



Fellowship
of the
Rockies

*Christmas
Devotional
2014*

Dear Church Family,

Where does the time go? We are already entering the 2014 Christmas season with all the joy as well as the hustle and bustle that it brings. Here at Fellowship of the Rockies we feel so blessed to be able to share this gift with you this Christmas! Together, as we enter into the craziness of this season, we hope this Christmas Devotional is an encouragement to you in your walk with God and the Christmas calendar helps you maneuver this busy time of year.

There is so much beauty that surrounds the Christmas season! Our prayer is that you will open your heart to the Holy Spirit by taking a few minutes a day to dwell upon that beauty by reading this devotional, and by attending our Sunday services and events. We really believe that if you do these things, even amidst the hustle and the bustle of the season, your life will be changed.

For your convenience there is digital copy of this Christmas Devotional you can download by clicking the Christmas Devotional icon on the home page of our website, www.forchurch.org.

May you find hope and peace this Christmas!

From all of us here at Fellowship of the Rockies,

Merry Christmas



All writings contained in this booklet are the property of Fellowship of the Rockies.

Table of Contents

Week 1 - Day 1

The Peace of “Christ”mas - Stewart McWilliams

Week 1 - Day 2

Jesus is the Gift - Randy Unruh

Week 1 - Day 3

A Little Extra Jesus - Nancy Parker Brummett

Week 1 - Day 4

Worship Service in the Sky - Chris Cullins

Week 1 - Day 5

True Christmas Spirit - Rachael Houlihan

Week 2 - Day 1

Home For Christmas - Stewart McWilliams

Week 2 - Day 2

The Birth of Our Salvation - Harlan Else

Week 2 - Day 3

Christmas Stories - Jamie Kopinski

Week 2 - Day 4

It's So Noisy! - Chris Cullins

Table of Contents

Week 2 - Day 5

Ordinary No More - Randy Unruh

Week 3 - Day 1

Cramped - Danny Cullins

Week 3 - Day 2

Glory to God - Matt Schroeder

Week 3 - Day 3

He is Able! - Valerie Penchoff

Week 3 - Day 4

Lifting Our Eyes - Nancy Parker Brummett

Week 3 - Day 5

Happy Holidays - Diane Cahill

Week 4 - Day 1

Christmas Humility - Harlan Else

Week 4 - Day 2

Missable Bethlehem - Danny Cullins

Week 4 - Day 3

Merry Christmas - Stewart McWilliams

Week 1 - Day 1

The Peace of "Christ"mas

By: Stewart McWilliams

Senior Pastor

It would be impossible to separate "peace" from a foundation of God for Christmas. Why don't you stop and read Luke 2:13-14 and John 14:27 now.

It's clear that Christmas – the coming of Christ to earth – happened so that you could experience peace. So how's that working for you right now? When you look back at your Thanksgiving celebration and look forward at the next 25 days do you get a Zen-like feeling or do you start to panic? Does your blood pressure fall or rise?

Well, for me – I love the chaos. I really do! The more the merrier! Bring it on! I can sleep in 2015 :). Yet there is something in my heart that whispers, "That's not what God had in mind!" I bet you want celebration and like me and you want to know the peace of CHRISTmas! If that's the case then we are both going to have to practice the NO of Christmas.

Continued on next page

The Peace of "Christ"mas

Continued

Now I'm not saying that we need to keep the tree in the attic or not buy any gifts. However, we could consider not buying one more decoration and get away with the 2,000 we already have. We could probably all survive with a simple exchange of modest presents with only our immediate families. After all, we probably already have more than we need. (Sorry, children). We can decline an invitation or two and still celebrate the birth of Christ.

The message of the birth of Jesus Christ was a message of peace. We just read in John 14 one of the last promises Jesus made to His disciples. It was a promise of peace. 17 of the last 21 books of the Bible begin with a wish that the readers of that book would experience peace. So, my friends, join me in saying NO to some of Christmas this year so we can know the peace of CHRISTmas.

Week 1 - Day 2

Jesus is the Gift

By: Randy Unruh

Associate Pastor of Student and Family Ministries

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

– Matthew 2:9-11

I was 8 years old and we were celebrating Christmas with my grandparents in Hutchinson, Kansas. These two were an amazing couple who had come over to America by boat with their families, as Russian/Germans, when they were both little. At grandma's we always knew that we would eat such good, homemade everything meals. But as far as gifts go...?

We were sitting around the tree on Christmas morning and we had opened several gifts, trucks; trains and other toys. When I opened the first of grandma and grandpa's gifts, I tore open the paper and inside found a pair of shiny black dress shoes and socks. I then later opened presents with dress shorts and a dress shirt.

Continued on next page

Jesus is the Gift

Continued

What 8 year old little boy wants a dress outfit, especially one that involved me wearing shorts, a dress shirt and socks to my knees? They meant well, of course, and the good news was that my little brother Mark got the same gifts so we could match. I'm pretty sure all my boy cousins got the same kind of presents. I know we shouldn't complain, but don't you detect a lack of originality? In contrast, haven't we all received those genuine gifts, that gift that was chosen specifically for you? It's special and it means so much.

All of you have received a perfect personal gift. One just for you. God says to all of us, "*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord*" – Luke 2:11. Jesus is the gift!

Week 1 - Day 3

A Little Extra Jesus

By: Nancy Parker Brummett

Women's Ministry

Of all the decorations we put up at Christmas, what I treasure most is our collection of nativity sets. Each one helps us stay focused on the reason for Christmas—the celebration of when Jesus Christ *“became flesh and made his dwelling among us”* – John 1:14.

For two years I was unable to find the Baby Jesus that went with a small terra cotta nativity set. Finally, I reluctantly donated the stable, Mary, and Joseph to Goodwill, because what good is a nativity set without its star? I hoped someone else would be able to use what was left of my set to replace a broken figure or two.

But wouldn't you know, the year after that, as I was unpacking the nativities, I noticed something in the corner of a piece of bubble wrap. There it was—the missing Baby Jesus in the manger. Now, of course, I had no Mary and Joseph to watch over him, I just had a little extra Jesus, measuring less than two inches long! What could I possibly do with a little extra Jesus?

It didn't take me long to realize the answer to that question. My friend undergoing cancer treatment could use a little extra Jesus. So could the homeless people in our community, and the families with soldiers deployed.

Continued on next page

A Little Extra Jesus Continued

But they don't need the little terra cotta Jesus that now sleeps so serenely amidst my Christmas decorations. They need more of Jesus Himself—more of His mercy, His love, and His peace. They need more of His compassion, His healing, and His power—more of the promise of eternal life that He brings. If someone is to experience more of Him this season, it may well be through those of us who know Him, and celebrate the true meaning of Christmas.

Now I know what to do with this tiny terra cotta babe in the manger. He's not extra at all. I will keep him to remind me that we all need a little extra Jesus—not only at Christmas, but always.

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

– John 10:10

Week 1 - Day 4

Worship Service in the Sky

By: Chris Cullins

Worship Pastor

The story of Jesus' birth is full of content resonating with music that has brought us thousands of songs on the subject. Composers all over the world for centuries have created works robust in length based on these simple passages of scripture. Out of all these possible songs, I point us today to one that was actually demonstrated for us, not just inspired.

Luke 2:14 is famous for being sung in many ways, but let's look at how it was first presented. The passage reads *Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests*. That in itself is enough, yes? But I love who sings it and why! Just before this proclamation, an "Angel of the Lord" scared the willies out of some shepherds chilling in the fields. The angel told them to not be afraid "for I bring you good news..." and this calmed the shepherds. Maybe. As soon as the angel had finished the announcement the sky filled with a host of angels, the armies of heaven, singing "Glory to God in the highest..." If you thought the shepherds had calmed down a little, how about now? They have before them the armies of heaven, much grander than any "army" they had seen before, demonstrating the greatest praise for the greatest news they had ever heard!

Continued on next page

Worship Service in the Sky

Continued

Many times the reference to worship implies just the music we sing. But in reality this worship service of the angels gives us the best model of true celebratory praise and worship. There is truth spoken about in the beautiful news of the gospel and celebration of that truth with the best physical expression possible. May we learn that not just in this season but in all seasons we are given the opportunity to celebrate the greatest news ever, individually and together, with all that we have and with all that we are. Yes, sometimes it might be frightening or demonstrated in ways we can't explain, but when we join with the angels then our lives will be blessed. The shepherds could have stayed in the fields after this demonstration but they couldn't help themselves and pursued the Savior. Hopefully we will leave our worship services full of the Spirit so that we too will pursue the Savior and spread the joy that comes from knowing Him.

Week 1 - Day 5

True Christmas Spirit

By: Rachael Houlihan

Ministry Assistant

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. – Luke 2:15-18, 20

These shepherds heard, then saw, then told! They didn't hear, get kind of excited, tell their friends and stay home because the walk was too far away. They hurried off (2:16)! They walked miles and miles and MILES. Personally, I have heard of someone having a baby and thought about visiting them but the drive was 45 minutes away, so I sent a card. A card is nice, but the shepherds walked much further than 45 minutes to go see someone they didn't know!

Continued on next page

True Christmas Spirit

Continued

When they saw Jesus they spread the word (2:17). It was too exciting to keep to themselves! As they were picking up more Huggies diapers for Mary and Joseph because they had been up all night with Jesus who got a cough from one of the donkeys in the stable*, they were telling the store clerk and the people they passed on the street. The Messiah was born!! Even when it was time for them to go back home they continued to tell people, glorify God and rejoice that God is sovereign and always comes through on His promises.

My challenge for you today is to take a step back and see God in this sometimes chaotic season, then go tell someone, tell anyone, tell everyone that He was born and He is here, and He can change their eternity!

Prayer: Thank you God for coming, for humbling yourself and becoming one of us. Please help me to keep you in the forefront of my mind when I get caught up in the day to day and give me the strength, courage and peace to tell people about you.

*I have no proof that any of that sentence ever happened.

Week 2 - Day 1

Home for Christmas

By: Stewart McWilliams

Senior Pastor

“I’ll be home for Christmas...” We read these words and for many of us the written words become a melody in our heads as we recall Bing Crosby’s crooning. For others the words touch our hearts. They cause us to recall memories of special times in a special place we call home. These memories can then stir up deeper emotions like joy, sadness or loss. It would be safe to say that Home and Christmas are inseparable in our society, and this is ironic since the first family of Christmas left home on the first Christmas.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem. – Luke 2:4

Now I know that there was a connection through his family of origin, but it is very unlikely that Joseph himself had ever been to King David’s house before. Joseph and Mary weren’t the only ones to travel that first Christmas season. The Magi or Wise Men from the east traveled even further to come worship the baby king. And speaking of this baby king, didn’t he travel the furthest from home?

Continued on next page

Home for Christmas

Continued

Matthew records the Old Testament prophecy that says *“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God with us’).”*

– Matthew 1:23. From heaven to earth - I’d say that’s a pretty long way from home.

There’s a profound point here. In my opinion, one can have Christmas anywhere! It doesn’t matter where you are. It doesn’t matter who is with you or who isn’t with you. God wants you to be at home this Christmas, home with Him. Hopefully it will include being in the place you call home on this December 25th. More important is that you will be with Him and the place will include the spirit of Christmas, giving, peace and joy. These realities are possible because a young couple took a long journey from their home. The reason Jesus came to earth is so that we can always be at home with Him.

Read Matthew 2:1-2 and Luke 2:1-7. Think about what that journey must have been like for them and the journey God has for you this Christmas.

Week 2 - Day 2
The Birth of Our Salvation
By: Harlan Else
Executive Pastor

Have you ever looked at a newborn baby and asked yourself, “I wonder what this baby is going to do in the next 80 years to make a difference?” I know that I asked myself that question as I held each of our seven grandchildren when they were born. Now they are growing up, and we are beginning to answer the question, at least for the first 20 to 30 years of their lives.

Now, imagine yourself as a visitor to the town of Bethlehem on a cold and blustery December night a little over 2,000 years ago. You heard from some folks on the dirt road through this small village that a new baby had been born, and of all places, in a stable surrounded by domestic farm animals. Having heard about this baby, wouldn't you have been curious just to look into that stable and get a glimpse of this baby that was born under such severe conditions? I know I would.

As I would peek around the door to the stable to look in on this new baby, I would likely ask myself the question I asked about each of our grandkids, “I wonder what this baby is going to do in the next 80 years to make a difference?”

Continued on next page

The Birth of Our Salvation

Continued

Little would I have known that this beautiful baby would someday take the weight of the sin of the world, your sin and mine, on His shoulders and die a horrible death so that each of us could spend eternity in the presence of God. Little would I have known that this beautiful baby would impact billions and billions of people for eternity. Little would I have known that this beautiful baby would be called the Eternal Great High Priest, constantly advocating for our eternity with God the Father; and He will continue to do so forever.

This beautiful baby, whose birth we celebrate, truly is the birth of our salvation. Without the birth of this beautiful baby, we would still all be lost and without hope.

Read Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews 7:20-22

Prayer: Lord, as I celebrate Christmas this year, keep me focused on the fact that God came to earth as a beautiful baby so that we could attain our eternal salvation.

Week 2 - Day 3

Christmas Stories

By: Jamie Kopinski

Children's Ministry Leader, Fountain Campus

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

– Luke 2:17-18

I love to hear people tell Christmas stories. I don't mean stories like Ebenezer Scrooge or Rudolph. I love personal Christmas stories. One story that my husband tells every year is about a gift his parents gave him. As a teenager he dreamed of getting a new pair of ice hockey skates. One morning he saw a large box with his name on it under the Christmas tree and he just knew that his dream had finally come true. Imagine his surprise, and disappointment, when he opened that box to find a clothes hamper instead of skates. I'm sure his parents had no idea that a clothes hamper would be the one gift he would always remember.

Long before my husband received his clothes hamper, there was a much more important Christmas story being told by shepherds. The shepherds' full story is found in Luke 2:8-20 but I wish I could have heard it from them. Oh, to hear the wonder in their voice when they talked about seeing an angelic choir praising God. Or to listen as they recounted how they rushed to Bethlehem to search for baby Jesus. To sense the awe and excitement in their voices when they spoke of seeing the Messiah, the Savior of the world, in a manger.

Continued on next page

Christmas Stories

Continued

I wish I could have seen the twinkle in their eyes when they realized that God had chosen them, not priests or elders, to send His angels to. I want to hear the shepherds' story because it's all about Jesus. I want to hear every detail of how their lives were affected by Him.

Of course not every Christmas story will be as awe inspiring as the shepherds' and that's okay. We need to hear stories like the clothes hamper to make us smile. But we also need to hear, and share, more stories like the shepherds' because they bring us back to what Christmas is really about. People need to hear how our lives have been changed by Jesus. They need to hear our excitement and the wonder in our voices when we talk about Him. They need to see that twinkle in our eyes.

What will your Christmas story be about this year? Will it be all about Jesus or all about what was under the tree? Will you tell others what our Savior has done in your life?

Week 2 - Day 4

It's So Noisy!

By: Chris Cullins

Worship Pastor

As a music professional I can't help but constantly notice anything that is rhythmic or melodic. People are always asking me, "How did you even hear that?" when in reality sometimes I wish I could tune it out. The Christmas season is definitely one of those times. Yes, as a musician and as a worship pastor I love all of the music from this special time of year, but sometimes it's a bit much. Every retail store that we drag ourselves through to find that special gift, the grocery store that has the special ham, the radio or playlist in our car, the commercials on TV, the post and repost on social media, they all are engulfed in this "noise" that Christmas music has become. Many of the Christmas albums from the top artists in the world are full of high energy, going, going, going songs about the excitement of the season and when that calming song finally comes on it brings a deep sigh of relief.

Continued on next page

It's So Noisy!

Continued

I know that the manger scene may have been a little more noisy than the pictures describe, with barn animals, noise from an overcrowded small town, angels making a ruckus in the fields nearby, and that “quiet” experience that is child birth, but I can’t help notice that over and over in scripture there is a resounding theme of peace. In one of our favorite carols there is the lyric “all is calm, all is bright.” I love that in the midst of all of the craziness our Savior brings light into our world and brings calm to the troubled hearts. As hard as it is, we might need to turn down the noise in our lives to clearly hear what the Prince of Peace has to say to us this season. May we rest in the promise that He is with us and He is in control.

Week 2 - Day 5

Ordinary No More

By: Randy Unruh

Associate Pastor of Student and Family Ministries

It was an ordinary night, at least for us. We were at a summer camp, five hours from home. I had preached earlier that night and now we were sleeping in our cabin. Karen woke me up with the information that “It is time”. It was time for our first child and only son to be born...4 weeks early. We had only been to one birthing class, didn't have cell phones yet and, according to our doctor, no good hospitals around so he told us, “come home now”. A short three hours later we were in the hospital preparing for our ordinary life to be ordinary no more.

It was an ordinary night with ordinary sheep and ordinary shepherds. Then the night sky exploded with brightness. Things that were shadows were now in clear view. Sheep that had been silently sleeping were now wide awake. One minute the shepherd was dead asleep, the next he was staring into the face of an angel!

The night was ordinary no more. The world was ordinary no more. My life...your life, was ordinary no more.

In the Christmas season we spend time acknowledging that Jesus came in a miraculous way in order to give us a miraculous chance at an extraordinary life and eternity.

Continued on next page

Ordinary No More

Continued

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” 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.”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. – Luke 2:8-16

Week 3 - Day 1

Cramped

By: Danny Cullins

Fountain Campus Pastor

Have you ever been in a small space for longer than you wanted to be there? Maybe you found that perfect spot playing hide and seek then regretted the success because your reward was having to stay there forever!

Maybe you were on a bus or in a car or on a plane and the space they gave wasn't enough for the bodies that were present! Who gets the armrest? Who has to lean forward? Maybe the smell of your new "friend" was less than pleasant.

Philippians 2 talks about how Jesus humbled Himself and emptied Himself to become human. He set aside omnipresence and located Himself in the small body of a baby boy. He gave up omniscience and had to learn to crawl, walk and talk. He gave up omnipotence - Mary (and probably Joseph) had to change His diaper!

And He walked the earth under the power of gravity, hunger and sleep requirements. He smelled and heard and saw and tasted and felt in limited human channels.

I wonder if He ever felt cramped?

But no matter what the cost, Jesus willingly did His part in fulfilling the Father's plan. And a special part of that began when He became a baby! Jesus, thank You for being our Immanuel - God with us!

Week 3 - Day 2

Glory To God

By: Matt Schroeder

Worship Leader, Fountain Campus

“And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

– Luke 2:12-14

We all know the Christmas season can be hectic, busy, stressful and fun all at the same time. Last minute trips to the store, long lines at the store, and the ever so famous family gatherings. With everything going on during the Christmas season we often find ourselves forgetting the real reason of Christmas, to celebrate the birth of Christ. As I read through Luke chapter 2 this year the above verses stood out to me. *“A multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying ‘Glory to God in the highest’”* Not only was the birth of Christ the beginning of the greatest thing ever to happen to us here on earth, but it even stirred something up inside the heavenly hosts. Suddenly, all they could do was praise God! I think we can learn something from the reaction of the heavenly hosts. I encourage you as we continue through this Christmas season. To not only remember what the real reason for Christmas is but to also praise God and glorify Him during those last minute trips to the store, long lines and family gatherings.

Week 3 - Day 3

He is Able!

By: Valerie Penchoff
Ministry Assistant

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

– Ephesians 3:20-21

The excitement that surrounds the season of Christmas is contagious and I love it! It never gets old - Christmas music, movies, parties, goodies, dinners, decorations, wassail (Miss Moe made the best!), more parties, food and the like. But isn't it too easy to get caught up in the "season" of Christmas and miss out on the "reason" for Christmas? It really can get overwhelming and stressful and that is certainly not the way it should be for followers of Christ.

In thinking about the birth of Jesus, the real reason we celebrate Christmas, the word simplicity keeps coming to mind. In one regard, His birth was simple – He was born in a stable and slept in a manger! He wasn't born in the greatest hospital with the world's best OB team on hand. He didn't have the newest crib and all the "must have" baby items. On the other hand, His birth was anything but simple. He was born to a woman who was a virgin. Yes, she was a virgin! That is certainly not a simple concept to grasp or explain. He was delivered in a stable and He and His mamma both survived. Wow! Simply incredible!

Continued on next page

He is Able!
Continued

The Ultimate Doctor, the Creator and Giver of life, the One who is able, He was there. He made it possible for His Son to be born of a virgin, to come and be the Savior of the world.

I challenge you this Christmas to not only enjoy the “season” but to make time to reflect upon the “reason” and look for ways that He has shown you or will show you that He is able. Slow down and ask Him how you can simplify the craziness of the season and share the true meaning of Christmas with those around you.

Prayer: God, thank You! Thank You that You love us so much that You sent Your only Son into this sinful world to conquer death so that we can live in You. I pray that this Christmas You would open our eyes, ears and hearts to ways we can simplify the “season” and magnify You, the Reason for Christmas.

Week 3 - Day 4

Lifting Our Eyes

By: Nancy Parker Brummett

Women's Ministry

Have you noticed that we have become a society of people looking down? And we're not looking down at beloved small children or pets as much as we are looking down at smartphones. Looking down to check Facebook, email, Twitter, Instagram or our GPS.

Technology can be helpful and crucial, no doubt about it. But looking down all the time cannot only give us a neck ache, it can even be hazardous to our health. Who can forget the YouTube video of the woman falling into the fountain at the mall while looking down at her smartphone? And no telling how many shoppers this season will be bumped into or knocked down by another shopper walking while looking at his or her phone.

What if we all spent more time looking up this Advent season, and less time looking down? What if we shift our gaze to the angel on top of the Christmas tree, the stars that shone over Bethlehem fields, or the snow-crested peaks of the majestic mountains all around us? Do we really want to miss all that glory because we are looking down?

Continued on next page

Lifting Our Eyes Continued

The Psalms of Ascent in the Bible give us examples of God's people looking up instead of down as they sought Him with all their hearts. *I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from?* says Psalm 121:1. *I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven,* reads Psalm 123:1.

If ever there was a time for us to lift both our eyes and our hands in praise to our Lord and Savior, it's at Christmas time. And once we are looking up again, we can share a smile with a harried store clerk. We can notice when someone needs help getting through the door or into their car. We can enjoy the birds at the feeder, the deer in the fields, sunrises and sunsets as all heaven and nature sings. Don't those sound like wonderful reasons to lift our eyes this Christmas?

But you are a shield around me, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. – Psalm 3:3

Week 3 - Day 5

Happy Holidays

By: Diane Cahill
Ministry Assistant

I was in a bank the other day looking at a poster that said, “We bring more joy to your holidays”. The colors were tones of grey, silver, and brown, showing a happy young couple striding through a mall, with an ATM in the background. I look at things like this drab poster, hear bland phrases like “happy holidays”, and wonder – what does everyone think they’re celebrating? If they don’t recognize Christmas as the celebration of the birth of the Savior of the world, then why are they celebrating at all? Is it just a collection of traditions and time off from school or their jobs?

The cause for our celebration is huge. Jesus’s birth, along with His death and resurrection, is arguably the most important point on the timeline of humanity. I don’t know about you, but I am SO grateful that God chose to let me live on this side of the timeline. Think of the contrasts. From walking in darkness to walking in the Light. From separation from God to reconciliation and peace with God. From human, fallible priests offering sacrifices for our sins to Jesus Himself being our priest and our atonement! Now there’s a cause for celebration!

Continued on next page

Happy Holidays

Continued

This year I want to shine the light and peace of the true Christmas spirit on those who are swirling around in the holiday craziness. I pray that those around me will be able to sense that there really is something more, something deeper worth discovering about this “happy holiday”. I pray that those who don’t know Him will this year be brought to wonder about those of us who believe, “what are THEY celebrating?”!

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light...

– Isaiah 9:2a

...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

– Romans 5:1b

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

– Hebrews 4:14

Week 4 - Day 1

Christmas Humility

By: Harlan Else
Executive Pastor

I love the weeks leading up to Christmas! This is the time of year when all of us are excited about the family gatherings, the gifts and the great food! Right? Wrong! For many folks in our community this is the time of year when the difference between the haves and have-nots becomes most apparent. This is the time of year when it becomes absolutely clear to many people that there will be no gifts for their kids, there will be no table heaped with succulent food, and because there is estrangement in family relationships, there will be no family gatherings.

I come in contact with so many of these “have-nots” leading up to Christmas each year. These are good people who, simply due to circumstances beyond their control, can’t buy their kids gifts, can’t provide the table of holiday food and spend Christmas alone.

The opportunity to work with these folks truly humbles me. I have so much, and they have so little. And yet, most of these people truly love Jesus. Jesus is where they find their hope for the future. Their faith in view of the fact that they might not know where their next meal is coming from truly fills me with an overwhelming sense of humility.

Continued on next page

Christmas Humility

Continued

I see these less fortunate people as reminders to me of the humiliation of our Savior Jesus Christ as He stood before the Council of Religious Leaders, Pilate, and Herod during the trials prior to His death. The tears run down my cheeks, for I realize that for much of my life, I have demonstrated an arrogance that certainly didn't please God. And then I realize that God has put me in a place and time of year where He can teach me humility through people who have so much less than I.

Think about it...the King of All Creation was born in a barn and was first visited by shepherds, people at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. He spent much of His time on earth humbly caring for the poor and disabled. And then He endured the humility of rigged trials, beatings and crucifixion to end His physical life here on earth so that we might enjoy eternal life.

So, in addition to giving us eternal life if we believe in Him, that baby whose birth we are about to celebrate has also given us a blueprint for humility in our relationships in this life and as we stand before Him in the next life.

Read Isaiah 53 and Matthew 26:47-67; 27:11-49

Week 4 - Day 2

Missable Bethlehem

By: Danny Cullins

Pastor, Fountain Campus

It was the town where the great King David was from, but he left as soon as he could. Boring little country town. Easy to miss. Easy to pass over on the way to Jerusalem, or Hebron or anywhere! Bethlehem is boring.

So why Bethlehem?

Have you ever noticed we like small town heroes? We like Cinderella stories. The unlikely heroes are not who we would pick if we had money involved, but we like them. We want the wild card team to win it all. We want the no name school to beat out the big boys. It just doesn't happen much.

Jesus is missable too. From a missable town, learned a missable trade, gathered what appeared to be a missable band of followers and died a death people did not want to see. Most of His own race missed Him. They're still looking for their Messiah! Because in their minds, the Messiah won't be humble, He won't be gentle, He won't be missable.

But He is. With so many other exciting things to be seen and enjoyed this Christmas we can pass right over an apparently simple Man born in a simple town.

Don't miss Him! He's the small town Hero! The story ends well! He's the King!

Week 4 - Day 3

Merry Christmas!

Christmas Eve/Christmas Day, 2014

Matthew 1:18-25

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Continued on next page

Merry Christmas!

Continued

Luke 2:1-17

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Continued on next page

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

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.”*

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

Matthew 2:1

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem...

*May you and your family be
blessed this Christmas!*



*Have a Merry
Christmas!*

Matthew 1:22-23

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).