

# The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

## INSIDE



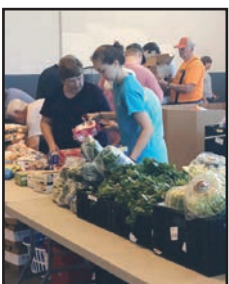
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Photo by Christian Hilley/University of Mobile

## of Christmas

Voices of Mobile and the University Singers perform an original arrangement by Greg Wiggins, instructor of music, of “Go Tell it on the Mountain/O Happy Day” during UM’s Christmas Spectacular Nov. 18–21.

### University of Mobile helps kick off the season with annual ‘Spec’

**T**he University of Mobile hosted its 19th Christmas Spectacular Nov. 18–21.

Listed as one of the top 25 best Christmas events in Mobile, the event featured nearly 300 people serving as vocalists, musicians, actors and tech crew members.

The vocalists and musicians performed in 20 ensembles and a 50-piece orchestra of combined students and pro-

fessional mentors. They did five shows over the course of the four days.

Coordinated by UM’s Alabama School of the Arts, “Spec” — as the faithful call it — was founded by Roger Breland, an early leader in contemporary Christian music and part of the UM community since 2002.

The goal, organizers say, is to present an inspiring musical extravaganza that stirs

hearts and gets everyone, from members of the audience to members of the cast, ready to experience the joy of Christmas.

#### Growing audience

Along with the more than 8,000 who attend in person each year, the show is now broadcast internationally.

Held at Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, the production this year included musical selections from clas-

sic carols and hymns like “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus,” “O Holy Night” and “Adeste Fideles” (“O Come All ye Faithful”) to modern favorites including “Jesus, What a Wonderful Child,” “Charlie Brown Christmas Medley” and “I Believe.”

Ticket sales help cover the cost of the production.

To order a DVD, go to [universityofmobilestore.com](http://universityofmobilestore.com). (TAB Media)



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The crossword puzzle  
can be found on page 14.



Photo by Adam West/The Church at Chelsea Westover

Professional juggler Jesse Joyner involves a crowd member in one of his shows during Harvest Jam weekend in October. The event drew 1,600 people and included inflatables, carnival rides and a gospel presentation.

# Shelby County church sees fruit through community outreach

Nearly four years ago, TAB shared the story of The Church at Chelsea Westover, a congregation businessman David Wilson planted in his ServPro headquarters in Shelby County.

With the help of Pastor Danny Lovett and others, the church grew to several hundred, most of whom were either unchurched or hadn't been in church in a long time.

Wilson died in 2017, but the church he started has kept growing — and people have continued to experience salvations.

Part of the church's long-term plan was to harness use of 90 acres behind the ServPro headquarters to reach the growing population of the area, starting with a big pavilion to hold children's activities. From there they planned construction of a multipurpose building.

"God allowed us to break ground

on a gymnasium/worship center before COVID hit, and we were able to get in in August," said Rick Wright, student/associate pastor. "It's been awesome since we've been in. We've had in the last six weeks over 70 visitors. God's just doing something neat and working, bringing people. We've seen people get saved, and we've seen people added."

## Harvest Jam weekend

They've also held several seasons of Upward soccer on the property and drew 1,600 over their Harvest Jam weekend in October, which included inflatables, carnival rides, a professional juggler and a gospel presentation.

Wright said the church's goal is for the community to use the acreage, providing opportunities to minister and share the gospel. (Grace Thornton)



Photo by Adam West/The Church at Chelsea Westover

Nearly four years ago, TAB shared the story of The Church at Chelsea Westover, a congregation businessman David Wilson planted in his ServPro headquarters. To read the original story, visit [tabonline.org/the-church-at-cw](http://tabonline.org/the-church-at-cw).

## The Alabama Baptist

"If ye continue in My word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31-32

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## OPINION



# RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash, President and Editor-in-Chief



jrash@thealabamabaptist.org



@RashionalThts

## Lots to do while we wait — families in crisis need us

Some who know the ins and outs of how the U.S. Supreme Court works say the justices have already made the ruling on the Dobbs v. Jackson case, even though the decision likely won't be announced for a while.

The reasonings for those who vote for overturning Roe v. Wade as well as those who prefer leaving it as is will be penned by selected justices — and that's what takes time, those in the know explain.

So if that's true what do we do now that the 90 minutes of oral arguments of this reportedly once-in-a-generation case (see story, page 4) are over and all we can do is wait?

Lisa Hogan of Sav-A-Life, Inc., in Jefferson County would likely say we all should help families in crisis in some way. It might be by volunteering at a Christ-centered pregnancy center, encouraging the staff, donating to the effort and/or praying.

We can pray for the team members at the centers as they meet each mother (and many times the father as well) right

where they are in the moment. We can pray for the mothers and fathers as they ponder the crucial decision in front of them.

We also can pray for public policy leaders and judicial representatives at all levels to eliminate social pressures from their minds as they study the cases and situations before them.

And in Birmingham, we can pray for the work being done to construct a third Sav-A-Life facility in partnership with Birmingham Metro Baptist Association.

Also partnering in the effort are the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and Send Relief compassion ministry of the North American Mission Board and the International Mission Board.

Representatives of each of the partner groups gathered Dec. 2 for a celebration and dedication service.

Chris Crain, BMBA executive director, and Michael Ethridge, BMBA director of operations, shared the miraculous journey from an estate gift of \$210,000 that increased over time to a donated building allowing

for other ministries and nonprofits to share the space to the construction now underway for the new crisis pregnancy center.

Ethridge said watching what all is happening within the walls — which translates to lives being changed outside the walls — has taught him to stop calculating timelines and worrying about how things will get done.

“When God provides a resource, He already has a plan for it, whether He has told you yet or not,” Ethridge said.

Bryant Wright, president of Send Relief, shared that the BMBA Sav-A-Life project is

Send Relief's first investment in a crisis pregnancy center.

“We are excited to partner,” he said. “Children and families are one of the five major focus areas of Send Relief and we see an extra need for Christ-centered pregnancy centers.”

SBOM executive director Rick Lance explained how the project is an example of true partnership among an association, state convention and national entity.

“God can bring us all together for the same mission ... for Kingdom-impact purposes,” he said. “We are laborers together with God ... it's how all the moving parts come together.”

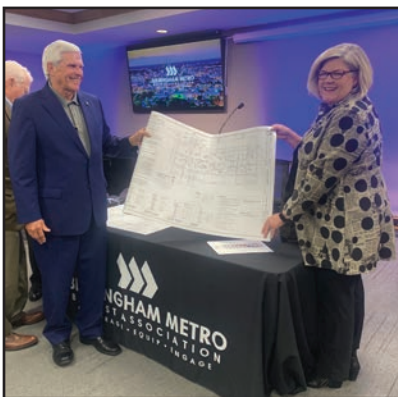


Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist  
BMBA's Michael Ethridge and Sav-A-Life's Lisa Hogan are excited to see the plans coming together for the new Sav-A-Life facility.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist  
Representatives from ministry partners assisting with the new Sav-A-Life project are (l to r) Barry Cosper, BMBA; Rick Lance, State Board of Missions; George Wright, Shades Mountain Baptist Church; Anne and Bryant Wright, Send Relief; and Chris Crain, BMBA.



# Your Voice



Share your comments, letters to the editor, blog excerpts, social media posts

## Dobbs case can correct catastrophe of Roe v. Wade

By Brent Leatherwood

Acting president, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

**T**he unwanted child.” This disturbing phrase reverberates in one’s conscience after reading the U.S. Supreme Court opinion from the 1973 case, *Roe v. Wade*.

Justice Harry Blackmun authored the opinion that seems more like a creative writing piece than a decision rooted in the U.S. Constitution. If some legal analysts criticize judges for “legislating from the bench,” then *Roe* represents the creation, passage and implementation of a whole new frontier of law without any legislative input.

As a consequence, Justice Blackmun laid the foundation for the modern abortion architecture we see around us in society to this day.

The language and rationale he wielded has led to an unmitigated moral disaster: over 60 million pre-born lives extinguished, vulnerable women and families preyed upon by predatory abortion clinics and whole communities targeted by an unrelenting abortion industry.

### ‘Grave mistakes’

With the oral arguments presented before the court this week in the case of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* (see sidebar, this page), the nine current justices have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to revisit Blackmun’s catastrophic opinion, as well as that of *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992).

The Court should not hesitate to completely do away with it. The Court can correct the grave mistakes of its past in ways that should hearten not only pro-life Americans, but all Americans.

As Christians who recognize the Genesis 3 reality in which we live, we understand nothing short of Christ’s return will truly repair the brokenness that affects our relationships in a fallen world, but we should not fail to recognize the ways Blackmun’s opinion did harm here.

### ‘Sold a lie’

His reasoning essentially created a legal permission structure that pitted mothers against their children. Because of this, countless mothers have been sold the lie by the abortion industry that their lives will be burdened, less rich and rewarding, and, ultimately, less satisfying with a child in the picture. By overruling *Roe* and *Casey*, we can save a new generation of families from enduring these awful and false narratives.

In addition, the court would be

taking a necessary step towards establishing a legal environment that views life as something to be protected, not discarded. Numerous experts agree that a favorable decision in *Dobbs* could return the question of abortion to the states.

In some states, there will be an almost overnight effect that moves their legal posture from a culture of death to one of life.

The right opinion in this case could comport with the very best of America’s ideals. A number of citizens believe that, at its essence, America is synonymous with freedom. Whether one fully agrees with that statement or not, it is undeniable that our nation has played a role in expanding the definition of freedom around the globe.

Even in our current moment, we are having a national conversation

about the implications of that term for every individual.

Yet it shouldn’t be lost on us that as we have this dialogue, our culture continues to steamroll the lives of millions of the tiniest individuals in our society each year. That cannot continue.

### National moment

The *Dobbs* case affords our nation a moment when we can finally decide to be consistent and loudly declare that the blessings of America’s “new birth of freedom” extend to born and preborn alike.

The reality is, it is past time for the court to dismantle the disastrous reasoning posited by Blackmun nearly 50 years ago.

By affirming his words, the court robbed generations of preborn children of their dignity, an atrocity that must be rectified. And while that will go a long way towards correcting the errors of the past made by the state, it is up to Christians to realize such a decision is not the end of the challenge before us. In fact, it will represent the starting point for a new prolife generation.

For all the good that a favorable court decision would do, there will still be mothers in crisis who are either unable or unwilling to give a child the love and care he or she needs. It will be at this moment when the true test comes — and the church must be ready.

It has a duty to look out for the child in all of this. To be her voice. To be her advocate. And we should stand ready to welcome her with open arms (Mark 10:14) and let her know the Author of life has wanted her all along.

## Court hears Roe challenge

**T**he U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments Dec. 1 in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*. The case involves a Mississippi law banning most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

In his opening argument, Mississippi Solicitor General Scott Stewart asked the court to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, returning the power to regulate abortion law back to the states or to Congress.

Mississippi argued that since the Constitution does not address the issue, states should be allowed jurisdiction.

During the debate, Chief Justice John Roberts suggested the court could look at Mississippi’s 15-week law as a new viability standard, rather than 23 to 24 weeks established previously by the *Roe* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* decisions.

Justices tend to view oral arguments as a time to answer any questions they may have developed while reading previously filed briefs.

A decision in the case is not expected until later next year. Read more about the case at [tabonline.org/jackson](http://tabonline.org/jackson). (TAB)

“Truly He taught us to love one another;  
His law is love and His gospel is peace.”

PLACIDE CAPPEAU  
*French poet and lyricist of “O Holy Night”*

To be faithful means you trust even when you don’t see. God has not abandoned you. God is at work.

**President Jamie Dew**  
**New Orleans Seminary**

Everything you go through in life is for Christ. Your mountaintop experiences are for Christ. Your deep valleys are for Christ.

**Pastor Ed Litton**  
**Redemption Church**  
**SBC president**

Disaster relief remains one of [our] wonderful Christ-centered ministries, made up of 7,000 trained,

credentialed and background-checked volunteers from all of our churches.

**Mel Johnson**  
**Alabama Baptist**  
**Disaster Relief task force**

One of life’s greatest satisfactions is to have people who really know us — and still love us.

**Gary Chapman**  
**Author and pastor**

Maybe you know [the] gospel story. Maybe you base your life upon it. Maybe you want nothing to do with it. Whatever your story ... read the

beginning of the greatest life ever lived. Read how it has changed me and so many lives completely. Then, if you are one of the people whose lives have been changed, share it. ... Share it using your voice, your life and your testimony.

**“The Christmas Story=**  
**The Gospel Story”**  
**laurengroves.me**

As we think about Christmas, let us not forget that the primary purpose of it is the celebration of Christ as our Redeemer.

**Morris Murray Jr.**  
**Jasper, Ala.**

## Making the most of Christmas

The human longing for hope is a powerful force.

People have always longed for hope, but particularly as we emerge from the pandemic, many people hope Christmas will be a fresh source of hope.

Unfortunately, their misplaced hopes are often connected to the fleeting pleasure of receiving a gift or the illusion of dysfunctional families somehow coming together.

People also associate Christmas with rest, with taking some time away from normal demands. Most schools and many companies wind things down near the end of the calendar year, which creates a natural time to recharge for the next year’s sprint. Even more than recent years, people are pandemic-weary and longing for rest right now.

The Christmas season also satisfies, for some, a basic spiritual impulse to connect with God and His redemption story. They may only be Christmas and Easter Christians, but at least they have enough faith tradition to connect on that basic level. It may only be a flicker of spiritual interest, but at least it’s there.

This Christmas season ... focus on offering hope to hurting people. Focus on the gospel as a source of rest and peace. Focus on fanning spiritual flickers of faith, not extinguishing them by making sarcastic comments about casual commitments.

The Christmas season is an unprecedented opportunity to communicate hope to the hurting and rest to the weary. It’s a good time to fan flickering faith and enhance relationships for future ministry.

**President Jeff Iorg**  
**Gateway Seminary**  
*(Read the full article at [gs.edu/presidents-blog/making-the-most-of-christmas](https://gs.edu/presidents-blog/making-the-most-of-christmas).)*

## From the *Twitterverse*

### @macbrunson

The cross of Jesus Christ affected human history long before the Roman Empire existed, before the pages of the Old Testament appeared, long before the crucifixion ever took place.

The cross will have the final say over all of time and eternity.

### @nathanfinn

I’m thankful today for Twitter. No, seriously. It amplifies angry and ignorant voices, to be sure. And cyberbullying is a real thing. But Twitter also enhances existing relationships and can serve as the front door for what become strong relationships. So, two cheers for Twitter.

### @sPeytonHill

Recently, an unchurched husband & wife were invited to our church by the wife’s hairdresser, one of our members. They both heard the

gospel, experienced real community, repented of their sins & placed their faith in Jesus. Today, they went public with their faith through baptism!

### @ReavisJr

I do sermon prep the old fashioned way! A Bible, books & a writing tablet! Love it!!!

### @lorifrank1

Every [preacher’s kid] grows up with the weight of knowing their sins ... could be the bullet that loads the gun aimed at their father.

### @PaulTripp

Christians should be the most consistently thankful people on earth.

### @dandarling

This is a symptom of not just a busy culture, but a busy heart. We are restless creatures because we are running from the solitude that

allows us to meditate, to be quiet, to hear God speak, to repent. It’s uncomfortable to face ourselves, so we fill our time with distractions.

### @revandyfrazier

I love the local church. What a gift of grace!

### @EdLitton

A church filled with people who know they’re sinners is a place where God abides, where His gospel shines brighter than anything else. —David McLemore

### @CSLewisDaily

If God forgives us we must forgive ourselves otherwise it’s like setting up ourselves as a higher tribunal than Him. —C.S. Lewis

### @TAndrewBrown

He who counts the stars and calls them by name is in no danger of forgetting his own children. —Spurgeon

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# 3 stories you should know



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

While more than 90% of Americans celebrate Christmas, just over 22% believe they could relay the Christ's birth story accurately. Lifeway Research recently released a survey indicating that more time in church and higher education raises the likelihood of a person being able to share the full story. Only 10% of the religiously unaffiliated, fewer than any other religious demographic, were confident in their ability to retell the story. (TAB Media)

## Judge blocks federal vaccine mandate

A federal judge in Louisiana on Nov. 30 blocked a national COVID-19 vaccine mandate set to go into effect by January, following numerous lawsuits objecting to the requirements.

U.S. District Judge Terry A. Doughty noted the case will ultimately be decided by a "higher court than this one."

The emergency temporary standard issued Nov. 4 requires federal employees, those employed by institutions that receive federal funds and private businesses with more than 100 employees, among others, to enforce mandatory vaccinations or a regular testing protocol. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is among many institutions that have filed suit in protest over the policy.

Read more at [tabonline.org/vaccine-mandate](https://tabonline.org/vaccine-mandate). (TAB Media)

## Religious persecutors list omits Nigeria

Religious liberty watchers are criticizing the U.S. State Department's decision to exclude Nigeria from a list of countries which engage in or tolerate severe violations of religious freedom.

The most recent Countries of Particular Concern list was released Nov. 15 and included several frequent offenders, including China, North Korea and Iran. Nigeria was left off the 2021 list, despite being designated a country of particular concern in 2020 and a special watch list country in 2019.

International Christian Concern on Nov. 16 named Nigeria the worst country in the world in its 2021 Persecutor of the Year Awards. ICC President Jeff King estimated 50,000 to 70,000 Christians have been killed in Nigeria since 2000. (TAB Media)

# Persecuted church

## New Uzbek religion law keeps restrictions on religious freedom

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan — Uzbekistan's new religion law went into effect July 6 and maintains almost all the previous law's restrictions on religious freedom.

The government drafted and adopted the law almost entirely in secret and in defiance of human rights obligations to several agencies, including the United Nations. (Uzbekistan sits on the U.N. Human Rights Council.)

The new law requires state permission to exercise freedom of religion, to share beliefs or teach religion. Publication, distribution and importation of printed or electronic materials are banned without prior state censorship.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom said the new law does lift a

ban on the public wearing of religious attire by non-registered clergy, and reduces to 50 the number of adult founders required for a religious entity to exist. Previously, the requirement was 100.

Uzbekistan is No. 21 on Open Doors' 2021 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

## Belarus officials threaten pastor, congregants with prosecution

MINSK, Belarus — The pastor and members of New Life Pentecostal Church in Minsk have been threatened with administrative and criminal charges if they continue to hold worship services in the parking lot, according to rights group Forum 18.

The members have worshipped weekly in the parking lot — even during inclement weather — since Feb. 17 when the state evicted the church

from its building, the report says. Church members vow to continue the worship services.

Authorities — from local to Parliament — have warned Pastor Vyacheslav Goncharenko of the possibility of prosecution for such charges



Photo courtesy of New Life Church

as organizing and participating in illegal meetings and not seeking state permission for mass meetings. The report says the eviction is part of a 15-year battle over the build-

ing that the state has claimed.

Additionally, officials are demanding \$180,000 in property taxes, even though a December 2005 presidential decree exempts churches, the report states.



# Alabama news

## OBITUARIES

► **Paul Clutts Jr.**, 94, died Oct. 31. A graduate of Madison High School, Clutts was a World War II veteran of the U.S. Army. He worked



CLUTTS

for Montgomery Ward and the U.S. Postal Service before being called into ministry in 1957. He attended Howard College and led churches in Tennessee — New Grove Baptist Church, Blanche — and Alabama: Antioch Baptist Church, Huntsville; First Baptist Church Cherokee; Westwood Baptist Church, Selma; FBC St. Elmo; FBC Ardmore; and Concord Baptist Church, Toney. He was a member of Jackson Way Baptist Church, Huntsville.

He is survived by his wife, Jean Clutts; daughter, Jeanne Hill (Danny); sons, Paul David Clutts (Jena), James Clutts, and Timothy Clutts (Joanna); nine grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren and five great-great-grandchildren.

## BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **The Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla**, will present a live nativity event Dec. 17–19, 6–8 p.m. During a 25-minute hayride guests will view scenes from Christ's birth to His resurrection. Christmas treats, hot chocolate and cider will be served. Visit [bcam.info](http://bcam.info). Bill McCall is pastor.

## FAYETTE COUNTY ASSOCIATION

► It was a great day for those gathered at **Rehobeth Baptist Church, Fayette**, Oct. 24 as they celebrated the church's 125th anniversary. "We had a great time and great fellowship," Pastor Casey Watkins said.

Former pastor Dwight Geist was the guest speaker for the day, and Polly Fowler led a choir made up of current and former members. Bonnie Lawrence led congregational singing.

Photo albums were on display, and a brief history of the church was distributed.

David Nelson of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and John Killian, director of missions for Fayette County Baptist Association, presented certificates to the church.

## JUDSON ASSOCIATION

► **Union Springs Baptist Church, Newville**, enjoyed a day full of celebration Oct. 24 for its 125th anniversary.

During the special service, the Byrd Family — who are former members of the church — provided special music. Ellen Dewberry of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented Pastor Jim Cordes with a certificate.

The church displayed items that had been buried in a time capsule at the 100th anniversary

celebration along with photos of church members and events from over the years. Lunch followed the service.

"It was an awesome success and was all wonderful," said Cathie Arnold, church clerk. "We had a good time of fellowship throughout the day."

## MORGAN ASSOCIATION

► **Danville Baptist Church** will host Road to Bethlehem living nativity Dec. 12, 5–7 p.m. There will be carolers, hot chocolate and apple cider, cookie decorating and a coloring contest.

## RANDOLPH ASSOCIATION

► **Steve Langley** has been called as pastor of **Zion Baptist Church, Woodland**. He previously served at Johnson Chapel, Valley; Sunset Heights, Lanett; and Bethel Baptist Church, Roanoke. He is a graduate of Southern Union State College and LaGrange College. Langley and his wife, Teresa, have two children and three grandchildren.



LANGLEY

## SAND MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

► It "felt like old home day" at **Dutton Baptist Church** as members celebrated the 100th anniversary Oct. 24, according to church member Sandy Barrett.

"There was a wonderful, sweet spirit," Barrett said. "God blessed us with a beautiful day."

Several former pastors shared memories during the special service — Buddy Strickland, Dale Haynes, Donny Johnston and Terry Robertson. The Tigie Family provided special music, and Perry Tigie led congregation singing.

Chris Guinn, director of missions for Sand Mountain Baptist Association, brought greetings, and Wendell Dutton of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a certificate to the church, which is led by Pastor Shannon Brewster.



Photo courtesy of DBC

Memorabilia from the church and association as well as nine photo albums with 3,000-plus photos were on display. Those present received a history of the church compiled by the anniversary committee — Sandy Barrett, Phyllis Tigie, Wilma Long, Sherry Brewster, Shari Edmonds, Linda Edmonds, Jo Ann Hurst, Jenny Phillips and Drinda Hughes. An anniversary cake featured photos of the old and new buildings.

► It was a "great day" at **Happy Home Baptist Church, Henagar**, as the church — led by Pastor Dustin Henshaw — celebrated its 100th anniversary Oct. 24.

Display boards featured photos of former pastors and other church leaders as well as church events including Vacation Bible School, Christmas plays and missions trips.

Former pastor Jim Booth was the guest speaker, and former pastor Matthew Kilgore shared memories of his time at the church. Matthew Lindille, grandson of former pastor J.A. Lindille, also shared, and former pastor Jack Andrews sent a video greeting to the church with his memories of serving there.

Karla Wilson sang, and Justin Byrum, minister of music, and the praise band led congregational singing.

Wendell Dutton presented a certificate to the church on behalf of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.

"It was a great day," said church member Theresa Moore. "We could feel the Spirit of God."

Following the service, a barbecue lunch was served at the church pavilion.

## SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Liberty Baptist Church, Chelsea**, had a lot to celebrate as it gathered for its 175th anniversary Nov. 7. In addition to a rich history, the members could see God's work in the present — four people were baptized in the second service.

"The celebration helped us see the importance of connecting the history of the church to the present and how the church affects the community, especially in the progression and growth of the Chelsea area," said Mike May, the church's discover pastor who leads worship ministry.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, was guest speaker for the celebration. He and Lonette Berg (right), executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented Pastor Tim Cox (left) with certificates for the church.

The church also viewed a video of former pastor Malcolm Wade, who shared his memories of serving the church in the mid-1950s.

Displays included church memorabilia, old photos, the original church sign and church furnishings (pulpit, pews and other furniture from the early 1900s forward).

A written history of the church as well as special anniversary cookies were distributed.



Photo courtesy of Lonette Berg



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Thank you to everyone who made a Grace Gift to Alabama Baptist Children's Homes. To learn more about Grace Gifts or how to make one, visit [alabamachild.org/give](http://alabamachild.org/give) or call 205.982.1112.



# Holiday attraction

## Experience Christmas season in northwest Louisiana's City of Lights

By Connie Pearson  
TAB Media

In Natchitoches, Louisiana, the Christmas festivities extend from the weekend before Thanksgiving until Jan. 6, so there is plenty of time to plan a visit to the town and still be home for your own family gatherings.

Pronounced “nack-a-tish” and located in the northwest quadrant of the state, the town is a 6-1/2-hour drive from Birmingham or a 45-minute drive from the Alexandria airport. If you visit, you will quickly understand how Natchitoches embraces its nickname as the City of Lights.

Some 300,000 lights adorn downtown and 120 displays are set along Cane River Lake — both good enough reasons to check out Natchitoches. But when you add the incredible food, special shops, gorgeous bed-and-breakfast inns and other attractions, spending a few days in Natchitoches becomes irresistible.

Cane River Lake, which runs through the middle of town, looks like a river but functions as a 33-mile-long lake because it is dammed up at both ends. The Riverfront Park, stage and amphitheater on Front Street serve as the main gathering spot for musical entertainment, bouncy houses for the children, the Santa House and weekly firework shows. The colored lights reflected in the water enhance the scene and underscore the celebration's name of “Festival of Lights.”

### Accommodation options

Chain hotels are available on University Highway and Highway 1 Bypass, plus two boutique hotels, Church Street Inn and Chateau St. Denis, are in the downtown area.

However, Natchitoches is proud of its designation as Louisiana's B&B capital, and I would strongly recommend you choose one from their list of 30. Several are in the historic district and date back to the 1800s.

Start by checking out Violet Hill, Samuel Guy House or Steel Mag-



Photo by Connie Pearson

Cane River Queen paddlewheel boat on the 33-mile-long Cane River Lake in Natchitoches, Louisiana, offers 60 passengers the chance to view around 120 displays during the Christmas season.

nia House. All three B&Bs are lovely, and their holiday decorations make them even more beautiful. If you travel with children, several of the B&Bs offer separate cottages suitable for families, and at the Riverbend B&B, it is possible to rent the entire house.

### Shopping

Boutiques, candy stores, antique shops and the Natchitoches Art Guild and Gallery offer a tempting array of merchandise, making them suitable places for finding that perfect gift for loved ones, but the most interesting store must be Kaffie-Frederick General Mercantile.

Kaffie-Frederick dates to 1863 and is Louisiana's oldest general store. Downstairs you can find every houseware item imaginable and vintage toys. Upstairs you will see a Christmas décor and gift shop full of beautiful items.

Tres Bien Antiques on St. Denis Street has a selection of prints by artist Denise Deville, including one that represents all the most famous scenes from the movie “Steel Magnolias,” which was filmed entirely in Natchitoches. The screenplay, a true story, was written by Natchitoches

native Robert Harling after his sister, Susan, died of complications from diabetes. Those who are fans of the movie will want to stop by the visitors center to pick up a brochure describing the locations of filming locations around the city.

### Louisiana cuisine

If you come to Louisiana hoping to find gumbo, red beans and rice, bread pudding and other Cajun and Creole offerings, you will certainly find them, but two dishes that are unique to Natchitoches are meat pies and yam cake. Louisiana Yam Cake is only made and sold in one place, a gas station, of all places. French Market Express bakes this outstanding dessert chocked with yams, coconut and pecans in large and small sizes, plus individual loaves, and two-bite muffins.

Meat pies are on several menus around town, but the ones I liked best were at Lasyone's Meat Pie Restaurant. Do yourself a favor and sample the crawfish version.

For smoked meats, outstanding potato salad and pecan pie, head to Grayson's Bar-B-Q a few miles away in Clarence. The owners and staff have been serving area resi-

dents for more than 50 years, and the aroma when you step out of your car will instantly cause you to start salivating. The smoked ham is exceptional.

At Merci Beaucoup, I loved the Cajun Potato, which consists of a baked potato topped with crawfish etouffee and a jumbo fried shrimp. At Cane River Commissary, I tried the Creole Sampler which was very good.

For a touch of elegance, I would recommend Mariner's Restaurant overlooking Sibley Lake. The restaurant property was purchased and completely redecorated during the pandemic and serves creative, chef-driven specialties in a refined atmosphere.

### A range of attractions

If you are not a shopper and wonder how you might spend a few days in Natchitoches, don't worry. There are some remarkably interesting options. Cane River Queen paddlewheel boat offers hourlong cruises up and down Cane River Lake.

Dark Woods Adventure Park opens for its annual Christmas in the Park walk-through light display with 200,000 lights of its own. The fresh mini-doughnuts, signature hot chocolate and inviting firepits lure visitors of all ages.

History buffs will want to check out Magnolia, Oakland and Melrose Plantations where many original buildings are still standing or the Fort St. Jean Baptiste State Historic Site, a replica fort providing insights into the lives of early settlers. At Melrose, you will become familiar with the artwork of Clementine Hunter who once worked as a cook for the plantation owners. For more modern history, head to the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame and Northwest Louisiana History Museum.

Hunting and fishing are popular during the designated seasons, in case you can't make it for Christmas. But, if possible, plan a visit when the City of Lights is awash with colored lights and all dressed up for the holidays.



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# Opportunities to serve

## Churches extend biblical hospitality through the holidays — you can too

By **Laura Lee Leathers**  
TAB Media

**F**rom the beginning of time, hospitality has been used to reach out and touch people. Placing the word “biblical” before “hospitality” changes everything.

Biblical hospitality is different from what the world offers. Why? Because of the motive. It comes from a heart that goes deeper than just meeting physical needs. It’s about reaching the spiritual condition, presenting the good news — Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

In other words, the need for physical food presents an opportunity to share the Bread of Life.

### Heart full of love

In the book “The Joy of Hospitality,” Vonette Bright and Barbara Ball give this definition: “True hospitality doesn’t wear us out or make us feel pressured; life sharing is not entertaining in our own strength. It flows from a heart full of love for others.”

Biblical hospitality takes many forms, and churches across Alabama serve through food pantries, special holiday meals and monthly programs throughout the year. Here are just a few examples:

#### ► **Downtown Rescue Mission**

“Hope Lives Here” is the

tagline for the Downtown Rescue Mission in Huntsville. For more than 40 years the facility has been a haven of shelter for homeless men, women and mothers with children. Currently, they provide emergency services consisting of a meal, shower and a place to sleep for approximately 240 individuals per night. A recovery program also is available.

Jay West, senior director of ministry, said many churches across the metro area support the mission, including area churches Whitesburg Baptist Church and Rivertree Church. Volunteers and funds are valuable assets and always needed.

#### ► **Greater St. John Baptist Church**

Greater St. John Baptist Church in Birmingham offers a food pantry for area low-income individuals.

“Nearly 70% (88,000) of Birmingham residents are living in areas that have been designated as a ‘food desert’ (a term used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to describe a resident’s access to healthy food),” the website says, adding, “the church’s desire is to start targeting hunger within our immediate community and neighborhood.”

#### ► **Linden Baptist Church & Bethel Baptist Association food ministries**



Photo courtesy of John Osborne

Volunteers prepare food for distribution through the Linden Baptist Church and Bethel Baptist Association food ministries, which together help more than 200 individuals each month.

Linden Baptist Church purchases food from the Selma Area Food Bank for monthly distribution. More than 100 families participate in the program, and the church anticipates a greater-than-normal need this year.

### Gospel opportunity

Presenting the gospel is part of the distribution, according to John Osborne, director of the Bethel Baptist Association food ministry.

Volunteers inquire about needs and prayer requests during food pickup.

“Our goal is to have a personal relationship with each family,” Osborne said.

And they do — if someone misses a pickup, Osborne or another volunteer follows up with a phone call and an offer for a makeup date.

The SAFB provides the church with a mobile food pantry several times a year. The church also assists the food bank’s effort to help seniors over age 60 access the Commodity Supplemental Food Program.

Volunteers play a significant role in the ministry, Osborne said. Assisting Bethel

Baptist is Calvary Baptist Church, south of Linden, as well as other churches in the area. Teenagers from a local high school, home-school children and 20 young adults from a Methodist church in Demopolis have played a significant role in preparing and distributing prepacked food boxes.

“Trusting that God will provide is required to be successful in this ministry,” Osborne said. “He has always provided whatever has been necessary.”

#### ► **Shelby Baptist Association**

Shelby Baptist Association holds an annual holiday food distribution in November.

### Emergency help

This year, 45 families who had been helped throughout the year were given designated times to arrive at the association building, said Delight Davis, SBA administrative assistant/treasurer.

A host welcomed them, then a chaplain met with each of them, sharing the gospel and praying.

Just before Christmas, the association also provides an emergency meal box filled

with nonperishable items.

While the office is closed for the holiday, it provides for individuals until regular hours resume. In 2020, some 20 families requested the boxes; this year the association expects an increase.

### Extend hospitality

Remember, hospitality is not an “event.” It is a vital part of the Christian life (Rom. 12:13). Begin with prayer and ask God how and where to get involved. Hospitality begins in the home and extends outward.

Here are some common needs and tips for providing help:

#### 1. **What material possessions might you give?**

- Money
- Clothes
- Furniture
- A building
- A vehicle

#### 2. **What talents and abilities can you share?**

- Can you organize?
- Are you a servant leader?
- Can you teach others how to grow and harvest vegetables?
- Do you have the spiritual gift of teaching?
- Are you an evangelist?

Everyone struggles with the issue of time. We make time for the things that are a priority, and a commitment must be made regarding time to engage in hospitality.

The holidays present an excellent opportunity to use possessions, spiritual gifts and time to touch the lives of others.

What is happening in your county? How can you be involved? It’s not too late to help fill a plate and serve others this holiday season.

Find out more about these ministries at [tabonline.org/biblical-hospitality](http://tabonline.org/biblical-hospitality).

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# Myers-Mallory

## State Missions Offering

As we approach the end of the year, remember that gifts continue to be received through December 31.  
**THANK YOU,** Alabama Baptists, for your faithfulness!





# At 91, Hazel Hacker remains faithful to the call

By Erin Roach

TAB Media

**H**azel Hacker has lived across the street from First Baptist Church Hartselle since Nov. 1, 1961. At that time, her house belonged to Morgan Baptist Association and her husband, Bill, was associational missionary. Twenty-five years later, the association deeded the house to the couple in appreciation of their service.

Bill died in 2012, but at 91 years old, Hazel still lives there and remains an active member of FBC Hartselle, a living example of decades of Christian service.

## Dream vacation

“My husband used to say if he could go to two bookstores and have a Snickers candy bar, he’d been on a good vacation,” Hacker told *The Alabama Baptist*. “When we went somewhere, we went to bookstores, and it didn’t have to be two different bookstores. It could have been the same bookstore twice.”

Humor is key to Hacker’s

resilience. When she’s in a group at church, they expect her to have something funny to contribute.

She gave an example: “Do you know what happens to a policeman when he goes to bed at night?”

“He becomes an undercover cop.”

## On the move

Hacker was born in Selma but soon moved to Birmingham, where she graduated from Phillips High School and attended Norwood Baptist Church. She met her husband there, and after he finished at Howard College (now Samford University), they moved to Fort Worth, Texas, so he could attend Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

After seminary, Bill served as pastor of Sixteenth Avenue Baptist Church in Decatur for a few years, then moved to FBC Centre before answering the call to Morgan Association, where he served 28 years.

“Being a pastor’s wife, we lived right close to the church, and I always felt like



Photo courtesy of Hazel Hacker  
Hazel Hacker is an active member of First Baptist Church Hartselle.

I needed to present myself so that if company came I’d be presentable,” Hacker recalled. “I still do that. I still get up in the morning and put on my clothes and put on my makeup. If I want to go somewhere, I don’t have to stop and figure out what I’m going to do.”

When her husband was an associational missionary, they had two young girls and wanted them to have consistency at a local church, so Hacker didn’t accompany him much. Bill was expected

to visit all the churches of the association at least once a year, and with 72 churches, that kept him busy.

“I teased and said when the girls got old enough they could come home from church and finish lunch, I’d go with him,” Hacker said. “So we did that.”

The Hackers’ oldest daughter, Peggy Suggs, graduated from Samford and now plays keyboard at Central Park Baptist Church in Decatur. Their younger daughter, Susan Bollinger, graduated from Judson College and lives in Bonham, Texas. She has made 17 trips to Russia to work with orphans, her mother said.

“They’ve both been active in missions wherever they are,” Hacker said of her daughters.

## Heart for missions

Through the years, Hacker taught Sunday School, Training Union, Girls in Action and Young Woman’s Auxiliary. As an associational missionary’s wife, she often led Vacation Bible School training and has been strongly involved in Woman’s Missionary Union.

“I sing in the choir, but I go along with the crowd. If they go wrong, I’m right with them,” she joked. “At my age, I’m slowing down.”

Two things Hacker still does at a strong pace involve touching the lives of children worldwide.

“I crochet sweaters for kids and send them to World Vision, and they send them all over the world,” she explained. “I do this at night when I can’t get up and run around much.”

## Praying for recipients

Hacker can make four sweaters and matching hats per week, ranging in sizes for 2- through 6-year-olds.

“This is a joy to me,” she said. “When I finish one, I put it over on the couch in my den, and I can look at it and pray for whoever is going to get that little sweater.”

Also, Hacker said she has “fallen in love with” Operation Christmas Child, the shoebox ministry of Samaritan’s Purse. For several years she was the coordinator at FBC Hartselle, and now she assembles a box per month year-round.

Hacker also cuts up old jeans and makes small purses to include in the boxes, using the seams as handles.

The bottom line in any account of her life, Hacker said, shouldn’t be about her “but about what God’s doing and how He’s used me. He can use anyone at any age.”

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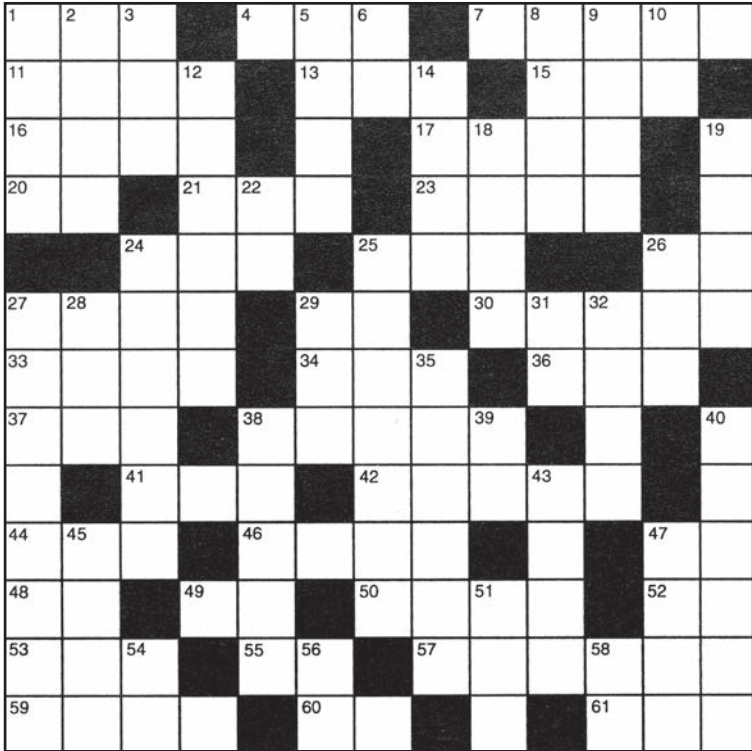
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# CHRISTIAN crossword

ACROSS

- 1. God shall \_\_\_\_ them off. (Ps. 94:23)
- 4. If \_\_\_\_ man serve me. (John 12:26)
- 7. \_\_\_\_ the Lord. (Ex. 12:31)
- 11. Large monkeys.
- 13. Slippery fish.
- 15. Very Important Person. (abbr.)
- 16. There is \_\_\_\_ beside me. (Isa. 45:6)
- 17. That thine eyes may be \_\_\_\_\_. (2 Chron. 6:20)
- 20. Printer's measures.
- 21. Chew the \_\_\_\_\_. (Deut. 14:7)
- 23. The \_\_\_\_ of perfectness. (Col. 3:14)
- 24. While the \_\_\_\_ was a preparing. (1 Pet. 3:20)
- 25. New, recent.
- 26. Attorney General. (abbr.)
- 27. A \_\_\_\_ to be born. (Eccles. 3:2)
- 29. Bushel. (abbr.)
- 30. In the seventh year of his \_\_\_\_\_. (Esther 2:16)
- 33. Form of the word root.
- 34. Short form of "umpire."
- 36. An expert.
- 37. Ensign. (abbr.)
- 38. A canopy of plant material.
- 41. From beginning to \_\_\_\_.
- 42. Northern sea duck.
- 44. He was \_\_\_\_ at that saying. (Mark 10:22)
- 46. Paddles used to row a boat.
- 47. Actual weight. (abbr.)
- 48. Pronoun meaning "we."
- 49. Horsepower. (abbr.)
- 50. The sower \_\_\_\_ the grain.
- 52. New England state. (abbr.)
- 53. And the \_\_\_\_, which the Lord God had taken



By Arlene Walker Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- from man, made he a woman ... (Gen. 2:22)
- 55. Seventh note of musical scale.
- 57. Below.
- 59. Go, return \_\_\_\_ to her mother's house. (Ruth 1:8)
- 60. Square. (abbr.)
- 61. Adam \_\_\_\_ Eve.

DOWN

- 1. The sweet \_\_\_\_ from a far country. (Jer. 6:20)
- 2. Laid him on the altar \_\_\_\_ the wood. (Gen. 22:9)
- 3. Lord, thy pound hath gained \_\_\_\_ pounds. (Luke 19:16)
- 5. My God shall supply all your \_\_\_\_\_. (Phil. 4:19)
- 6. Go \_\_\_\_ into all the world. (Mark 16:15)
- 8. Lord \_\_\_\_ of the sabbath. (Matt. 12:8)
- 9. Outside layer of an orange.
- 10. Vice president. (abbr.)
- 12. His \_\_\_\_ is with the righteous. (Prov. 3:32)
- 14. Lower part of the ear.
- 18. The \_\_\_\_ always with you. (Matt. 26:11)
- 19. Shew me a \_\_\_\_\_. (Judg. 6:17)

- 22. United Kingdom. (abbr.)
- 24. Entertained.
- 25. Book of Israelites' wilderness wanderings.
- 26. He is of \_\_\_\_\_. (John 9:21)
- 27. Have \_\_\_\_ in heaven. (Mark 10:21)
- 28. Suffix which means "act" or "condition of."
- 29. Prickly seed case.
- 31. Each. (abbr.)
- 32. One who frosts cake.
- 35. Full of deadly \_\_\_\_\_. (James 3:8)
- 38. Take as one's own child.
- 39. Rural delivery. (abbr.)
- 40. Worthy of his \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Tim. 5:18)
- 43. Direction of sunrise.
- 45. Largest continent.
- 47. Let all the people say, \_\_\_\_\_. (Ps. 106:48)
- 51. Marry.
- 54. Before Christ. (abbr.)
- 56. Surely the Lord \_\_\_\_ in this place. (Gen. 28:16)
- 58. Interjection expressing triumph.

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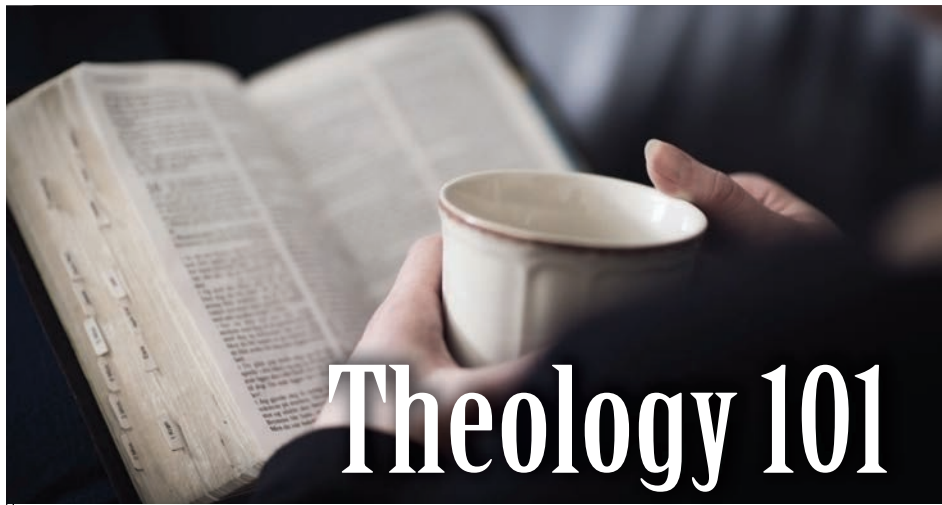
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# Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

## Songs of Christmas

### Zacharias' Song

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.  
TAB Media

In the larger biblical account of the birth of Jesus we read also about the birth of John the Baptist, after which another song of Christmas was voiced, by John's father.

The occasion was the formal naming of the son born to Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth in the twilight of their lives. While performing his priestly duties, Zacharias was visited by an angel who announced the forthcoming conception and birth of a son. The aged priest was instructed by the angel to give him the name John. When Zacharias requested proof of the miraculous promise of a son in his old age — unwilling to simply accept the angel's message — Zacharias was rendered unable to speak until the day when he officially named his son John.

When the infant was presented for the official naming ceremony, apparently everyone presumed he would be named after his father. In careful obedience to his instructions from the angel of the Lord, Zacharias, though still unable to speak, wrote emphatically on a tablet that his son would be called John.

In that act of obedience, the ability to speak was restored to the aged priest, and his first words were praise: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel" (Luke 1:68). "Blessed" in the Latin translation has served to give the title "Benedictus" to Zacharias' song. As with Mary's song last week, so this week we seek to identify

some theological truths suggested by Zacharias.

His song was in two parts. The first was praise, while the second was prophecy. Like all true Christian praise, that voiced by Zacharias was enabled by the Holy Spirit (v. 67). Expressed in poetic language and filled with figures of speech, the praise portion has to do with what God was about to do in sending the promised Messiah (vv. 68–75). Being so sure what God promises He is faithful to do, Zacharias praised God in the past tense for what was at the time still in the future — the birth of Jesus.

#### Announcing salvation

The second part of the song was prophecy, directed toward his infant son (vv. 76–79) who was to be the forerunner of the Messiah, announcing salvation and the forgiveness of sins through God's mercy. That salvation would guide people's feet "into the way of peace" (v. 79).

Grateful songs of praise often follow great acts of God. Such was the case with Mary's song and then with Zacharias'. Will this holy season find us lifting songs of praise to God for His gracious and mighty works?

*Jerry Batson is a retired Alabama Baptist pastor who also has served as associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor of several schools of religion during his career.*



## Famous Christians from previous centuries

# Heroes of the Faith

## 2021 marks 800th birthday of Italian theologian and cardinal

St. Bonaventure (1221–1274) was an Italian Franciscan, theologian and philosopher. He was a cardinal and a doctor of the Catholic Church.

This year is the 800th anniversary of his birth.

He was born at Bagnoregio in the Tuscany region of Italy, 78 miles north of Rome. His parents were Giovanni di Fidanza and Maria di Ritella.

As a small child, he contracted a serious disease. His mother asked St. Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) to pray for his healing. God answered her prayer. Understanding the child would become a great

man, Francis cried out what would become the child's name: "O Buona ventura!" (O good fortune).

When he was 22, Bonaventure joined the Friars Minor known as the Franciscans. St. Francis started it in 1209. The Franciscans stressed a life of prayer, poverty and charity. Bonaventure wrote a book about the beloved founder — "The Life of St. Francis of Assisi."

He studied at the prestigious University of Paris and received his master of theology degree. He became a lecturer at the university from 1248 until 1256.

His numerous books display his theological and philosophical thoughts. "Journey of the Soul to God" is a masterpiece of medieval spiritual practice. "The Tree of Life" is focused on the life of Christ.

The Franciscan brothers elected Bonaventure as minister general of the order in 1257.

During the next 15 years, he continually visited the brothers, walking from Assisi to Madrid and Paris and to all the other friaries of Europe.

His humble living brought him to the Pope's attention, and he was named a cardinal. When

couriers found Bonaventure to give him a red hat, which signified he was a cardinal, he was washing the dishes after a meal. He thanked them and completed the dishes before picking up the hat.

As cardinal, Pope Gregory X asked Bonaventure to heal the schism of the two parts of the Catholic Church — the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic. His work resulted in the Eastern churches accepting the union July 6, 1274.

#### Sudden death

Bonaventure died suddenly July 15, 1274. The chronicle of his secretary states that he was poisoned.

In 1482, Pope Sixtus IV included him in the catalogue of the saints.

Pope Sixtus V declared him a doctor of the Church in 1588.

Bonaventure's Christ-centered life and philosophy can be summed up in one of his famous sayings: "If you learn everything except Christ," he wrote, "you learn nothing. If you learn nothing except Christ, you learn everything."



ST. BONAVENTURE

## By Joanne Sloan

*Joanne Sloan, a member of First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa, has been a published writer of articles and books for 30 years. She has a bachelor's degree double majoring in history and English from East Texas State University (now Texas A&M–Commerce) and a master's degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).*





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## OTHER OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE

*Ministers Wives' Connection, **January 11** online*

*Great Commission Conversations, Morning and Evening, **January 18**, online*

*Southeast Youth Conclave, **January 20-22**, Chattanooga Convention Center*

*Discipleship Network of Alabama Annual Meeting, **January 28-29**, Athens First*

*Alabama Bible Skills and Drills Retreat, **January 28-29**, Shocco Springs*

*Sharing Hope Conference, **January 30-31**, Dauphin Way, Mobile*



# Unreached people propel efforts to mobilize students

By Dianna L. Cagle  
TAB Media

More people today are dying and going to a Christ-less eternity than at any point in history," said the International Mission Board's Chris Derry, creating an unprec-

edented missions opportunity for students and young adults.

Unite, sponsored by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, met Nov. 15 at The Well Church in Huntsville to discuss missions opportunities for students.

"We watched last year as you saw your campuses shut down completely," said Derry, director of church and network relations for IMB.

"They were at home online for class.

"We know it was difficult to try to do ministry last year but the Lord continues to redeem the people for Himself."

For the IMB, 91% of the organization's ministry teams are focused on the unreached. Derry highlighted the number of people dying every day — 155,473.

"That is our motivation to share Christ, that they can have hope and forgiveness and reconciliation with the Father because of His gospel," he said.

"We press through things like pandemics and Zoom meetings."

According to IMB research and population trends, nearly 16 billion



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist  
Andy Pettigrew, student mobilizer manager for the International Mission Board, addresses campus ministers and collegiate church leaders about recruiting students to the missions field.

people lived between 1700 and 2000. Derry emphasized that 9 billion more will live between 2000 and 2100, totaling 24 billion in this century. It's a massive opportunity for a generation that's constantly connected online, can fly at the drop of a hat and has a desire to move and go, Derry noted.

With 52% of the world's population under the age 29, Sarah Farley, IMB student mobilization associate, said the organization is the largest sender of students, but more still needs to be done.

"We don't just want your young adults and students, we need your young adults and students," she said.

## Christmas Greetings!

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us! His death, burial, resurrection and soon return is the message we proclaim.

*Enjoy and share Jesus this season.*



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# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 12

## Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Dean of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



### GOD SAVES Ezekiel 11:2-4, 14-21

God's people often assume God will bless them, regardless of their obedience or disobedience, because they were born into covenant relationship with Him (as Jews may assume), or because they "grew up in church" (as some Baptists may assume). They may be ignorant that repentance, faith and obedience are fruit borne out in the lives of Christians who have been born again, saved by grace through faith.

Old Testament prophets were called out by God, announcing His judgment to a city or a nation as an invitation for the hearers to repent, be reconciled and experience restored fellowship with God. In Ezekiel 11, readers will note three distinct sections: a vision of judgment on disobedience, a promise of redemption and restoration and a vision of God's glory departing from Jerusalem. We will look at the first two sections.

#### Called Out (2-4)

The spirit of God reveals to Ezekiel a vision of Jerusalem. Twenty-five leaders are gathered together to discuss the current affairs of the city. Rather than considering the welfare of the inhabitants, they are conceiving plans for their own benefit, characterized as evil.

Translators are not in agreement regarding the meaning of verse 3, with some who interpret it as containing a question, while others translate it as a statement. The Christian Standard Bible reads it as a suggestive question, one in which leaders are promoting building projects. Like those days of Ezekiel, we are living in days in which civil leaders pursue personal privilege over community benefit, religious leaders speak for a "god" they do not know and whose word they do not proclaim and moral decay as rampant as it was in Jerusalem prior to the exile. These are not the characteristics of believers who are called to be holy.

#### Gathered (14-17)

While God's people are scattered

among the nations, the time is coming when God will gather believers from the nations into the land of Israel.

These words reflect God's promises in the Torah, particularly in Deuteronomy.

In the post-exilic period, Nehemiah reminds God of His promises when he prays, "... if you return to me and carefully observe my commands ... I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I chose to have my name dwell" (Neh. 1:9).

God has always had a plan to redeem a people to Himself from every tribe, tongue and nation. From Genesis to Revelation, the Scriptures record God's promises that the nations will know Him. In the prophets, we continually read God is making Himself known to the nations.

Take time to read judgment oracles against the nations in Isaiah 13-23, Ezekiel 25-35, Amos 1-2 and Jonah 3.

Why are these indictments against the nations? God invites the guilty parties to confess their sin, repent of their wickedness, trust God's word and surrender to live in covenant fellowship with Him.

#### Sanctified (18-21)

Jeremiah writes of a new covenant coming to the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jer. 31).

This passage in Ezekiel 11 underscores this new covenant, emphasizing a consecrated gathering of believers in the Promised Land, a transformed people with a new heart and a new spirit. No longer will they pursue abominable idolatries.

Instead, the inhabitants will live in covenant fellowship with God: "They will follow my statutes, keep my ordinances and practice them."

We cannot save ourselves, and we cannot become holy without the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. His sacrifice ratified the new covenant. Thank God He exchanges our hearts of stone for hearts of flesh to trust the Incarnate Christ.

## Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical &amp; Religious Studies, Samford University



### THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS Isaiah 9:1-3; John 1:1-9

There is something unnerving about being in a place of complete and total darkness — not the sort of darkness you might experience on a moonless night or in a room without the lights on, but the kind that surrounds you when you descend into a cave. When you have trekked far enough into the cave for that last glimmer of light from the entrance to disappear, you turn off the comforting headlamps and flashlights that help you see the way. There, the last photon of light vanishes, and you experience a darkness so thick you can almost feel it. It is remarkable how much this scene is changed when a single light is switched back on.

The Bible often employs this same imagery of light penetrating the darkness. God's first act of creation in Genesis 1 is to command, "Let there be light!" and drive back the darkness that had enveloped the primordial sea. Even in the midst of his suffering, Job declares God "reveals mysteries from the darkness and brings the deepest darkness into the light" (Job 12:22). In a similar vein, the psalmist praises God saying, "LORD, You light my lamp; my God illuminates my darkness" (Ps. 18:28). For the biblical authors, it was the divine light of God's presence that they hoped would break through the darkness of their present circumstances.

#### The light shines on those living in a land of darkness. (Isa. 9:1-3)

Few hours were darker in the history of God's chosen people than the closing decades of the eighth century B.C. In the year 732, the mighty Assyrian emperor Tiglath-pileser III subjugated much of the territory of the northern kingdom Israel, turning these areas into Assyrian provinces. Just a decade later, Assyrian emperors would destroy the Israelite capital Samaria and with it the rest of the nation of Israel. Only the much smaller and much weaker southern kingdom, Judah, now remained. It was a dark time indeed for the na-

tion, and yet, just when all hope seemed to be lost, the prophet Isaiah found hope in the accession of Judah's new king, Hezekiah. With God's help, Hezekiah would be able to withstand the further attacks of the Assyrians (2 Kings 19:32-37); through him, God's great light would shine once again on those living in Assyria's shadow (Isa. 9:2).

#### Jesus is the light that shines in darkness. (John 1:1-4)

As the words of Isaiah continued to echo through the centuries, those touched by the ministry of Jesus understood the prophet's words in an entirely new light. Matthew's Gospel draws a connection between the light God had once shown on Zebulun and Naphtali (Isa. 9:1) and the light Jesus brought to these same regions when He moved to the nearby town of Capernaum (Matt. 4:16). John's Gospel goes even further, as he declares concerning Jesus, the living Word, "Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men" (John 1:4). God had once used His king, Hezekiah, to bring light to Assyrian captives; now, a much greater light had arrived and would shine upon all of humanity.

#### Jesus gives light to everyone. (John 1:5-9)

If it had been a dark time for Israel in Isaiah's day, it was an equally dark time in the days of Jesus' earthly ministry. The nation was riven by religious strife. The terrible might of Rome posed a constant threat to the nation.

Little hope seemed to exist for the people. Yet, just when circumstances seemed most dire, the light of Christ did shine into the darkness. When his son John (the Baptist) was born, Zechariah had prophesied that "the Dawn from on high will visit us to shine on those who live in darkness and the shadow of death" (Luke 1:78-79a). Now, John (the Evangelist) proclaims that it is Christ Himself who was and is "the True Light" who has come into the world and who gives light to everyone.



# MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs  
TAB Media

## Christmas Matters: How Christ's birth makes a difference every day

**S**tarting a new venture later in life has not always been the norm. Sharing that new venture with a lifelong friend is even more unusual.

But in their 50s, Anna Nash and Katy Shelton have co-written a devotional, “Christmas Matters: How the Birth of Jesus Makes a Difference Every Day.”

Two years ago, Shelton decided to read a chapter from Luke during each of the 24 days before Christmas. Though raised in church, she had a difficult time understanding practical applications from some passages.

“At this point, I called Anna,” Shelton recalled. “I said, ‘So, I’m confused about some of these parables. What would you think about writing a short book to explain some of [them] in simple terms about what they mean today?’”

Nash’s response was, “Absolutely not.”

### Devotional

She said it had previously been done by others with more Bible knowledge. But after praying, the women agreed God was leading them to write a Christmas devotional with a practical focus. “Christmas Matters” was the result.

Each chapter contains an overview



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verse from Luke, a reflective reading, thoughts or questions about the reading, a prayer and a biblical promise. Nash and Shelton avoided using “church lingo,” wanting it to be easy to understand for those with and without a church background.

Neither of the women ever imagined being co-authors. However, later in life each felt God had more planned for them.

“I think we both as empty-nesters weren’t ready to retire,” Shelton explained.

“We were stay-at-home moms taking care of our kids. When our kids left, we lived in different states and weren’t super close at that point. But we separately both felt inspired to do something.”

Nash discovered a passion to help others in times of transition, so she founded Beacon People, explaining that “the Lord inspired me with some new thoughts of truth that I felt very burdened about, along the lines of God’s calling and aligning

that with His word — for the purpose of our lives in His Kingdom, for our satisfaction and for His glory. We are image-bearers. I couldn’t stand to not say it.”

Blogging about her new passion

led to developing a curriculum for Beacon People, but Nash knew she didn’t have the skills to pull it off without help.

“That was around the same time I was turning 50. I attempted to write because when I believe in something, I want to communicate about it in any way I can,” she said.

“I do think I’m a communicator, but I don’t think I’m a good writer.

“I’m a ‘recovering’ Bible-belt ‘performance girl,’” Nash admitted, “and a lot of that means I have to be able to do it all and do it well. [I have learned] to be able to breathe and say, ‘That’s what the Body of Christ is about. Anna cannot spell right; Anna cannot complete a sentence or do the right punctuation and that’s OK,’ because there are others

around me with that gift.’”

In fact, it was Shelton’s skills that drew Nash to her originally.

“I did not even attempt to start writing until I was 50 years old,” Shelton said. “Growing up, I was not a reader at all. I probably didn’t start reading for pleasure until I was in my 30s. I was a late bloomer as far as reading and writing.”

### Later in life

“[However], just because you haven’t attempted something before you’re 50 doesn’t mean you shouldn’t.”

Working together helped the women learn “more than we wanted,” Nash joked, adding, “As we launched the book, I was speechless and so humbled that we have the privilege of doing this ... that we’re childhood friends, lifelong friends. And yet, in this stage in life, who gets to do that with her best friend?”

“Working together we have learned so much more about each other,” Shelton said.

“We each have strengths and weaknesses in our writing, and in some ways we’re very different and in some ways we’re very much alike.

“It’s kind of like a marriage, where you have to work through things and figure things out and you’re better for it.”

Another devotional, for the 40 days of Lent, “Easter Matters: How the Resurrection of Jesus Changes You” is scheduled to release in February 2022.

### EDITOR’S NOTE

*Reviews of films, books, music or other media that appear in TAB are intended to help readers evaluate current media for themselves, their children and grandchildren in order to decide whether to watch, read or listen. Reviews are not an endorsement by the writer or TAB Media.*



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