

Advent

2016 Devotional Guide



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“We have found the Messiah.”

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. John 1:41, 42

The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.” John 4:25, 26

Introduction: Shawn Shannon

First Week: HOPE

Sunday, November 27th: Isaiah 40:1-5 – Dr. David Morgan, Pastor and Adjunct Professor
Monday, November 28th: Haggai 2:6, 7 – Dr. Shawn Shannon, Director, Baptist Student Ministry
Tuesday, November 29th: Malachi 3:1-3 – Dr. Robert Pendergraft, Assistant Professor, Church Music
Wednesday, November 30th: Isaiah 7:14 – Katy Hartt, Assistant Director, Student Organizations
Thursday, December 1st: Isaiah 40:9 – Laura Yates, Senior Psychology Major
Friday, December 2nd: Isaiah 60:1-3 – John Robinson, Missionary in Residence
Saturday, December 3rd: Isaiah 9:2, 6 – Dr. Jim King, Professor, McLane College of Business

Second Week: LOVE

Sunday, December 4th: Luke 2:8 – Rebeka Retta, Resident Director, College View Apartments
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Tuesday, December 6th: Isaiah 35:5, 6 – Dr. Michelle Roueche, Director of Choral Studies
Wednesday, December 7th: Isaiah 40:11 - Larry Locke, Associate Dean, McLane College of Business
Thursday, December 8th: Matthew 11:28-30 – Dr. Sharon Souter, Dean, College of Nursing
Friday, December 9th: John 1:29 – Karl Baker, Assistant Baptist Student Ministry Director
Saturday, December 10th: Isaiah 53:3-6 – Brent Harris, Vice President for Information Technology

Third Week: JOY

Sunday, December 11th: Psalm 22:7, 8 – Jen Jones, Director, Data Quality and Institutional Analytics, Information Technology
Monday, December 12th: Psalm 16:10 – Dr. Carol Holcomb, Professor of Church History
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Wednesday, December 14th: Hebrews 1:5, 6 – Tiffany Wurdemann, Director, Student Organizations
Thursday, December 15th: Psalm 68:18, 11 – Kendyll Robinson, Junior Cell Biology Major
Friday, December 16th: Romans 10:15, 18 – Mary Catherine Carnes, Resident Director, Burt Hall
Saturday, December 17th: Psalm 2:1-4 – Traci Squarcette, Resident Director, Independence Village

Fourth Week: PEACE

Sunday, December 18th: Revelation 19:6, 16 – Dr. Renate Hood, Professor, College of Christian Studies
Monday, December 19th: Revelation 11:15 – Evan Duncan, College and Media Pastor, FBC/Temple
Tuesday, December 20th: Job 19:25, 26 – Brian Street, Resident Director, Gettys Hall
Wednesday, December 21st: 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 – Dr. Ken Smith, Dean, McLane College of Business
Thursday, December 22nd: I Corinthians 15:51-54 – Dylan Mathis, BSM Campus Missionary Intern
Friday, December 23rd: I Corinthians 15:55-57 – Dr. Marty McMahon, Claude McBride Professorship and Asst. Director, Honors Program
Saturday, December 24th: Romans 8:31, 33, 34 – Dr. Christi Emerson, Assistant Professor, College of Nursing
Christmas, December 25th: Revelation 5:12, 13 – Dr. Bill Carrell, Professor, Director of Church Relations

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Introduction

“We have found the Messiah.”

John 1:41

The first Big Story I remember hearing was about King Arthur, his court, and the kingdom of Camelot. Later, I relished my “visits” to Narnia. And then ventured into Middle Earth through *The Lord of the Rings*.

These stories had several things in common: there were kings, heroes, and other admirable characters. There were companies and communities of those who made common cause together. There was treachery, loyalty, and transformation of character. There were kingdoms in peril and matters of life and death to face. And they inspired me.

I discovered that a good and large story goes a long way to sustain and encourage me this side of heaven.

Missions Mosaic did a series on “Religions Among Us” this past year. Their key definition of postmodernism stated that it is characterized by “incredulity toward metanarratives.” This includes no longer believing any grand story about history, either religious or secular. (I hope postmodern thinkers are not being stereotyped here!)

In contrast, I find such comfort in trusting that there is a larger story than just what I experience in this life. I felt very sad that there are those who are skeptical about such things. I am greatly helped by believing there is a great story that is not only long and large, but also ultimately good. For it has the most wonderful Author who is good, wise, and able, who knows what He is about.

And God so loving the world through/in Jesus is the greatest story of all. The Old Troubles, the ancient longings, the coming of the Promised One, and the anticipated Second Coming... these are elements in the larger story of Advent. This year’s readings follow the scriptural text of Handel’s *Messiah*. We are invited to look back, look ahead, and look around! And to see the Messiah with fresh vision.

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. John 1:41, 42

The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us.”

Jesus declared, “I the one speaking to you—I am He.” John 4:25, 26

Messiah! Tell us this old, old story anew! Help us find you afresh! Amen.

Dr. Shawn Shannon, Director, Baptist Student Ministry

Week 1

Hope



November 27th *Comfort Ye* **Isaiah 40:1-5**

I'm addicted to Christmas music, both sacred and secular. I'm so addicted that I force myself to adhere to strict rule of not listening until after lunch on Thanksgiving Day.

I, however, make one exception. I'll flood my playlist with Christmas tunes while writing advent devotionals. "Tunes" doesn't fit this year. Because this, and the devotionals that follow, are inspired by Handel's Messiah, I've listened often to it. Passages, compiled from the King James Bible Charles Jennens supply the content of Messiah. These help us anticipate and celebrate the coming of the Long-Expected One.

Messiah begins with God's promises as spoken by the prophets and ending with Christ's glorification in heaven. The oratorio is written in three parts that follow the liturgical year. Part I corresponds with Advent, Christmas, and the life of Jesus. Part II treats Lent, Easter, the Ascension, and Pentecost. Part III draws the church year to a close—dealing with the end of time.

Part I opens with a Sinfony, written in a minor key which creates a sense of hopelessness in the reader (Sinfony). The first words, "comfort ye," offer hope. It has been suggested that the rising and dropping phrases suggest the extent of the rough places that would be crossed (Comfort Ye).

God was promising the Israelites that He would restore them to Jerusalem. A lone tenor voice proclaims the first prophecy from Isaiah, that Jerusalem has paid the penalty and God promises comfort.

In Isaiah's time, disconsolate Israelite exiles toiled in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's army had leveled Jerusalem's walls, plundered the temple therein, and marched Israel's leaders to Babylon.

We may need the words of Messiah as much as the first audience did 275 years ago. The United States is processing a recent presidential election. Bitter and acrimonious campaigns have left a nation anxious about its future. A student commented to me this semester that he/she hoped Jesus would return before November. He didn't. Our world remains darkened by sin and separation. Some remained enslaved to hopelessness. Are we so separated from God that hope has been lost?

Listen. A lone voice cries out that God is comforting God's people. God is promising to set things right. An upside down world will be replaced by ground leveled by God. He's not here yet. We remain in the darkness. But be comforted: Our redemption is drawing near.

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



November 28th
What is Desired by All Nations Will Come
Haggai 2:6, 7

Haggai served as prophet when Judah had returned from her exile in Babylon and was rebuilding the temple. His name carries the meaning of “my holiday,” “celebration,” or “festive.” What a fitting moniker for this season of the year!

God’s people-come-home had begun rebuilding the temple when they were stopped by the intrigues of the Samaritans. Following an eighteen-year long pause, Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people to resume the work. Haggai exhorted them with repeated messages of “Be strong; I am with you. Do not fear.” And so they built together.

God also communicates through Haggai that He will “shake,” and shake all that can be shaken: heavens, earth, sea, land, and nations. We shake things to stir, separate or settle them. Perhaps God was doing a bit of all of these functions with His shaking. Whatever else shaking does, it rearranges things and they are not as they were. This declaration of shaking is the setting for two wonderful announcements:

“What is desired by all nations will come.”

“I will fill this house with glory.”

And the glory of this temple will be greater than the previous temple, even as worldly glory is surpassed by heavenly glory.

So it is that “what” is desired by all nations turns out to be “Who.” You know Who. In the midst of the restoration of good things, the Better comes. I have watched my friend Colton White (college pastor, First Baptist, Belton) experience significant losses of family members. Through-out his mourning, he consistently communicated that “Jesus is better.” What a precious truth!

Hear the ancient message: be strong; rebuild; do not fear; watch for the Desire of Nations. He has come! He will come!

Dr. Shawn Shannon, Director, Baptist Student Ministry



November 29th
For He is like a Refiner's Fire
Malachi 3:1-3

Throughout the Old Testament, God sent individuals to be His messengers to the people of Israel. He sent judges, prophets, and in this text promised to send John the Baptist. All of these were mortal men or women bringing a message from God to His chosen people. The promise made in this text, however, is not only that God would send John the Baptist to prepare the way; the Lord himself would come to earth!

As exciting as it must have been to hear that the Lord would come, something even more remarkable is demonstrated in the verses that follow. The last verse of the previous chapter showed that the people of Israel were looking for the God of justice to come. The promise could have been made that the God of justice would come in judgment and rain down wrath on the people of Israel, but that is not what is prophesied. Rather, Malachi states that when the Lord comes it will not be for the immediate judging of the sins of the people, but rather the Lord will come to purify His people for his glorious work of redemption. The Lord will come to restore His people so that they may be found worthy of being in a relationship with Him.

Just as the children of Israel found hope in the Lord coming not to judge but to save, we can find hope this advent season in the Lord's return to earth being a time of joy rather than torment for those found to be in Christ. Our God is a just God, but even in His justice he looked down on us in our sinful state and sent His only Son to be a perfect sacrifice that we may be placed in the Refiner's Fire and come out as pure and holy, worthy to approach God the Father in the righteousness of Jesus Christ His Son.

Dr. Robert Pendergraft, Assistant Professor, Department of Music



November 30th
Hope Born on a Holy Night
Isaiah 7:14

We have hope knowing that the Lord gave us a sign that Mary would conceive and have a Son named Immanuel, meaning God with us.

This summer I was able to go and see where Christ was born. Thinking back to that very moment is something I will never forget. I remember being overwhelmed with emotions as I was walking down into the grotto seeing this very spot where our hope of the world was born! The Church of the Nativity marks the spot today, there in Bethlehem. There were people everywhere coming to see this special place that is so important to our Christian faith.

O Holy night, the stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth

While down in the grotto we sang with just our voices *O Holy Night*. Filled with so much emotion the words were hard to get out, knowing in this very cave Christ was brought into this world for me, for you, for all of us! The sweet sound of everyone's voices filling the small cave worshipping our God, was truly a wonderful experience that will make Christmas a little more special for the years to come with these memories.

Coming out of the grotto our, Christian guide spoke of Matthew 2:11. This was the place the wise men came to see this child in the house to worship him and bring him gifts. These two places are one in the same. The house was just above where He was born in the basement cave of the house where the animals were kept. He came to change the world in a lowly manger found in the grotto, below the house. People were flocking to see this child then, and people are still today flocking to see this important place where He was born.

As we celebrate the Advent season may we be reminded of those feelings that were stirred when Christ came for us on that Holy night long ago. Let's remember our hope that is found in Christ. Let's remember this Advent season there are others who are wanting to flock to a hope found only through Christ, and what better time than now when we celebrate the birth of our Savior!

Mrs. Katy Hartt, Assistant Director, Student Organizations



December 1st
Here Is Your God
Isaiah 40:9

A child running to show his mom his artwork.

Getting an A on a test and telling all your friends.

Hiking up a hill to see the sunset and Snapchatting the photos.

What do all of these scenarios have in common? We love to share good news with others. We cannot contain our excitement when we receive a raise, when we get engaged, when we enjoy a relaxing vacation.

So why do we hesitate to share the greatest news of all with others?

Fear. We fear rejection. We fear the opinion of man. We fear failure. We forget that the King of the universe came to a filthy stall in a mangy barn and took on the limitations of our leathery skin, salty tears, and fragile heartbeat. He subjected Himself to our pain and sorrow, growing ever greater until it climaxed with His brutal torture and death. Because of us.

I forget this sometimes. I forget the God who became a servant of all. I forget that He has called me to bring this life-giving news to a weary world, and to show them by my words and actions “Here is your God!”

He is here, inviting us to join Him in the greatest story ever told, begun with the love song sung into the chaos and climaxing with the Love Song that thundered out on the cross, “It is finished!”

Emmanuel. Say it again, breathing the name in and then out slowly. Our God is here with us, in our very breath and very being.

Our God is here with us. Let us not forget that. Let us use our time with others this Christmas season to share the greatest news in history, that our God dwells in us, is with us, and will be our God forever. (Rev. 21:3)

Ms. Laura Yates, Senior Psychology major



December 2nd

Glory and Light come to Darkness

Isaiah 60:2-3

With that strange mix of excitement and dread common to every performer, I recall vividly a younger version of myself, one of the soloists in a performance of Handel's "Messiah," standing on stage and facing a vast audience. Suddenly the orchestra behind me began familiar notes in a minor key with the pulsating and increasing intensity of whole and half-step alteration in sixteenth and eighth note succession, building with each note and phrase a sense of foreboding. The orchestra stopped its brief introduction, having set the mood, and with my being caught up in the musical moment I began to sing the words of Isaiah 60:2: "*For behold! Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people.*" As I sang these words, the orchestra's accompaniment continued in that same minor-key, almost as ominous a way as before. Then, and just as suddenly, the music changed profoundly. We found ourselves in a major key and the evocative perhaps even frenetic rhythms of the previous section were replaced with unison eighth notes, almost as a march of triumph to introduce the next part of the text – "*But the Lord shall arise upon thee.*" The music became practically lyrical, by the time I sang "*and His glory shall be seen upon thee.*" It culminated with the "serious" tone of a concluding minor key to accompany verse 3: "*And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.*"

As a missionary, who happens also to be a musician, there are Scripture passages like this one in Isaiah 60:2-3 that I can scarce read without hearing in my mind's ear the musical strains of Handel's work. My imagination is further emboldened by this musical/missionary juxtaposition through the allegorical imagery of C.S. Lewis, who presents the Christ-figure, Aslan, *singing* into existence all that is and would be (*The Magician's Nephew*). Having sung and read these words, I wonder what soul music filled Isaiah, as he in his prophetic office delivered the Lord's message here in Isaiah 60:2-3? Isaiah takes seriously the reality and danger of darkness – it is no illusion or mere inconvenience. In contrast, he also introduces hope, restoration and renewal of purpose in the promise of that glorious light who is coming, a King to put right what is wrong, the fulfillment of the covenant with God's people in such a way that even the Gentiles are drawn to and included in this new Kingdom, forever destroying the wall that divides "us" from "them." This coming King and unified Kingdom as the fulfillment of God's purpose and promise for His creation is truly "Good News" for all and by anyone's standards.

However, it is at this point that the joy of this soul's music of a Kingdom and King, who has come and even now reigns and rules, turns our hearts to the missionary task. There are millions who don't know that the King has come and ransomed us from the slavery of sin and delivered us into a Kingdom and new creation. They continue to live in the darkness we encounter in Isaiah's prophecy. As citizens of this new Kingdom, we must be the means of extending our King's light to the world, so that His glory might truly be seen upon all of us.

Rev. John Robinson, Missionary in Residence, Spiritual Life



December 3rd
The Great Light
Isaiah 9:2,6

“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined...For unto Us a Child is born, unto Us a Son is give, and the government shall be upon His shoulder. And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

How dark can darkness get? Possibly darker than the darkest night? When one walks in such darkness, many thoughts go through the mind. How long will the darkness last? Is it possible to find one’s way in such darkness? What will happen if the way is lost in the darkness? Can it possibly get any darker? Hesitation and uncertainty set in. Doubt and fear take control. The shadow of death looms...

Darkness is the absence of light. And many times that absence is difficult to overcome. But often, with the absence of light, comes the longing and hope for light. Dreams and faith bring encouragement and confidence that a great light will soon shine. Then when that great light is seen, when the darkness is broken, The Way is found. Darkness is overcome. The Light defeats death!

Wonderful. Counselor. Prince of Peace. Everlasting Father. Mighty God. Overcomer of darkness. Defeater of death. The Great Light of the world. Jesus! My Jesus!!

If you have ever walked in the deepest darkness of life; if you have ever dwelled in the shadow of death; if you have ever doubted or feared - you know what hope and encouragement The Light brought to you when His brightness shined down.

Now is the time to allow Him to be The Light to others through you. Through you will He erase their doubts and fears; through you will He bring them hope and encouragement; through you will The Light defeat eternal death; through you will the world see The Great Light! For unto us a Child is born. Jesus! My Jesus!!

Dr. Jim King, Professor, McLane College of Business

Week 2

Love



December 4th
What's love got to do with it?
Luke 2:8

When Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge announced the birth of their child, Prince George, there was such a celebration in England. People lined the streets anticipating and keeping watch for his arrival. Reporters camped out and kept watch by the hospital in hopes of getting pictures of Prince George. As soon as the Prince arrived the news spread quickly announcing the birth of this child who would be third in line to be king after his paternal grandfather Prince Charles of Wales. It was an event that will be recorded in history.

In our scripture today we read about another group who kept watch: shepherds. But in this story unlike the people and reporters in England they had no clue of the announcement they were soon to receive. In Hebrew, shepherd means “one who tends”. Shepherds were required to be watchful and take care of all the sheep under their care. If one strayed, the shepherd would search for the lost sheep until it was found. His life was one of focus. Shepherding was a difficult life and even one of danger. The shepherd was exposed to the extremes of cold and heat and many times had to fight off attacks of wild animals while protecting their fold. They lived and breathed sheep so you can just imagine that their social skills were possibly limited. I have not even addressed the smell that would come with this job being outside and among sheep. I feel certain that this group would not be invited to many social functions of their day. So why then would God choose this group of men to be one of the first to hear about the birth of our Savior? Why, would God choose this group to be one of His first messengers? I believe that it was God showing His love for those who would be considered outcasts to be the first to be revealed the birth of Jesus, the King of Kings. They were simple men going about doing what they were called to do...tend sheep.

You see there are no social classes with God. The Good News is for all, even simple, smelly shepherds. Our Creator wants all to know that the Savior, Messiah has come to save us all from our sins.

Share this message of His love to all as you go about your day because “Love has everything to do with it”.

Rebeka A. Retta, RD & Coordinator Training and Publications, Res Life



December 5th
“Is Jesus the One You Are Looking for?”
Zachariah 9:9 & Luke 19:28-40

In Luke 19:28-40, we have a detailed description about the time Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday and before He was crucified on Friday. This event is known as the Triumphant Entry and is a fulfillment of a prophecy found in Zachariah 9:9. The event was exactly the opposite of what the Jews expected from their Messiah. The word “messiah” means “deliverer”. The Jews expected a political leader, not a spiritual leader. They expected a triumphant, charismatic leader who would destroy the power of Rome and make them a great nation as Israel had been under the reign of King David and King Solomon. Nothing in their Jewish background prepared them to follow a Messiah who would suffer and die. Even His own disciples struggled with the concept.

Zachariah tells us that the King is coming. He is righteous and He is humble. He is riding on a colt of a donkey. The donkey was not an animal that symbolized war or victory; it was a symbol of peace. Jesus came to bring peace. This peace is not an absence of trials or struggles in life. It is a peace that brings contentment and joy to life regardless of the circumstances.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem that Sunday on the colt, He blew away all preconceived ideas about His role as the Messiah. The crowds laid down their coats and palm branches and proclaimed “Hosanna, Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord”. However, this same crowd, when faced with the reality that Jesus was not going to be the “Messiah” they envisioned, pronounced His death sentence and approved of His crucifixion.

Many times life does not look like what we expect. There is illness, financial issues, relationship problems, and so on. Every one of us must decide if we will continue to have faith in the One who came to us on a colt, or look for another who will do life the way we want it. Where will Jesus be in your life this Christmas season? Only you can decide.

Dr. George Louthback, UMHB Chaplain, Spiritual Life



December 6th
Seeing Things Differently
Isaiah 35:5-6

Listening has become a lost art. How many really good listeners do you know? In most conversations, are you truly listening to understand. . . or secretly waiting to interject your next response? Social Media has definitely fueled this problem! Now that everyone has a guaranteed audience on Facebook and Twitter, most people are much too eager to post their opinions. *Let me tell you what I think!* Many tweeters would be wise to read Proverbs 18:2: “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion.” These days, it seems there is little interest in understanding others. No one is listening.

In the Kairos Prison Ministry, volunteers go into the prisons to share the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. At first, most prisoners are not interested in this ministry. They are expecting only judgment and condemnation. However, the Kairos motto is refreshingly simple: *Listen. Listen. Love. Love.* Countless prisoners have turned their hearts over to Jesus through this powerful ministry. They discovered the love of Christ simply because someone listened without judgment.

When Jesus is truly in our hearts, we begin to see things differently. As it says in today’s Isaiah passage, “Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped!” Jesus helps us see with spiritual eyes. Jesus helps us see people the way God sees us.

Matthew 7:7 tells us, “Seek and you will find.” When we look for Jesus in each person we meet, we will find Him. Mother Teresa affirmed, “Each one of them is Jesus in disguise.” But in order to recognize Him, we have to listen first.

As we prepare our hearts for the coming of our Savior, let us practice every day:

Listen. Listen. Love. Love.

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



December 7th
Carried in the Arms of the Good Shepherd
Isaiah 40:11

**He will tend his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms;
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young. Isaiah 40:11**

Most of us probably grew up reading today's text with a very peaceful mental picture of Christ, the Good Shepherd, gently carrying a lamb in His arms. We can picture the lamb very relaxed, legs and hooves curled up under its body, with its head resting against Christ's chest, eyes closed and almost asleep.

That is because we don't know much about lambs.

Once when I was a pastor, I had one of our local farmers bring a lamb into the Sunday morning church service as a visual aid of how humbly and plainly the Lord of glory had cast himself in the drama of redemption. It was a great illustration, but one thing it was not was peaceful. The lamb bucked and squirmed and bleated the whole time. The farmer had to grip the little animal tight against his chest to keep him from jumping down and blitzing through the sanctuary.

Lambs are self-willed little creatures. So are we. Christ came to tend us because we need to be tended. He came to rescue us from the deadly paths we are on and carry us to safety. He gathers us up because we don't have the wisdom or discipline to stay close to Him on our own. Sure, He loves us when we are obediently resting on His grace. He also loves us when we are bucking and kicking against Him with all our might.

This advent season, thank the Lord for His strong arms and loving heart. Stop kicking, and humbly submit yourself to what the Lord is doing in your life and thank Him for all His care.

Larry Locke, Associate Professor, Management



Date: December 8th
His yoke is easy; His burden light
Matthew 11:28-30

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.

Each year at Christmas I pause as I think about Mary's burden. I remember my own and my daughter's pregnancies as we neared "term" and how uncomfortable we were at times. We were not riding great distances on the back of a donkey with only a thin blank between our body and that of the animal. We did not travel for days. We did not 'deliver' in a stable and we had physicians and nurses nearby. What a difference for young Mary and what a commitment she made. What a sacrifice.

I think of the burden of the cross, of its pain and shame. Yet Jesus carried it without comment or request for relief.

I feel certain that you, like I, have felt burdened this year. Burdened by family illness or loss; by students' failures or needs' by hours of grading; by needs of family and friends. Jesus said: come to Me, give up your burdens...in Me you will find rest. The rest is a promise as we learn from Jesus, who is 'meek and lowly in heart'. I think of rest for my soul, from my weariness.

I think of the many people who need Jesus to find this relief. I think of how I take it for granted and absent mindedly ask for His help on a casual basis, and I feel remorse and seek forgiveness.

Please know that God loves you. He thinks you are worth everything. He sent His son to pay the price for you and to take on your yoke.... your problems.

As you think of Jesus this Christmas, place your burdens at His feet and celebrate what His sacrifice provides...

For God so love....so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son.... for YOU and Me.

Dr. Sharon Souter, Dean, College of Nursing



December 9th
What Does God Look Like?
John 1:29

“John saw Jesus coming toward him and said,
‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’”

Look! The call of action to turn, to stop, to notice. John the Baptizer is the one who is calling those around to take notice, to acknowledge the significance of Jesus.

When we see Jesus, we see the fullest representation of the living God. Jesus reveals the heart of God. So in John 1:29, John the Baptizer proclaims what God looks like. God is not a vengeful dictator or self-consumed leader. God is not a warrior looking for blood or a ruler waiting to flex his power. Rather, the God revealed through Christ looks like a peaceful, humble, loving and slaughtered lamb. At the center of our Christian faith is a wounded lamb.

As Christmas comes this year, let’s remember at the center of the universe is a God who is willing to be put to death so that we may have life. God is willing to become humble and weak so we may no longer be defeated by sin and death. God comes as a baby, so He can die on a cross. The love of God is seen in unfathomable self-sacrifice. Jesus reigns as a wounded lamb. And for those reasons, we call people to look and see. The King has come, He King is unlike any other kingdom, and His Kingdom will have no end!

Karl Baker, Assistant Director, Baptist Student Ministry



December 10th
He Was Despised
Isaiah 53:3-6

But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

Christ was and is the atonement for our sins. He took on our iniquities as the ultimate sacrifice for our sin that we could be made whole and restored into relationship with God, the ultimate healing. It's Roman Road 101, right? It's the foundation of our Christian faith and certainly the greatest of all news. However, I wonder if we're too quick to skip over verses 3 and 4 of Isaiah 53 where Jesus' life is characterized as despised . . . rejected . . . a man of suffering . . . acquainted with infirmity . . . stricken . . . afflicted.

I spend much of my time, money, and energy trying to insulate myself and the ones I love from pain. However, Jesus seems to model a life of walking directly into pain and suffering. Though we will certainly never experience the level of suffering of Jesus, loneliness, disappointment, rejection and pain are some of the most important benchmarks of the human experience. If we are so consumed with protecting ourselves and the ones we love from pain, we risk not being transformed more fully into the likeness of Christ as a result of that pain. It is often through the dark night that God reveals Himself most profoundly.

As Richard Rohr puts it in *Adam's Return*, "It seems that nothing less than some kind of pain will force us to release our grip on our small explanations and our self-serving illusions. Resurrection will always take care of itself, whenever death is trusted. .. It is the cross, the journey into the necessary night, that we must be convinced of, and the resurrection is offered as a gift." (pg. 38)

Pain and suffering that is not transformational is often deflected onto others, leading to cynicism, broken relationships, emptiness and paralysis in one's relationship with God. In this season of Advent marked by a yearning for the long-awaited Messiah, may our prayer be that we are transformed into the likeness of Christ through all of life's experiences and may we never forget that ultimately by His bruises we are healed. Thanks be to God!

Brent Harris, Vice President for Information Technology

Week 3

Joy



December 11th ***He Trusted in God*** **Psalm 22:7, 8**

The church I attend always reads the entirety of Psalm 22 on Maundy Thursday, the Thursday before Easter. It's a solemn time. We know that the cross is ahead of us. So, when I saw that these verses from Psalm 22 were the first ones of the week labeled **JOY** in the Advent guide, it felt a little jarring. In fact, Psalm 22 begins like this: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" – the very same words Jesus himself cries out from the cross.

This does not immediately bring joy to mind.

Verse 7 is all about people mocking the Psalmist. Making faces at him. Shaking their heads. Taunting him, "*If your God is so great, let HIM deliver you!*"

But in that mocking tone, true joy is foretold.

Joy and happiness are not the same thing. Happiness is fleeting. A temporary sense of delight. Happiness makes you feel good for a little while. But joy is something different. Joy is deep and abiding. Joy can exist regardless of the immediate circumstances. In fact, the entire book of Philippians is Paul's description of how joy not only exists in the presence of suffering, but is strengthened by it.

Happiness depends on external things: a really good meal, a good grade on a paper, winning a game. Joy is deep within. It's a gift from God that gives us peace and a calm assurance that the best is yet to come. Joy comes from knowing that God is in charge; knowing that no matter how the world is caving in around us, God is on His throne. No matter how we are treated, even if we're mocked and taunted like the Psalmist was, when we trust in the Lord we experience joy.

Joy is knowing that Jesus cried out "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" but that He was not forsaken. Joy is knowing that after the pain of Good Friday comes the beauty of Easter morning, and the promise of Resurrection. Joy is the gift of the Christ child and the redeeming grace He brings.

Psalm 22 ends in a shout of praise. I pray that today you are filled with the joy that comes from knowing Christ our Deliverer.

Jen Jones, Director Institutional Analytics, Information Technology



December 12th
Christmas is Only the Beginning
Psalm 16:10

One Sunday when my son, Andrew, was about 4 years old, he was leaning his head against my shoulder at church. The minister was narrating the events of Good Friday and pronounced, “Jesus was crucified and died.” Andrew sat up with a jerk, turned to me and said in full voice, “Jesus *died?*” I said, “Yes, shhhh.” He shook his little head and said, “Uh oh. That is *not* good.” Andrew thought we were in big trouble. Even a child understood that if Christ is not risen, then we are all doomed.

The apostle Paul said that “If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is futile.” If life is only suffering that “ends in a box,” then our hope is an illusion and our joy a self-deception. Christ humbled himself and entered the world through a manger. But this was only the beginning! Thank heaven, we are not in “big trouble!” There is Good News! We have faith in the very thing the Psalmist trusted—that God would not let the “Holy One see decay.” It was my privilege to tell Andrew that Christ is risen! The viciousness of the cross has been overcome by joy.

Several years ago Shawn Shannon gave me a CD for Christmas called “Keeping the Baby Awake.” One of the songs on that album has become my favorite Christmas hymn. The poet, Richard Wilbur, walks us from the manger to the cross and ends with an empty tomb. The last stanza says: “And every stone shall cry in praises of this child, by whose descent among us the worlds are reconciled.”

Christ has reconciled the world to himself and calls us to join this work of reconciliation. He did not give the order to abandon ship or to shelter in place! Instead, Jesus calls us to brave a dangerous world with a message of good news for the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed. He calls us to silence viciousness with love and to quiet cruelty with hope.

Another of my favorite hymns says it this way: “This is my Father’s world: the battle is not won. Jesus who died shall be satisfied. And Earth and Heav’n be one.” Christmas is only the beginning!

Dr. Carol Crawford Holcomb, Professor of Christian Studies



December 13th
And the King of Glory Shall Come In
Psalm 24:7-10

Psalm 24: 7-10

Lift up your heads, oh you gates; be lifted up, you everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, you gates; lift up, you everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord Almighty—He is the King of glory.

In the fall of 2010 my oldest boy Ben stood with me as we spoke to our former pastor Van Vowell. Van had slipped into a coma the night before and the family had been told that it was not likely that he would awaken. Darkness had come unexpectedly and torn a father away from his two children and a friend away from our family.

It is no small thing that moments like this come. Such remind me of the thin veil of strength that I enjoy; deciding what I will do or where I will go. That said, I knew Van would have wanted us, in his darkness, to proclaim the hope that he had heralded and trusted in so many years of his life; so that is what we did.

Ben had memorized Psalm 24 and so there we took our stand next to Van. I held both the limp hand of my friend and the hand of my little boy and recited with Ben this triumphant Psalm. The nurses told us that Van might hear our words, "He founded," "He who has clean hands," "Lift up your heads oh ye gates," and "the King of Glory shall come in", so we both said them as if he could hear us.

Ben and I finished the Psalm hoping it had pierced the darkness and the fear that Van must have felt (if he indeed heard us). May the words of this Christmas season do the same for you. May you hear His words "Emmanuel, God with us, and may it pierce your darkness and quiet your fears. As we eat, and greet friends and family, may the talk of a lowly one born in a manger comfort us all once again.

Dr. Paul Primrose, Associate Professor, Chemistry



December 14th
Awe and Wonder
Hebrews 1:5, 6

A few summers ago, I had the opportunity to summit Mt. Reiner with my brother. In the process, I felt engulfed by how vast the mountain range went on for what seemed like forever. My sophomore year of college, my dad was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer and given 6 months to live. After 6 months the tumor had grown to a softball size in his throat to the point of nearly suffocating him. The day his surgery was scheduled, there was no tumor to be found, no ounce of cancer that remained in his body. He is still alive today. When I was 5, I came down with the chicken pox. My mom stayed up all night with me to make sure I knew it was going to be okay.

The stories above are all things that I stand in awe and wonder about. They remind me of things the Lord has created that are beyond my comprehension, miracles that have saved the life of my father and family, and the compassion my mother showed me that only the Lord could have modeled. They are also characteristics that represent Christ. The more experiences I have, the more I become acquainted with our Lord, the more I stand in awe and complete worship for Him.

In the passage, it talks about how the only person God has commanded us to worship besides Himself is His Son. Not even the angels were on the level where God put Christ. And even the angels are commanded to worship Christ. Take a moment to try to comprehend that. Take another moment to think about the things that make you stand in awe. If we truly knew Christ, would we need to be commanded to worship Him?

This season, we have the opportunity to be reminded of the birth of our Lord and Savior. When you find yourself unable to press on, take time to sit and wonder about the biggest gift we could never fully comprehend that has been entrusted to us--the relationship with the Creator of the universe. He knows you, He provides for you. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Tiffany Wurdemann, Director of Student Organizations, Student Life



December 15th
You Ascended on High
Psalm 68:18

You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there.

We often refuse to notice, or maybe we are too self-absorbed to see, but the truest joy in our lives grows from the deepest despair. This is not a popular way of thinking, but test it and see if it holds true for you.

*Think of a low point in your life.
How did God use it to bring about His good and perfect will?*

In the midst of a trial it is difficult to know how God could possibly turn our ashes into beauty, but invariably He does. It's doubtful Joseph comprehended why his beloved Mary was pregnant. Mary could not have known why she had nothing more to comfort her sweet child than the cold stone of a livestock trough. As the disciples watched Jesus be mocked, stripped, beaten, and killed they were completely unaware of how this seemingly tragic situation could possibly be redeemed. But it was.

As we are given the advantage of looking backward through time, we see a truth in scripture which is validated by our own stories – God works in our weakness and in spite of our sin to bring about His glorious plan of redemption.

God raises up joy from our pain. He heals the broken. He draws the prodigal near. He tramples His enemy underfoot. In all of these things He is capturing our attention and making known to all that His mercy is available and His judgment is sure.

Our lives will likely follow a similar trajectory. From slavery to safety. From dry deserts to fruitful lands. From battles with sin and evil to the destruction of sin and death. From isolation to community. From mangers to mountaintops. From the cross into His Kingdom.

He ascended on high to lead all who will be led.

*What is God leading you through this Christmas season?
Will you rest, knowing He is working to bring about joy?*

Kendyll Robinson, Junior, Cell Biology Major



December 16th
How Beautiful are the Feet
Romans 10:15, 18

“Bring good news of good things.”

When I was a teenager, someone at my church told me, “You don’t have to cross the sea, you just have to see the cross.” This simple statement was a springboard that the Lord used to change my view of missions and how I serve Him. I have since spent a few Christmases in the Middle East. The advent season was always difficult for me because it did not “feel” like Christmas does in America. Yet, those hard seasons were ones that God used to remind me why I was in that strange place for Christmas and not at “home.” There were people all around me that I encountered on a daily basis who had not yet heard of Jesus. We, as followers of Christ, are called to “bring good news of good things” as Paul writes in Romans 10:15.

Whether we would consider our feet “beautiful” or not, these verses are calling us to question how people will hear the Good News of Jesus if we do not tell them. Whether we are giving a “cup of cold water” (Matt. 10:42), “caring for widows and orphans” (James 1:27), or “making disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19), Paul is reminding the reader that we are to be His messengers to a world that does not know Him. Our American culture generally thinks of giving to others at Christmas, let us be a people who keep our eyes on Jesus, give freely, and share the good news of Jesus to all we encounter.

We do not have to go far to find people who do not follow Christ. This Christmas, I’m asking God to show me how I can be one who proclaims the Good News to the ends of the earth-- even if I never leave Texas.

Mary Catherine Carnes, Resident Director, Residence Life



December 17th
The New King in Town
Psalm 2:1-4

This passage is so parallel to what we are going through right now in 2016. A new king is crowned and there is unrest and rebellion among the people. Sounds real familiar doesn't it? I will not even attempt to get political, but only say that the people have spoken. Our worldly American voting system works and has worked for years and years.

What I want to convey to you is there is a higher order. Yes, we obey worldly laws to keep order but we should be more concerned about God's laws and commands. God commands us to love Him and love one another as thyself above all other commands. So why are so many people treating each other with hate and resorting to physical harm over a worldly selection process?

God says to trust the plans He has for us, but do we? Do we only trust God when things go our way?

The world is outraged and God is displeased with our behavior. The Joy in this passage is He has a plan for us. We are called as believers to trust that plan and bring rest to the nation.

We will see many different worldly rulers in our lifetime but there is only one ruler for Christians. Christ's throne is set up in the hearts of all believers.

Traci Squarcette, Resident Director, Independence Village

Week 4

Peace



December 18th
Exploding into Praise!
Revelation 19:6, 16

Have you ever left a can of Sprite sitting in your car on a simmering, hot Texas afternoon (perhaps after taking it straight from a cold fridge or after one of the kids gave it a good shake)? I have. I remember returning to my car on one such scorching day to find a can had exploded—Sprite was everywhere.

Both in Handel's *Messiah* and in the Book of Revelation, the narrative builds and the pressure mounts (everything on earth spins out of control) until it reaches a crescendo: Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords! God conquers all! Similarly, in our lives, just when it seems that everything around us spins out of control, we are reminded that God Almighty reigns—He alone is in control over all things and rulers.

Throughout the Book of Revelation, first-century Christians in the seven churches in Asia Minor were reminded that God is in control of the affairs of the world and that He promises to stick with the faithful. Its literary genre, apocalyptic, was enjoyed like refreshing holiday songs are in the present-day season. From chapters 6-19, John leads his readers through a series of symbolic events that display God's faithfulness in Christ, much like Handel leads his listeners through the story of Christ in a sweet interplay of musical delight and scriptural truth.

Chapter 19 in Revelation inspires great celebration: plagues and disasters have ended. Peace breaks into human history! This was not just a silent event of a baby born in a manger in a far-away field. No! As the trumpets and timpani swell in Handel's *Messiah*, so the Scripture exclaims, "Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns (Rev 19:6).'" Like my soda can exploded, this musical and scriptural can, no longer able to contain its refreshment, explodes with sounds and fury, "Hallelujah!" The praise no longer is silent. Christianity is for those who celebrate and shout.

The final chorus, "King of Kings . . . and Lord of Lords" is sung on one note, augmented by repeated calls, "Hallelujah" and "forever – and ever," raised higher and higher by the sopranos, and ultimately resolves into call and repose, "Hallelujah." One cannot but rejoice when reading the lead up in Revelation: The Rider on the white horse, the Christ, wears a robe of which the original Greek language says that it had been dipped in blood in the past and has perpetual impact. Wow! The Rider is the Crucified Messiah; the One who shed His blood and is followed by an army in white, an army of peace. He comes out of a war; He does not enter into a war, for He is King of kings and Lord of lords!

In many parts of the world, the audience rises to its feet for this part of Handel's *Messiah*. Indeed, who would not rise and explode with praise as the King of kings and Lord of lords rides into human history and into our hearts? Are you standing yet? Are you shouting?

Dr. Renate Hood, Professor of Christian Studies



Monday, December 19th
The Kingdom has Come
Revelation 11:15

Revelation is full of mysterious and vivid symbols. Before this passage, John has recounted a vision of six trumpets that display God's action against evil, paralleling God's action against Egypt in Exodus to set his people free from enslavement.

Now, the seventh trumpet sounds and with it comes peace and worship. God has set His whole creation free, and heaven cries out that finally, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah, and He will reign forever and ever."

Jesus was always talking about the Kingdom. Whether describing it through parables or declaring that it is at hand, the Kingdom of God is central to Jesus' message. He models in his prayer to pray that the Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.

When Jesus bursts onto the scene, the Kingdom breaks out with Him. He declares that His followers are citizens of this incredible Kingdom where the mourners are comforted, the meek inherit the earth, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are filled, the merciful receive mercy, the pure in heart see God, and the peacemakers are called children of God.

The day is coming when all the world will glisten with the beauty of God's love. When peace will be the reality. When all of God's people and creation is set free from evil, sin, pain, and death.

Advent reminds us to hope toward that future, and live right now as citizens of that coming Kingdom.

The kingdom of the world is full of disappointment, pain and injustice, but we know the Kingdom of God is coming and is already at hand through the Church and God's people. May we live in this world as citizens of the coming Kingdom. May we see wholeness in brokenness. May we fight for righteousness where the world oppresses. May we hope for the day when the kingdom of this world is reborn and resurrected to become the Kingdom of our Lord, on earth as it is in heaven. May we do the hard work of peacemaking. May we worship the God who has entered into our midst to bring forth hope and love. May we celebrate that we have been set free.

Evan Duncan, College Pastor, First Baptist Church, Temple



December 20th
Peace
Job 19:25-26

“Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, it empties today of its strength.” Corrie Ten Boom

Many of us set goals, whether it be for a project, a job, a school year, or a calendar year; we set goals to push and measure ourselves. When goals are met we feel a sense of accomplishment, when they are not we try to assess what went wrong or how we can do better. Many of us (I know I do) can beat ourselves up over the unreached goals and overlook what we have achieved.

In times of beating ourselves up, dwelling on failures and unachieved goals, or determining why we don't quite measure up, what tends to be overlooked is the big picture. God is on his throne and He is control! For a statement so powerful and true, it is easy to forget that. As it states in the passage for Job:

“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth.”

I chose this passage for this project because I (and I'm sure others) needed to be reminded of this. Despite all the distractions, temptations, and congestion life in this world flails at us, there is Peace waiting for and available to us.

Let us not forget when life becomes overwhelming and we just need to take a break or take time for ourselves about the Peace in God that we have this holiday season or any season in our lives. For only through God we will achieve the true Peace we are looking for.

Brian Street, Resident Director, Gettys Hall



December 21st
Firstfruits
I Corinthians 15:20-22

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

Throughout the history of God's people recorded in the Old Testament, the ceremonial law foreshadowed Christ. One aspect of that law was the consecration of the firstfruits of the harvest to God—an act of faith that demonstrated reliance on God's blessing in the greater return of the harvest. Perhaps Paul was here alluding to that part of the Passover ceremony in which a sheaf of barley, the first of the harvest, was waved before the Lord in dedication to Him. Regardless, the offering of the firstfruits represented thankful confidence that God would bless and provide through the whole harvest.

Here, Jesus' resurrection is equated with this cultural understanding of the first-fruits. Just as a farmer demonstrates reliance on God's blessing by offering the first produce of the field to God, we have confidence in our resurrection because Jesus is risen—the firstfruits of all who are united to Him through faith. By raising His son, God shows He accepted the ultimate sacrifice. A few verses earlier Paul wrote, “For I delivered to you as of *first importance* what I also received: that Christ *died for our sins* in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was *raised on the third day* in accordance with the Scriptures ...” It is Christ's resurrection that completes the gospel message.

The firstfruits have been offered and accepted, and God will bless the harvest. Christ has been raised, and He guarantees the resurrection of those in union with Him. Hallelujah!

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



December 22nd
Tell Your Heart to Beat Again
1 Corinthians 15:51-54

It would seem that peace is a hard thing to come by in this present day and age. It doesn't take much to realize that the world we live in lacks this. From war to division, shootings and other extreme acts of violence are present. Where is the peace? Where is the hope for our world? As we struggle to seek the answer to these questions, I remember a song by Danny Gokey entitled "Tell Your Heart to Beat Again." In it, he talks about stepping into the light of grace and realizing that all the troubles in this life are nothing compared to the glory that is in Christ. Because of what was done for you years ago on the cross, you can now live. No longer do you have to dwell on the past: "*yesterday is a closing door.*"

This reminds me of the words spoken in **1 Corinthians 15:54**.
"Death has been swallowed up in victory."

Our Savior entered into a dark and broken world when there was no peace and many were suffering. He chose such a time as this to dwell among us and fulfill what was foretold in Scripture. He is the peace that the world at large is not ready for. He has broken the bonds of sin. The chains that once entangled us (that we often times pick back up) He removes. In the midst of the suffering that our world experiences daily, we have the peace and assurance to know that in Christ, there is victory. Within our own personal lives, those places that only we know about, the things we try to cover up and of which we are ashamed, He tells us that we will one day rise with Him in glory and will be made new. Death no longer has victory.

We must remember that the same peace that entered into our world in the form of a baby, a human like us yet still fully God, lives and dwells in the hearts of those who have faith and belief in Him. We must also remember that He is God and will be exalted among the nations, exalted among the earth, and there is our peace.

So I encourage you to Tell Your Heart to Beat Again.

Dylan Mathis, Campus Missionary Intern, BSM



Date: December 23rd
The Real Hope of Christmas
I Corinthians 15:55-57

Christmas remains America's major holiday. Part of that is almost certainly all the trappings—presents, traditions, Santa, etc.—but part of it is also the comforting picture of a little baby in a manger. Christmas doesn't seem to demand as much of us as Easter. The little baby in the manger isn't asking us to do anything. On the other hand, the Master hanging on a cross saying "follow me" represents a large demand on our lives. Without the cross, though, the manger doesn't mean anything. And without the empty tomb, the cross wouldn't mean much either.

The empty tomb is the real hope of Christmas. Death, our greatest enemy, entered the world through our sin. Yet, on the cross, Jesus mastered sin. As Paul says in Colossians, He nailed the power of sin to the cross. It was sin that formed the sting of death. It is the cross that breaks the power of sin, and it is the resurrection that shows that God has broken the power of death.

Christmas is just two days away. It is the birth of the Prince of Peace. It is the day that God entered the world as a man. It's not the cute picture of a non-crying baby in a manger that leads to peace, though. It is that God broke into our lives and changed the story. He sleeps in a manger, sweeps sawdust in a carpenter's shop, wanders by the Sea of Galilee, spends a few short years doing good – but it all leads up to a few key days where sin and death meet their match. The "little boy from the carpenter's shop" really is the king of glory. He proved it by triumphing over death and sin and the grave.

For many, Christmas isn't always the happiest of times. We can be reminded of loved ones who are no longer with us. We can be reminded of our own failures in family and friendships. Yet, the peace that Christ offers is the peace of the empty tomb. Death indeed is defeated. We do not suffer as "ones who have no hope." The odd little manger in Bethlehem holds the King of Glory. He isn't there to be a sweet, simple child. He's there to give us life.

Dr. Marty McMahon, Professor, McLane College of Business



Saturday, December 24th
More than Conquerors
Romans 8: 31, 33, 34

Injustice in the world dominates our headlines and affects children, adults, families, and communities in devastating ways. Mere humans, seemingly strong, certainly cruel, prey on those who do not, or cannot, fight back. Fortunate are those who have a champion who steps forward in their defense, thwarting the blows and extinguishing the threat.

On a night long ago, a young mother was turned away from the safety of an inn. Ill intent was likely not a factor; however, it still seemed an injustice. Years later, on a hill far away, the greatest injustice of mankind was carried out, yet in that same miraculous event, God raised up our Defender, our Protector, our Savior.

While the taunting of the world battered our spirit, Jesus Christ came to our defense, not with blows or harsh words, but through submission to the Father and the power of His own blood. He endured the pain of all that is wrong in the world so we could become right with the Father in Heaven, and “if God is for us, who can be against us?”

This Advent season, rejoice in the God who justifies and in the Savior who equips us to be “more than conquerors.”

Dr. Christi Emerson, Assistant Professor, College of Nursing



December 25th
Worthy is the Lamb
Revelation 5:12-13

Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

Today is Christmas Day. It is also Sunday. Strangely, going to worship today for many Christians will feel like an inconvenient interruption in the warm, relaxing time with family and the opening of gifts at home. For most of Christian history, however, Christmas Day has been among the greatest of days for worship. Indeed, the very name “Christmas” is a title for a worship service. The word “mass” comes from the Old English *masse*, which in turn came from the Latin word *missio*, meaning “to send” or “to dismiss” as in the dismissal of worship and sending out into the world. So when we say “Christmas,” we are saying “Christ-worship.”

In our Scripture text for today from the book of Revelation, we hear a great anthem of worship sounding out in heaven at the appearance of the risen Christ in the form of a slaughtered lamb. Just before his appearance, all the hosts of heaven were waiting in suspense for the revealing of the One who would be worthy to open the seven-sealed scroll of the words containing the final salvation to come. Even John, the writer of the book, says that he was so disturbed by the wait, that he began to weep bitterly, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll. Then suddenly, upon the arrival of the Lamb, all of heaven broke out in worship, singing *Worthy is the Lamb . . .*

The hosts of heaven show us that the only authentic response to the coming of Christ is worship – knee-bending, song-singing, hand-raising, heart-stirring *WORSHIP!*

So, on this blessed day, get up, get dressed, get out and go worship the child of Bethlehem, the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth – JESUS, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Dr. Bill Carrell, Professor of Christian Studies