “so Matt, what happened to these guys?” Did they go home and talk about this king they had met? Did they ever come back to hear Him preach? Did they hear His message in that far away land and choose to follow Him? We can’t know, but it is hard to believe God would abandon a group of guys who went out of their way to worship Jesus.

The story of the Wise Men reminds us that God is working ahead of us. Christmas reminds us that God continues to work to bring all people home. In God’s good grace, we can join that work wherever we might be.

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



December 8th, 2018
Joseph is warned in a dream
Matthew 2:13-15

When was the last time you had a dream that woke you up in the middle of the night? For myself, it has been a long time since I have had one but when I did I would often think as I was laying there, “I probably should not have eaten that pizza last night before I went to bed”, and then take some antacids and then fall back asleep. I am glad that our character, Joseph, in our passage today did not have the same thought when he was awoken from his sleep. What we find instead in his response is an amazing display of obedience to a warning from God who he had already learned to trust.

In our reading today we find that Joseph had just become the earthly father of Jesus. Earlier that evening he and his wife Mary had guests, the Shepherds and the Wise men who came to see, acknowledge and worship their new born who was the long expected Messiah. A very full day and evening meant a well-deserved good night sleep. So it is interesting that when the angel of the Lord appeared to him later that night and told him to “Get up, and take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt”, the scripture said he *immediately* “got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt.” And stayed until God told him to move again. Joseph did not delay or linger in his obedience. And because he did, his action of obedience saved the baby Jesus whose life was threatened. His immediate obedience is strong evidence that Joseph had learned to trust God long before that night.

The question then is not does God still speak to us through dreams or even if it was the pizza you ate but rather when He does speak to us how are we going to respond? It is important that we do not delay or linger in the place where we have been, but, like Joseph, continue to follow God’s leading in our spiritual journey to stay put or keep moving when He says move. May our obedience always be immediate.

Rebeka A. Retta, RD and Coordinator, Training and Publications, ResLife

Week 2

Love



December 9th, 2018
The Trouble with Advent
Matthew 2:1-3

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Matthew 2:1-3

The question the magi asked King Herod must have been very unsettling for him. His whole life was based on the presumption that the correct answer for him to make to their question was, “me”. The idea that someone else had a claim on his position and property must have been troubling, indeed. Adding to this that his new rival’s status had been confirmed in the heavens would add an element of doom to his concerns.

The fate of Herod is the fate of any usurper. You have to live in constant fear that the real owner will someday come back for what is his.

The coming of advent should trouble us also. We’re usurpers, too. Many of us have based our lives on the proposition that we are the masters of our own future. God’s job is to help us when we pray to him. Everything in our homes and bank accounts belongs to us. If we are so inclined, we may share as much as 10% with God.

The coming King is king over us, just as much as He was over Herod. The heavens daily proclaim His majesty and He demands our obedience. It is no wonder that many major movements of the Spirit are not associated with shouts of joy but with tears of repentance. When the Lord comes, He establishes His authority. Anyone who seeks to hold His authority for themselves will be brought low.

As we prepare for Christmas this year, make room for your King. Surrender all your prerogatives and possessions to Him. Repent of your self-rule and surrender to His. Then, like the magi, you can gather your gifts and come to worship Him, trouble free.

Larry Locke, Associate Professor of Business



December 10th, 2018
Herod kills the children
Matthew 2:13-18

The carol *Joy to the World* by Isaac Watts includes the line, “He comes to make his blessings flow, *far as the curse is found.*” In this passage, we hear and feel the deep, resonant, throbbing echoes of that curse.

“The LORD God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between her seed and your seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel’” (Genesis 3:14-15).

God’s curse on Satan promised Satan’s ultimate defeat through the seed of the woman, Jesus, who would take away the sins of the world. But this curse also foreshadowed generations of conflict between Satan, his angels and humans who reject God, and Jesus and those who follow Him.

Herod was a monster. He was an Edomite and a servant of Rome. He viewed the arrival of the Messiah not as the fulfillment of a long-awaited promise but as a threat to his power and position. And so, like the great red dragon of Revelation 12, he sought to devour the seed of the woman. And when God rescued the child, as He did in today’s passage by warning Joseph in a dream, Revelation 12 says, “The dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (verse 17).

The slaughter of the babies in Bethlehem was horrific. Feel the grief expressed in the quote from Jeremiah 31: “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

Jesus came to conquer death. He has crushed the head of the Serpent. Indeed, “He comes to make his blessings flow, *far as the curse is found.*” The victory is assured . . . but the curse has not been lifted and the battle rages on. Around the world there are believers and unbelievers suffering the ongoing enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. It is appropriate, then, that we remember those in pain and temper our joy with tears.

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



December 11th, 2018
Joseph, an angel, and a dream. . . again!
Matthew 2:19-23

Do you know anyone who *enjoys* change? Virtually every stressful event in life involves drastic change: death of a loved one, divorce, loss of employment, personal injury or illness. Even marriage and retirement are considered highly stressful events. Change is hard for us. The unknown is scary. Those of us working in academia are probably the most resistant to change. We like the familiarity of rituals, traditions, and predictable schedules. We like to feel in control.

I marvel at Joseph's faithfulness when God called him to change his plans. Can you imagine the gossip and ridicule he must have endured – marrying a pregnant girl in that day and age? Can you imagine uprooting your family on a moment's notice because of a dream – not knowing where you will sleep or how you will feed your family? Then I consider Jesus's faithfulness. He could have walked away from the cross at any time. Yet He endured the most excruciating death imaginable because He trusted God so completely.

How often have you felt God nudging you to change something in your life? Virtually every person in the Bible was reluctant when God called them to do something. Why are we so afraid to trust God? How many times have we behaved like defiant children when we had to deal with change?

Had Joseph not acted on his faith, the Son of God might have been killed. Joseph trusted God without any proof that his dream would come true. God always proves His faithfulness and goodness. Jesus is living proof! Emmanuel literally means that God is with us! God is ALWAYS with us! That, dear friends, will never change!

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



December 12th, 2018
The Worship of Silence
Luke 1:5-25

When I lived and traveled in Asia, I often found myself left in silence because I was unable to communicate with others. Until I learned a few words in a local language, I depended on others to communicate for me. I was reminded that the ability to communicate effectively involves a lot of humility and a lot of listening. I also learned to get comfortable with silence.

Zechariah and Elizabeth had probably given up hope of ever having a child when the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah with this wonderful news. His apparent fear framed his question and corresponding rationale, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years” (v. 18). This seems like a logical question, yet Gabriel responded, “And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time” (v. 20). It’s easy to sympathize with Zechariah’s response, but we may miss the opportunity that his silence must have brought.

In the subsequent months, the silence in which Zechariah lived meant that he experienced limited to no communication with people around him, but this also meant he was free to enjoy countless hours communing with the Lord. In his silence, Zechariah could enjoy worshipping God and preparing for his child, the one “who would make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” These precious months of silence gave him the chance to soak in the news that the angel had given him. It also gave him months to learn how to listen---to others but more importantly, to the voice of God.

As we prepare our own hearts to remember the birth of our Savior, may we learn how to listen for his voice that brings peace and joy. May the Lord silence the noise that takes away from fully enjoying and soaking in his presence!

*Dr. Haedy Liu, Associate Professor & ESOL Director,
Modern Foreign Languages Department*



December 13th, 2018
Elizabeth and the Unexpected Child
Luke 1: 24, 25; 39-45

When I think of surprise birthday parties, it is typically the one having the birthday who is being surprised. When it comes to the birth of John the Baptist, it is Elizabeth who is surprised!

“How kind the Lord is,” she exclaimed, “to take away my disgrace of having no children.” (Luke 1:25)

When her relative Mary comes to visit Elizabeth in her sweet solitude, Elizabeth greets her with generous joy! Hear her blessings:

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! . . . blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” (Luke 1:42, 45)

When we are jostled by some unexpected event in our lives, whatever is in us is what spills out. What flows from Elizabeth’s life is confidence in God, encouragement for Mary, and the recognition that God is at work in unusual ways.

Elizabeth’s responses reveal that she is a woman who sees and embraces the will of God. After decades of barrenness, she conceives! And she gives God the credit and the glory, living her happy hallelujah in her hiddenness.

Then Mary comes to visit. I can only imagine how Elizabeth encouraged this young woman. I assume there were few if any who understood and believed Mary’s pregnancy was miraculous. Yet Elizabeth “got it.” She acknowledged and celebrated both the mother and her child and sent Mary on her way triple blessed!

I want to emulate Elizabeth in how she perceives and celebrates the work of God in her life and in the life of another. Surely she recognizes His ways because she knows Him so well. May the Lord also fill us with His Holy Spirit so that our own blessings overflow into the lives of others.



December 14th, 2018
Gabriel visits Mary
Luke 1:26-38

A little over 20 years ago, I got the news: you're going to have a baby boy! At first, I was thrilled. Then I was terrified. What if something went wrong? What if I wasn't cut out to be a mom? How would I know what to do?

A little over 2,000 years ago, Mary got the news. And in a spectacular way. A doctor told me. An angel of the Lord visited Mary! Here she was, a teenage girl, not yet married, and Gabriel came to tell her she was special and the Lord had chosen her. I love how honest her first reaction was. Different translations say she was "perturbed at these words," or "she was thoroughly shaken," or "she was greatly troubled." And she hadn't even gotten the real surprise yet. Just knowing that the Lord God *saw* her and *avored* her was enough to disturb her to her core.

Then the angel said, "Do not be afraid."

Having someone tell you not to be afraid instantly makes you brave, right? Yeah. Me neither.

The angel went on: "You will conceive and give birth to a son." Not, "Hey, Mary, we'd really like you to do this. What do you think?" Just, "Mary, this is going to happen." Again, she was troubled and confused. She asked, "But, *how*?"

The angel said, "The Holy Spirit. Because God's promises must be fulfilled." And Mary—innocent, unwed, soon to be mom that she is—replied, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be so."

What a remarkable example of faith. Mary, shaken and greatly troubled by the words of the angel, committed herself to the Lord's plan. She offered her life to bring life to the Savior.

Like Mary, we are to be bearers of the good news. We are called to share God's love and grace in this broken world. Like Mary, we dare to say, "Here I am, Lord. I am your servant. Use me."

Ms. Jen Jones, Director, Institutional Analytics, Institutional Research



December 15th, 2018
Mary Visits Elizabeth
Luke 1:39-45

Have you ever seen a couple tell their parents that they are about to become grandparents? There are endless videos online that share the sweetness of the moment that families share when they realize that this thing that they have hoped and prayed for is actually happening! What joy!

Mary has just heard the most incredible news she had heard up to this point in her young life: she will bear the Messiah. Every translation I read of verse 39 tells of Mary's rush to go to visit Elizabeth after learning this news from Gabriel. Mary likely also knew of Elizabeth's pregnancy and wanted to rejoice with her and share this special time with her. It amazes me that Elizabeth only had to hear Mary's greeting and the Holy Spirit filled her and she praised God for the child that Mary was carrying.

If there had been a video of this moment between these two women, I can just picture the joy, laughter, and probably a few tears as they shared this joyous news. What a confirmation for both women that God was doing something amazing- and they got to be a part of it! The long awaited Messiah was coming!

Have you ever prayed for something for a long time and wondered if God was going to answer? I think all of us have in some way or another. All throughout scripture we see the example of God's people waiting on God. Some of them waited years and never saw God's answer while others received an answer fairly quickly. When I read this passage, I was struck by verse 45: "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" (NIV) Mary trusted God to do what He said He would do- even when it seemed impossible.

This Christmas, I am going to be praying for faith like that. I want to not give up praying for the salvation of a friend or healing of a family member or any number of things that I've prayed for and not seen God's answer yet. Like Elizabeth and Mary, I want to be someone who trusts the Lord even when I cannot comprehend how it will happen. They praised the Lord in the middle of trusting Him- what an incredible example to follow!

Mary Catherine Carnes, Resident Director, Residence Life

Week 3

Joy



December 16th, 2018
Mary's Song of Praise
Luke 1: 46-56

As Mary lifts her song of praise to her God and Savior for being mindful of His humble servant, she acknowledges His mercy across the generations. She responds to His fulfilled promise by lifting her voice in praise and exultation.

Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, confirms the fulfillment of a vow to the nations...and the baby within her leaps for joy as a manifestation of the vow fulfilled in her.

Oh, the wonder and amazement! A spirit-filled experience followed by an outpouring of adoration and gratitude. Women, literally filled with life, connected by a powerful infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the "indefinable gift!" (2 Cor. 9:15)

Years later, Mary is kneeling. Weeping. Not tears of joy, but tears of agony at the sight of her Promised Child on the cross of Calvary. And in the days that follow...God fulfills His promise once more. The promise of victory over sin and death. The promise of a Risen Savior. And the whole of creation rejoices in the victory of the King of Kings!

Jesus is the "victorious one!" (Rev. 3:21)

We often seek the thrill of adventure, relationship, or accomplishment to experience what we perceive as joy. These substitutes are fleeting and unfulfilling when measured against the boundless grace of a relationship with Jesus Christ. Promises made are promises kept. When we delight ourselves in the Lord, He gives us the desire of our heart. (Ps. 37:4) Desires of His design rather than those of the world.

Jesus is the "Light of the World!" (John 8:12)

This Advent Season, seek authentic joy from the One who loves you beyond all measure. May your heart leap with exultation as you enter into the presence of the Savior this Christmas and always!

Dr. Christi Emerson, Associate Professor, Nursing



December 17th, 2018
The Birth of John the Baptist
Luke 1:57-66

The forerunner.....

Just as it sounds...forerunner is defined as: a person or thing that precedes the coming or development of someone or something else. This was the role of John the Baptist, to set the stage for the One who would follow.

My daughter, throughout her elementary, junior high and high school years followed her brother by three years. The name was uncommon enough that “everyone” knew who her big brother was...*He* was an athlete...*she* was a cheerleader; *He* made grades without effort, *she* struggled; *he* made friends and many of them easily, *she* was shy and introverted. So, *she* struggled...*she* cried...folks bullied...it was not fun.

Perhaps the reverse was true for John: the one to follow him was the chosen one. Yet, John was special, a special birth announcement, a special set of parents with a special set of circumstances. And his birth...even more special as was his birth announcement and circumcision. “Everyone (who heard about the events of Zechariah and his inability to speak and then the ability to speak) said what is this child (John) going to be. For the Lord’s hand is with him”.

Yet, this special forerunner of our Lord and Savior understood his birth, his role, and his message. He understood who the ‘Son’ would be and what His birth and forthcoming words of hope would mean for a nation, for a world.

He understood as he prepared the way for the One who would bring living water.

He understood at Jesus baptism, as he heard the voice of God. “This is My Son”

He understood as he faced a horrible death.

Oh, that we, this season, might be forerunners...oh that we would let NOTHING stop us as we share the price both John and Jesus paid.

Oh, that we might be obedient to all the Father asks.

Oh, that we might love and forgive as they did. That we might lead others to the one true God!

Dr. Sharon Souter, Professor, UMHB School of Nursing



December 18th, 2018
Zechariah's Song
Luke 1:67-80

We re-encounter Zechariah after John's birth. Zechariah has been unable to speak for months, but following his obedience, Zechariah begins to sing words inspired by the Holy Spirit. Zechariah breaks the silence by recounting God's faithfulness throughout time and proclaiming the way in which God would use this newborn child as the prophet that would identify the coming Messiah.

Zechariah had just witnessed the miracle of a birth and was now able to proclaim God's glory. The form of the song is a model for our own songs of praise today. The opening lines recount the ways God worked throughout history. The next section gives thanks to God for the blessing in the present, the birth of John. The focus of this thanks is not however on the present, but on the yet to come. The third and final portion of the song praises God for what He will do in and through John's life. Let our own songs and prayers of thanks follow this same pattern: thank God for what He has done in the past, thank God for what He has done in the present, and thank God for how He will use us in the future.

Father,

*Thank you for what you have done in looking on a world in need of a Savior
and meeting that need.*

*Thank you for the testimony of the women and men through the ages that have
found their hope and trust in you alone.*

*Thank you for what you do in our mundane lives on a daily basis;
for the way you work and intervene to bring glory to your Name.*

*And Father, thank you that you will use us not as passive spectators,
but as ministers of your gospel as we seek to share your love with a world that
waits for your return, just as Israel had waited for your Son's first advent.*

Use us and direct us to do your work,

Dr. Robert Pendergraft, Assistant Professor of Church Music



December 19th, 2018
The Census at Bethlehem
Luke 2:1-7

(If possible, view the painting, [The Census of Bethlehem](#) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. The painting depicts the scene in Luke 2:1-5.)

“Man proposes, but God disposes.” Rome ruled; God overruled.

Luke characteristically juxtaposed secular history with divine events. What might seem like a benign census was anything but. Through such decrees, empires wielded unrestrained control. In the best of times, benevolent emperors care for their people. In the worst of times, emperors suppress their subjects, such as Augustus, although some in his day referred to him (and other emperors) as a divine savior. The empire celebrated his birth as the beginning of good news.

In Luke 2:1-7, the beloved physician emphasized the secular setting of Jesus’ birth. Caesar Augustus ruled from Rome while Quirinius oversaw the registration of Jews in Palestine. Luke’s terse account of Jesus’ birth is fraught with overtones of subjugation. Augustus was the first of the Roman emperors who ruled over the *Pax Romana*, the peace of Rome. That time was indeed one of peace, at least the absence of outward conflict. Conquered nations knew that to rebel was to invite Roman retribution and forcible imposition of “peace.”

Joseph and Mary were but two of the many people who were uprooted by the *Pax Romana*. Augustus’s edict required that Joseph register, not in his hometown of Nazareth, but in Bethlehem, some seventy miles to the south. Mary accompanied Joseph, although Luke offers no explanation why. We might speculate that Joseph did not want her to be subjected to community’s whisperings about an unwed pregnant woman. Perhaps Rome required spouses to register. What is clear is that Rome was exercising its control of its subjects.

Perhaps Joseph and Mary joined a caravan for safety as they journeyed. One can only imagine the toll that the journey took on Mary. Barbara Robinson in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* describes them this way: “They looked like the people you see on the six o’clock news—refugees, sent to wait in some strange ugly place, with all their boxes and sacks around them.” Luke’s description of their accommodations is subject to multiple interpretations, but they are cramped and crowded. The infant Jesus was laid in a feed trough, because space was limited (“there was no place for them in the inn”). Lying in the manger, according to God’s plan was Jesus, God’s promised Messiah. “Man proposes; God disposes.”

*Dr. David Morgan, Adjunct Instructor, College of Christian Studies and Pastor,
Trinity Baptist Church, Harker Heights*



December 20th, 2018
Shepherds and Angels
Luke 2:8-20

Wearing a bathrobe, a bath towel draped on my head and a stick in my hand, my five-year-old self was transformed into a first-century Jewish shepherd gazing over Mary's shoulder at the newborn baby Jesus. So is my earliest memory of Luke's account of the shepherds and angels. As I recall, the angels got to do all the talking. We shepherds just stood there (except for the moment when I had to prompt one of my fellow actors who forgot her lines).

The shepherds always appear as Christmas props, standing and staring. Always the angels get the speaking parts. The angels get to announce the good news. They get to proclaim the baby Jesus as Savior, Messiah and Lord. The angels get to sing praises to God and proclaim favor to humanity. The shepherds just stand and stare.

Is there something more we can say about the shepherds? Most commentators aren't much help here. One points out that shepherds were dirty, often dishonest, nothing special. Yet, Luke seems to think these dirty, smelly props are important in the story. After all, no other group in all the world gets an official angelic announcement of the birth of Christ. Maybe the shepherds were important because they were not important. The Gospels often work that way. Jesus does the greatest miracles for unimportant people.

However, I think there is something more to it than just being unimportant props. After all, literally and metaphorically, shepherds are all through the Old Testament. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and David were all shepherds. Jeremiah and Ezekiel describe the leaders of Israel as shepherds, shepherds who failed, but shepherds nevertheless. At its height, the metaphor of shepherd describes God himself in the Psalms and the Prophets. In the New Testament, Jesus fulfills the prophecy of Ezekiel when he describes himself as "the Good Shepherd" who will lay down his life for the sheep. Even the apostles get in on the act as Jesus commands them to "feed my sheep."

I think Luke knew that no group was more demonstrative of the person and work of the newborn Savior than that of these humble shepherds. Smelly, dirty props they may be, but they stand and stare to remind us that we are the dirty, smelly sheep for whom He was not afraid to get down in the dirt to serve.

Dr. Bill Carrell, Professor, Christian Studies



December 21st, 2018
Mary's Unusual Child
Luke 2:1-21

While as a father, I can relate to the anticipation of a newborn child, I cannot fathom the heavenly anticipation of the birth of our newborn king, Jesus Christ. As Paul Bateman, *author of Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, so gloriously wrote,

*Join the triumph of the skies;
With th' angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born- King"*

As there was an unprecedented earthly anticipation of the birth of our Lord, there was even more of a celebration within the heavens. So much so that He sent a company of heavenly host to share the news and celebrate on Earth.

*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,
"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

As great as the earthly anticipation for Christ second coming may be, I can only imagine the heavenly anticipation as Christ prepares to return. May we prepare our hearts and voices to join in the *triumph of the skies*, and as we proclaim and praise the return of our King, our Messiah.

Dr. Brandon Skaggs, Vice President, Student Life



December 22nd, 2018
They Did it Right
Luke 2:22-24

The passage in Luke 2:22-24 is easily overlooked. Joseph and Mary were law abiding Jews. After the birth of a son the Law of Moses required certain rituals. Luke combines two of these in this passage.

The first was the purification of Mary (Leviticus 12). A woman became unclean at the time she gave birth. Under the law, she had to offer a sacrifice to become purified or clean. Since she was poor, she had to choose two birds for her sacrifice. It was either two doves or two pigeons (Leviticus 12:8). We are not told which bird she chooses.

The second ritual according to the Law of Moses was the presentation of the first born son to the Lord. Both parents participated in this. The first-born belonged to God for priestly service (Exodus 13:2). Since Jesus was presented by his parents, it symbolized he belonged to God. The question is; was all this necessary? Probably not. Mary needed to be purified according to the law. Jesus needed to be presented to God according to the law. Joseph and Mary did the right thing because it was the right way according to the law.

We live in a culture that does not always reward doing the right thing. We see people every day who get rewarded for doing the wrong thing. Students get higher grades because they cheat on tests; people get more money because they cheat on their income tax – our culture rewards doing the wrong thing for personal gain.

It has been said that there is never a right time to do the wrong thing. Joseph and Mary did the right thing because it was the right thing to do. Not because they had to but because it was important to them to set an example for their son that everything about His birth was done the right way.

Have you thought about ways you can do the right thing in your life even when you have the opportunity to do the wrong thing? Not a bad way to enter the Christmas season.

Dr. George Louthback, UMHB Chaplin, Spiritual Life

Week 4

Peace



December 23rd, 2018
Simeon Blesses God For Jesus
Luke 2:25-37

December 23 finds our family in transition every year. It is usually a day that we are wrapping things up at home before we travel to the homes of distant family or a day we feverishly finish cleaning the house getting ready to host blessed guests. Our kids refer to December 23 as Christmas Adam because Adam came just before Eve. (They also refer to it as Festivus, but that's not important right now.)

Today's reading finds us nearing the end of Luke's Gospel narrative about the birth of Christ. Luke stands apart from the other Gospels in his use of songs. The first and second chapters of Luke are a musical. The book pulses with tunes and soars with songs from Mary's family to our current reading, the song of Simeon.

Simeon was an old man who had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would one day see the Messiah. He stood watch, awaiting the promised one. This elderly sentinel (a century sentry?) was the sailor in the crow's nest looking for land, the night watchman awaiting dawn, the student furtively looking at the clock during class. Unlike the shepherds, who weren't waiting for anything, Simeon waited expectantly due to the Holy Spirit. In Luke's telling, we find him bursting into song when his long waiting days are over. After all of these years, he has finally seen the Christ child!

But Simeon's song takes us by surprise. Where the earlier songs of Mary, Zacharias, and others sing of pure joy at the new news, Simeon sings a song of experience, a somber song. Simeon sings in a minor key. You see, Simeon was waiting for (as he put it) the "*consolation of Israel*". Israel had been battered and bruised by empire and felt abandoned by God and longed for consolation and for healing. Israel bore a burden that only the Messiah could ease. The Holy Spirit guided Simeon to rightly understand that consolation would ultimately come from Messiah. Few, if any, of the first Christmas celebrants understood all that Messiah would mean. Simeon may have been the first to fully grasp that the visit of the Messiah would be a time of challenge and difficulty, not one simply of all conquering joy.

Simeon's blessing of the infant Jesus is itself a prayer of thanksgiving that Simeon has lived to see "Your Salvation." This child would be a light of revelation to the Gentiles, as Jesus' return overflowed the narrow banks of Israel and made a promised revelation to the Gentiles. Simeon concludes his song with a blessing to Mary. This final blessing foreshadows a darkening time, a day to come in which, Simeon says, a sword would pierce her own soul. Luke's narrative of the birth of Christ carries in its verses joys and sorrows, songs and laments, and most importantly, manglers and crosses.

Dr. John S. Vassar, Provost, Office of Academic Affairs



December 24th, 2018
A Long Wait
Luke 2:36-38

Waiting and serving: who likes it?

Anna was a prophetess who, after a short seven year marriage, never left the temple for 77 years (verse 36). From verse 37 we discover Anna was eighty-four. She was a woman serving night and day with fastings and prayers. That is a long time to pray.

We learn in verse 38 that “she came up (to Mary and Joseph) and began giving thanks to God and continued to speak of Him (God) to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem”. This implies strongly that Anna knew this small baby was God’s Son and Deliverer of Israel.

Remember on this day before we celebrate Jesus’ birth that nothing is impossible to God. Do not give up on that situation, unsaved loved one or perhaps it is someone caught up in an addiction. God knows your heart. Cry out to Him. “God is not slow about His promise but wishes that none should perish.” 2 Peter 3:9

Father, cause our hearts to be tender and receptive to Your word. May we not give up. May we pray continually. Cause us to seek Your will in all we do. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Nurse Debbie, UMHB Coordinator of Health Services



December 25th, 2018
Jesus Grew
Luke 2:39-40

Joseph and Mary have now completed all that was required by the law of the Lord. They returned to their hometown of Nazareth in Galilee. Perhaps they entered into a season of normal family life.

And Jesus grew! To grow is to progress to maturity, to become larger, to increase, to develop, and to flourish. Mature things bear fruit, reproducing after their own kind, according to their nature. And Jesus' nature expressed itself in strength and wisdom; and God's favor was with Him. Let's explore these characteristics further.

Strength: the capacity for exertion or endurance; the power to resist force or withstand pressure; solidity or toughness. We will soon see this in Jesus as he faces tests and temptations in the wilderness...and throughout His earthly ministry.

Wisdom: the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment. Jesus would have been familiar with Proverbs, where the first 7 chapters were repeatedly call "my son(s)" to wisdom. Truly the Spirit of Wisdom rested upon Him (Isaiah 1: 2).

Favor: the approval, support, goodwill, kindness, benevolence, assistance, and liking of God. (It is dear to know the Father likes His Son.) The Father affirms this at the start of Jesus' public ministry by announcing at His baptism, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).

It encourages me that Jesus grew. He did not appear on Earth fully grown. He went through the process of development that possibly included occasional awkwardness and learning things the hard way. Like we do.

We are also invited to grow, as He did.. "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

"Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity..." (Hebrews 6:1).

"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ"(Ephesians 4:15).

The Father intends to conform us to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29), and He will grow us to be both uniquely ourselves and truly like Him. "He does not demand impossibilities." (Henry Charles Lee) Jesus grew. So will we grow closer to and more like Him. God knows what He's about!

Dr. Shawn Shannon, Spiritual Life, Director of Baptist Student Ministry



Thanks-Giving
Thanks Be to God for His Indescribable Gift!
2 Corinthians 9:15

Thank you, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, for cultivating an environment where Christ is sought, followed, and celebrated.

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Thank you, Lord, for being so good, caring so much, and doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. You know what you are about. We praise you.

Dr. Shawn Shannon
Advent 2018