

The Alabama Baptist

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December 23, 2021

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



L to r: James Hammack and Jennifer Davis Rash



L to r: Amy Hacker, Thomas Felder, Carrie B. McWhorter, Dianna L. Cagle



L to r: Hannah Muñoz and Melanie McKinney



L to r: Trennis and Pam Henderson



Richard Maddox

Margaret Colson



Back row, l to r: Annette Brown and Dave Walsh

Front row, l to r: Sarah Gill and Grace Thomion



Lauren C. Grim



L to r: Maggie Evans, Susan Stevens, Deb Lowery and Pam Holt



Debbie Campbell and Addie Lee Frierson



Shawn Hendricks

Merry
Christmas

FROM PRESIDENT AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
AND STAFF AT TAB MEDIA GROUP

Let us know

TAB Media asked the following questions on social media

COLORED OR WHITE LIGHTS?



Brian Harris
We go back and forth on the tree inside. Depends on who clicks the button last! Outside — I have all white lights.



Megan Chandler
Colored lights!



Amy Barber
I like them both. My tree has both ... love it.



Tricia Prestwood Light
Colored lights.



Julie Redmond Donavan
Both!



Lauren Cumbie
My husband and I compromised. We bought a tree that does both. So we alternate one day with white lights for me and the next color lights for him!

FAVORITE CHRISTMAS SONG



Paula Hyche
Carol of the Bells



Mandy Henderson
Go Tell It on the Mountain
I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day



Alisa Compton
Beautiful Star of Bethlehem



Janet Hand
Mary, Did You Know?



Howard Abrams
Joy to the World



Tammie Medley
O Holy Night

FAVORITE CHRISTMAS TRADITION



Aletha Barnes Tecklenburg
Our family began having our big Christmas meal on Christmas Eve in 2001 since my husband left for his first deployment to Afghanistan on Christmas Day that year. We have kept that tradition and just enjoy leftovers while relaxing on Christmas Day.



Faye Drummond Stone
In December 1986, I had surgery for TMJ. My gums were wired together for 6 weeks. The only nutrition I could have was liquid. I made lime sherbet punch at our family Christmas party. I was not the only one who enjoyed it. The whole family did. Now we have it every Christmas.

FAVORITE CHRISTMAS MOVIE



JoEllen Botts Ingram
It's a Wonderful Life



Jennifer Davis Scott
Home Alone



Sam Evans
The Family Stone

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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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 14.

OPINION



RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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



jrash@thealabamabaptist.org



@RashionalThts

Christmas snow globe moments of peace amid trying times

Rarely has every moment of any Christmas season worked out precisely as I had hoped and never have we made it from Thanksgiving to New Year's without a moment of sadness, frustration or disappointment.

But every holiday season I can remember has had its own special moment of joy and unique impression on my heart. I'm confident it will happen again this year, and I look forward with anticipation of what that particular experience will be.

Preparing for our family Christmas gatherings and doing all the seasonal things we do this time of year helps me remember to appreciate those we love and not take them for granted. You never really know how long we have with each person.

And while those first holidays without a loved one are definitely difficult, God always seems to provide a glimpse of hope and extra special warmth through others and in ways we could never have guessed.

The first Christmas after my bonus mom died, I traveled with her family to Germany and Austria during the Christmas season.

Our broken hearts were held together in the midst of fairy

tale-style Christmas markets, an unexpected tea time at the home where "The Sound of Music" was filmed and a magical Christmas Eve.

More than a decade later, we still talk about that Christmas Eve night — walking down the quiet and lonely cobblestone street with hundreds of twinkling lights almost within reach above our heads as the church bells echoed across the sleepy little town.

We attended a late-night Christmas Eve service, only understanding part of what was said but grasping every aspect of what was happening through our hearts united in Christ.

As we walked home after the service, the perfect amount of tiny snowflakes began to fall,

and we stood in the moonlight mesmerized, not wanting the moment to end.

It truly felt like we had walked out the front door of the church and straight into a snow globe — for those few minutes that evening, every part of life was perfect and peaceful.

Where did all the people from the church go? How did we — mere guests in this beautiful town — find ourselves in this storied, movie-set moment all alone and able to soak up every glorious sound and icy snowflake that tickled our cheeks?

Our only explanation was Immanuel — God with us. He provided exactly what we needed when we needed it.

Psalm 73:26 tells us, "My

flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

And so while the lyrics of Andy Williams' 1963 hit "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year" may not be the full reality for our Christmas seasons, we can look to the One who always holds us tight and gave us the greatest gift we could ever desire — Jesus Christ.

And through Him we can receive the gift of redemption, salvation and so much more.

Isaiah 9:6 says it best: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."



Christmas market images replicating what can be found in Germany and Austria this time of year have a special place in our home. They remind us of those 10 days spent wandering through Christmas market after Christmas market back in 2008. They also help us feel closer to our dear friends in Germany.

Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Your Voice



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

Pondering the 'why' behind the Magi's quest to see Jesus

By Joe McKeever

joemckeever.com

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King, wise men from the east arrived unexpectedly in Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him'" (Matt. 2:1-2).

Only men would have done what the Magi did. Only a group of buddies, all of them sharing the same drives and curiosities and interests, only such a band of brothers, would have gone to such lengths simply to see a baby.

It's a man thing.

If that sounds condescending to the women in the audience, I apologize, but it's the truth. Women talk about this all the time, how men do crazy things, disregarding the risk.

The greatest puzzle

To me, the greatest puzzle of the Magi story is not the star they followed, not their origin and not even the religious significance. Instead I wonder simply why they did what they did.

Why would a small group of men, albeit wealthy ones, put their lives on hold and travel at considerable expense across uncharted territory for a great distance when they were uncertain where they were headed, how far it was, or what they would see when they got there? As I say, it was a man-thing.

It simply was not logical. It didn't



Unsplash.com

make sense in a hundred ways. After all, it was only a baby. There could hardly have been any political considerations or international angles to their venture.

It was only a baby. And babies do not know when you come to see them. They can't respond with a thank you and be forever in your debt. It makes little sense to us today. But I think I know.

They came for their own sake. Something inside them said, "I want to see, to be there, to know, to touch."

It's not enough to send a greeting card or letter. It's not enough to read about it in the paper or watch it on television. Some things you want to experience in person. You just have to be there.

It's not sufficient explanation to

say, "They wanted to see the King of the Jews."

The Jews were not much of a nation and hadn't been for a long time. Not important at all. There is no reason why anyone would travel even 5 miles to see their new king, much less thousands of miles.

True to themselves

Even if you were King of the Jews, you weren't king of much. And He was just a baby and would not be a king at all for some time to come, if ever (humanly speaking).

I wonder what happened when the men returned home.

I can hear their wives: "Well, report in. What did you do? What did you see?" And most of all, "Was it worth it?"

Wives are nothing if not practical.

The Magi would have answered, "We saw a baby. ... We worshipped him and left some gifts. But other than the murderous tyrant King Herod putting a bounty on our heads, that's all."

The Magi were being true to themselves when they came to Bethlehem, sought out the King, bowed before Him and worshipped Him with gifts. They did not know the gifts they brought, especially the gold, would be needed to finance the family's sudden trip to Egypt to escape Herod's rampage. They did not know that years later, Matthew would add the strange little tale to his account of the life and ministry of this Jesus.

They had no way of knowing over 2,000 years after they had lived and died, you and I would still be discussing them, wondering about them and admiring their resolve.

We wish we had been with them. We wish we were as wise as they. And so many things we wonder.

I wonder what bold thing God wants me to do which I have held back from because I was fearful and unwilling to take risks or to incur the wrath of some around me.

I wonder if when we get to heaven, we will find the Heavenly Father did something through those eastern visitors to Bethlehem completely unknown to us and of great benefit to the little holy family.

I think of the Lord's statement in Luke 18:8. "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth." And I think, "Find it in me, O Lord. In me."

"Father, make me less cautious, more daring, more willing to launch out into the deep at Thy word. Amen."

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“This gift of God we'll cherish well,
That ever joy our hearts shall fill.”

“HOW GREAT OUR JOY”

Traditional German carol

Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Jesus. Matthew 1:21 says, “And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”

This verse tells us Jesus will save us from our sins. What are our sins? Sin came into the world when Adam and Eve ate the fruit in the garden. Since we are all descendants of Adam and Eve, we are all born sinners so we need a Savior.

This Christmas, the greatest gift you could receive is the gift of Jesus as your Savior.

Gregg Potts
Cartersville, Ga.

As I look around at the world, I become more and more aware of the

mess of brokenness and disappointment sin has created.

For the sake of reflection, suppose for a moment that God's plan for the world ordained that we would each spend some amount of time in heaven before living on earth. I don't think I would have the courage to make that transition, and I certainly wouldn't have the desire!

Yet Christ did just that. And during His season on earth, He bore more than we will ever know or be required to endure.

That reality in and of itself speaks of His love for us.

Rosalie Chesley
Managing editor, Baptist LIFE

Our goal is to be obedient, and [God] has put people in our lives

who have just blessed us and blessed us. ... What's your story, how are you able to connect with people God puts in your path, wherever that is?

Trennis Henderson
Regional correspondent
TAB Media

Christianity is extremely rational — it's not a blind faith.

Matt Adams
Illusionist and evangelist

All my life I've been afraid to (get baptized), so I just put it off and said I'll do without it. But as I got older I got to thinking about it, and I just decided to do it.

Joy Stamey, 86
New member of Liberty Live Church in Hampton, Va.

Greatest gift of Christmas

In a land far from the old farmhouse of my childhood, the greatest gift to humanity arrived.

The ultimate present of all the ages came wrapped in rags and placed in a manger.

His arrival didn't happen as the world expected. If there had been magazines in that day, it wouldn't have been a cover story.

But this gift, Jesus, is the greatest gift of all time. He came to change the lives and eternal destiny of all who would receive Him.

Christ left the beauty and glory of heaven to take the form of a human, live a sinless life and sacrifice His life for us.

And the gift keeps giving! Believers in Christ find reconciliation with Holy God because of Jesus' sacrifice.

Jesus gave us a Comforter, the presence of the Holy Spirit, to guide us through life on earth. We will spend eternity with our Lord in heaven.

Ah, the unfathomable and unspeakable joy of God's gift to us!

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

This Christmas, I hope you will experience the joy of God's perfect gift.

Savor the gift of each moment of the season.

Don't get caught up in the commercialization of this sacred celebration.

It's not about beautifully wrapped packages or a perfectly decorated tree.

It's about the Savior of the world. The perfect gift, given to us with love.

Charlene Miller
“Gifts and Giving”
(Read the full post at leanintojesus.com/blog)

From the *Twitterverse*

@ValleydaleSBC

If you are in need of joy during this Christmas season, ask God. Joy was one of the great promises of Jesus' birth. #christmas #joy #emmanuel #GodWithUs

@bcm link

Advent simply means arrival. Advent Past is what we look back on at Christmas as Christ's first coming. Advent Future is what we look forward to as His return. Advent Present was initiated by Jesus when He said: “As the Father has sent me, I send you.”

@ERLC

Advent is when Christians remember the long-awaited arrival of the Messiah. As we look forward to Christmas, we stand in the sandals of those who waited centuries for the arrival of the One God had prophesied would come. —@champhornton

@BaptistPress

@AaronBWilson26: “As you reflect on peace this Christmas, pause to consider the richness of the peace your spiritual adoption brings and the calling to courageously embrace the temporary battle that accompanies it as we await Jesus' return.”

@PaulTripp

What could produce more heartfelt gratitude than rescuing, forgiving, accepting, adopting, transforming, empowering and delivering grace?

@Lifeway

“Of all the Christmas programs churches offer in December, possibly the most important is simply reading the biblical account of the Christmas story itself.” — @smcconn

@BaptistStandard

Christmas teaches Jesus' way is counter to the way of power. Chris-

tians, of all people, ought to pay close attention to this lesson ...

@sPeytonHill

If you don't read and interpret the Old Testament with Christ as the focus and goal, then you miss 95% of the beauty of Christmas carols.

@nathanafinn

Friends in ministry: pride comes in many forms. Take care that you never “outgrow” your home church that first nurtured your faith. Some of your views might change — Lord willing, because of maturity. But remain ever grounded, humble and thankful for your roots in the faith.

@scottdawson

Alabama grieves with the families devastated through the tornado's path ... We know how they feel and pray for every family impacted.

Stronger together.

3 stories you should know



Photo by Gerald Herbert/AP

Martha Thomas salvages Christmas decorations from her destroyed Mayfield, Kentucky, home Dec. 13 in the aftermath of tornadoes that tore through the region. Kentucky was hardest hit, with at least 74 dead and over 100 unaccounted for as of Dec. 17. At least 14 people died in Illinois, Tennessee, Arkansas and Missouri. Several Baptist churches were hit. Send Relief and Southern Baptist Disaster Relief are responding. Read more at tabonline.org/midwest-tornadoes. (TAB)

Stone drops lawsuit against Moore

Georgia pastor and former candidate for Southern Baptist Convention president Mike Stone withdrew a defamation lawsuit Dec. 9 against former Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission President Russell Moore.

Stone, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Blackshear, is the former chairman of the SBC Executive Committee. In the \$750,000 lawsuit filed in October, Stone accused Moore, who now works with Christianity Today, of “defamation, false light invasion of privacy and emotional distress.”

The lawsuit focused on two letters Moore wrote as ERLC president that were leaked prior to the 2021 SBC annual meeting. Stone alleged the letters were part of a “malicious and defamatory campaign against him.” (TAB Media)

Remaining American hostages freed in Haiti

The remaining missionaries held hostage in Haiti have been released, according to media reports.

Their Ohio-based organization, Christian Aid Ministries, said in a statement released Dec. 16, “We glorify God for answered prayer — the remaining 12 hostages are FREE! Join us in praising God that all 17 of our loved ones are now safe. Thank you for your fervent prayers throughout the past two months. We hope to provide more information as we are able.”

This latest update follows the release of five hostages in recent weeks.

The group of 17 missionaries, which included five children, were taken hostage Oct. 16 by the 400 Mawozo gang. The group’s Haitian driver was also taken captive. (TAB Media)

Persecuted church

Vietnamese church accused of starting deadly COVID wave

HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam — A pastoral couple and 11 congregants were questioned in a criminal investigation accusing their church of starting a COVID-19 outbreak in Vietnam’s Ho Chi Minh City, reports Morning Star News.

On Oct. 14, Go Vap District police questioned Vo Xuan Loan; her husband, Phuong Van Tan, and others from Revival Ekklesia Mission house church. Christian leaders believe the probe is an effort to defame evangelicals after some 60 people with ties to the church tested positive for the Delta variant at the end of May. Authorities are using a Vietnam criminal code as justification for the probe, according to the report.

Church members maintain they were observing government COVID-19 measures. Attorney Dang

Dinh Manh, on Oct. 20, petitioned for dismissal of all charges, notes the report. Delta variant outbreaks in Ho Chi Minh City killed more than 22,000 people by mid-October, says the report.

Vietnam is No. 19 on Open Doors’ 2021 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Muslim extremists decapitate Christian, kill pastor in Uganda

KAMPALA, Uganda — Muslim extremists in eastern Uganda decapitated a Christian church elder and killed a pastor in unrelated incidents.

In Luuka District, extremists killed 60-year-old

Alex Mukasa for leading three Muslims to Christ. Mukasa’s headless body was found at a sugar cane plantation Oct. 17, a day after he did not return home. His head was discovered days later in Nabisira swamp, Morning Star News reported. Two people have been arrested so far.

In Nangonde, Pastor Stephen Lugwire was killed Oct. 26 for refusing to remove his church building, a report says. One attacker said the church was located too close to a mosque.

A daughter was present when her father was attacked but escaped. The assailants are at large; however, a woman who aided them afterward has been arrested, the report says. Two days after Lugwire’s funeral, congregants reportedly destroyed an area mosque and some properties of Muslims, MSN reported.

Uganda’s constitution and laws provide for religious freedom.



Facebook photo

Alabama news

OBITUARY

► Retired Alabama Baptist pastor **Lawrence Brooks Jr.** died Dec. 13. He was 78.

Brooks was a U.S. Army veteran and a master electrician. He served as pastor of churches including Big Creek Baptist, Adger, and Williamsburg Baptist, Adamsville. He also served as associate pastor of Pine Ridge Baptist Church, Bessemer. Following his retirement, he was a Sunday School teacher and ministry volunteer at West Jefferson Baptist Church, Quinton.

Brooks is preceded in death by his son, Terry Allen. He is survived by his wife, Virginia; children, Pam, Susan, Eddie, Becky, Blake and Bobbie Lee; and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.



BROOKS

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Dave Burns** has been called as senior pastor of **Calvary Baptist Church, Prattville**. He recently retired as associate to senior adults and pastoral care of First Baptist Church Prattville. Burns attended John C. Calhoun Jr. College, The University of Alabama and Liberty University online. He has two married children and four grandsons.



BURNS

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond, plans a Watch Night service Dec. 31, 8 p.m. The Singing Ambassadors from Fayetteville, Tennessee, will perform. A refreshment break will be taken around 10 p.m. with prayer into the new year. Earl Harper is pastor.

BUTLER COUNTY ASSOCIATION



MCCOY

► McKenzie Baptist Church honored Pastor **Dene McCoy** and his wife, Janice, Oct. 10, with a gift in the morning service and a special fellowship Sunday evening in observance of pastor appreciation day. McCoy led a prayer vigil at McKenzie High School for "See You at the Pole" which also marked his five-year anniversary as pastor.

CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

► As **New Haven Baptist Church, Anniston**, celebrated its 75th anniversary Nov. 21, it was a time "to look back through the 75 years of the blessings of God," Pastor George Robinson said. Through the years, the church has been a light

to others through Vacation Bible School, youth ministry and international missions trips, Robinson said. "We have had so many servants of God who have served through the years and laid the proper foundation so our church will be able to be a light for many years to come."

During the special service, Robinson preached, and Annette Winckler — a charter member — presented the church's history. She and five others who were there at the founding — Buddy Webb, Charles Curry, Linda Cotten, Larry Ford and Howard Pilkinton — were also recognized. Southern gospel group Crystal River provided special music, and Calhoun County Sheriff Matthew Wade opened the service by playing "Amazing Grace" on the bagpipes. Sonja Adams of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented the church with a plaque.



Photo courtesy of Sonja Adams

CHILTON ASSOCIATION

► The Christmas season will be extra special for West End Baptist Church, Clanton, as they celebrate **Charles Christmas'** 75th anniversary in ministry with a service Dec. 26, 10 a.m.

"Bro. Charles is a kind, gentle and humble servant of Christ who fervently follows the Lord and faithfully proclaims His word," said James Watkins, West End's pastor.



CHRISTMAS

Ordained at Cottonwood Baptist Church in 1946, he has served as pastor of a number of Alabama Baptist churches and from 1990 to 1997 as director of missions for Chilton Baptist Association. After his retirement, Christmas continued to serve as an interim pastor, and at 94, he fills the pulpit occasionally and

teaches a weekly Bible study in Memphis, Tennessee.

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

► **Matthew Durham** has been called as pastor of **Union Grove Baptist Church, Crossville**. He and his wife, Kendall, have two children.



DURHAM

EAST CULLMAN ASSOCIATION

► **Jason Vinson** has been called as pastor of **Center Grove Baptist Church, Cullman**. He previously served as pastor of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Lexington. He and his wife, Jenny, have four adult children and one grandchild.

ESCAMBIA ASSOCIATION

► **Macon Phillips** has been called as pastor of **First Baptist Church East Brewton**. He previously served Enterprise Baptist Church, Enterprise, Mississippi, where he was pastor for 13 years until his semi-retirement in June 2020.

FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

► First Baptist Church Russellville plans to celebrate its music minister **Bert Fowler**, Jan. 9, 1:30–3 p.m. in the fellowship hall. Fowler, who is retiring, has served the church for 28 years. Chase Dowdy is pastor.

FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

► **Patrick Dalstra** has been called as minister to students and young adults at **First Baptist Church Oneonta**. He has a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Seminary. He previously served as minister of youth at FBC Mathiston, Mississippi (2013–2017).



DALSTRA

Works to Works Ministry, Jacksonville, Florida, challenged him to go into the roughest housing projects to share Christ. He recently started substituting at Oneonta High School. He and his wife, Katie, have two children.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► As **Bill King** looks toward his retirement at the end of the year, he says it's less like retiring and more like "retreading."



KING

He's been busy ever since raising and selling worms as a boy, and he doesn't expect that to change, even as he steps back from his role as director of missions for Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association, where he's served since 2007.

"It has been my joy and privilege to serve each of those churches and one great association," King said of the more than 40 churches that comprise Tuskegee Lee. He first answered the call to ministry as a senior in high school. During his junior year at Samford University, he began serving as pastor of Half Acre Baptist Church, Linden.

"Except for a brief period after I moved to New Orleans to attend the seminary there, I served as a pastor for the next 31 years," King said. That included churches in Butler, Fort Payne and Rainbow City as well as Georgia and Mississippi.

His humorous alter ego — Brother Billy Bob Bohannon — is not retiring and will still be available for appearances. King will also be available as an interim pastor, pulpit supply or for music.

Lasting influence

Elizabeth Carter: 51 years proclaiming God's majesty, ministering to people

By Lanell Downs Smith
TAB Media

Those who have heard Elizabeth Carter play the organ at First Baptist Church Decatur say she is a “real” organist — the kind with a seminary degree, who plays with both hands and feet while singing at the top of her lungs.

She has played the organ in church each week for 51 years and has done her best, she said, to be excellent and to lead well.

Carter loves to play both traditional hymns and contemporary songs. When she plays for worship, she attempts to block out all distractions, to play as part of the team and to keep her focus on her worship. In fact, “I have learned through the years that what is important is that I worship — sometimes inspired by the music, sometimes in spite of the music,” she explained. “God loves music that comes from the heart.”

But her focus isn't only on playing the organ. According to minister of music Matt Rouse, she has influenced the congregation for decades, leading children's music and assisting in planning and preparation for worship.

Four decades

“[Carter is] really not defined by playing the organ alone,” Rouse said. “That doesn't describe nearly four decades of ministry in one church. She has ministered through multiple ministers of music and interims and



Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Carter

Elizabeth Carter began playing the organ at First Baptist Church Decatur in 1984. For nearly four decades, her music ministry has been marked with an emphasis on missions and outreach.

multiple pastors and interims. There's a lot of components to her ministry that are very important.”

When COVID-19 hit, Carter began overseeing congregational care as pastoral care and missions associate for the church. Her longevity at FBC Decatur is due to her ability to adapt, Rouse said, and everything she does is focused toward missions and outreach.

Under Carter's leadership as missions director, the congregation adopted Lima, Peru, as its international city, and she directs the Vacation Bible School missions focus toward helping children learn about Peru and understand the importance of missions.

During the pandemic Carter also led outreach efforts to Decatur's medical community and coordinated a partnership between FBC and a church plant in Aurora, Colorado.

“The reason that we asked

is for every single person in our church to have at least one engagement in missions a year.”

Power in music

Carter heard a pipe organ for the first time during a 7th grade field trip to view architectural features in Flint, Michigan. As the class stood in an old Methodist church looking at the ceilings and pillars, the organist came in and began to practice.

“I had never heard a pipe organ until that day,” Carter recalled. “I could hear God's power and majesty in the music.”

Carter's father, Robert Erickson, was a church planter in Michigan through the General Association of Regular Baptists. That fall, a member of Carter's church purchased a home theater organ, which came with six months of lessons. She was offered the lessons with the opportunity for training to become church organist.

Six months later, her instructor recommended Carter receive more advanced

lessons, and she began seriously studying the organ in January 1970.

Her mother, Anna Lou — always her biggest advocate — supported her passion for music and desire to develop her talent. After high school, Carter earned a bachelor of music in pipe organ performance degree from Grand Rapids Baptist Bible College (now Cornerstone University).

She studied under Don Hustad at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and graduated in 1983 with a master of music in pipe organ. In October 1983 she was hired as church organist for FBC Decatur and began her tenure Jan. 1, 1984.

Faithful in service

Except for a few weeks for vacations, Carter has played the organ in church every Sunday since 1972.

“I have tried to faithfully play and to serve the churches where I have been the organist,” she said. “I have done my best to be excellent and to lead well.”

Two of Elizabeth Carter's traditional hymn CDs, “Pipes, Pedals and Praise” and “In This Very Room” are available for purchase. For more information email elizabethcarter@fbcdecatur.org.

ALABAMA STATEWIDE D-LIFE BOOT CAMP

SATURDAY JANUARY 22, 2022

NORTH PARK CHURCH TRUSSVILLE, AL 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM

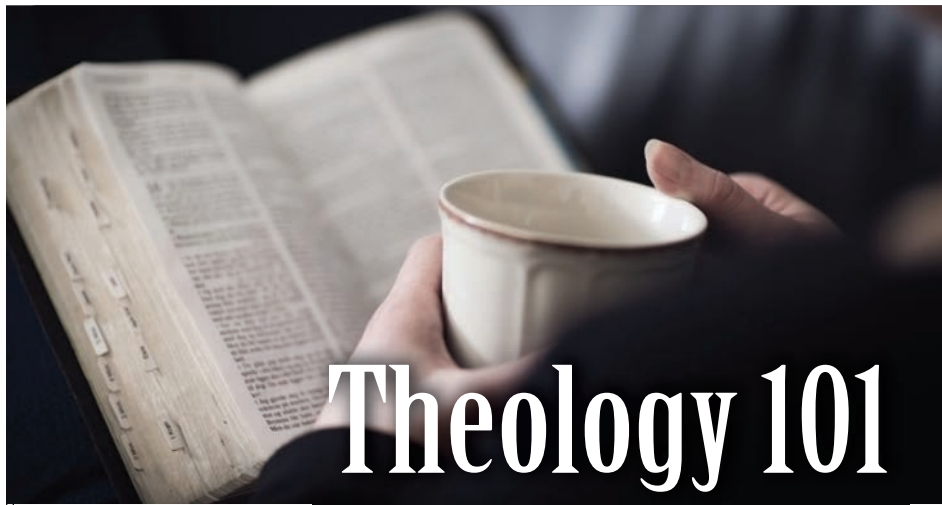
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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Songs of Christmas

Simeon's Song

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
TAB Media

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, we have looked at theological truths found in three other “songs of Christmas” — those of Mary, Zacharias and the angels.

This leaves us with the song voiced by Simeon on the occasion when Joseph and Mary presented Jesus in the temple. Simeon took the infant Jesus in his arms while voicing a prophetic song. As with the previous three, from the Latin this song has been given a title, “Nunc Dimittis” (Luke 2:29–32). Several truths may be distilled from Simeon’s song.

God is the source of peace. Addressing God, Simeon begins by saying, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace” (v. 29). This “just and devout” man had been waiting expectantly for what he termed “the consolation of Israel.”

The Holy Spirit is the divine means of revelation. It had been revealed to Simeon by the Spirit that he would see “the Lord’s Christ” before he died (v. 26).

The Spirit also is the agent of divine leading. Simeon had come to the temple at the day and hour when Joseph and Mary were there with the infant Jesus to fulfill the “custom of the law,” His official naming and circumcision.

What had been revealed to Simeon by the Spirit came to fulfillment due to the precise leading of the Spirit.

Taking the infant Christ into his arms, Simeon gave voice to his

song, acknowledging God as the source of peace (v. 29). The God of peace had sent the Prince of Peace into the world, and Simeon was blessed to hold the Son of God in his arms while acknowledging God’s faithfulness.

In his song, Simeon also was aware that when he looked upon the infant Savior, he was beholding God’s salvation (v. 30). It was as Peter would years later confess before the Jewish Sanhedrin concerning Christ, that there is salvation in no other name, “for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

God’s provision

Furthermore, that salvation is God’s provision “prepared before the face of all peoples” (v. 31). Whether Jew or Gentile, everyone who enters a saving relationship with God must do so through the same Savior. This Christ is both God’s light bringing revelation to Gentiles and glory to God’s chosen nation, Israel (v. 32).

May we end this year and begin the new year convinced Christ is still “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).

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 100th anniversary of the death of American composer

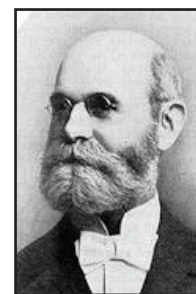
William James Kirkpatrick (1838–1921) was an American composer who wrote a tune for the beloved Christmas carol “Away in a Manger.” Other famous hymns for which he wrote tunes include “He Hideth My Soul,” “‘Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus” and “Redeemed, How I Loved to Proclaim It.” He also wrote the hymn, “Lord, I’m Coming Home.”

This year is the 100th anniversary of his death.

Kirkpatrick was born Feb. 27, 1838, in Ireland to Thomas and Elizabeth Kirkpatrick. His family immigrated to Duncannon, Pennsylvania, in 1840.

He had formal training in music at a young age, moving to Philadelphia to study vocal music under prominent teachers. He also learned to play five instruments.

Kirkpatrick joined Philadelphia’s Wharton Street Methodist Episcopal Church in 1855 and sang in the choir. He published his first collection of hymns, “Devotional Melodies,” in 1859 when he was just 21. He would go on to publish some 100 collections, primarily with John R. Sweney.



KIRKPATRICK

In 1861, Kirkpatrick married Susanna Doak, with whom he had three children; she died in 1878. He married twice more, and his third wife outlived him.

‘Away in a Manger’

Kirkpatrick wrote the tunes of some of the best-loved hymns, including “Away in a Manger.” Though the words of the carol are anonymous, they were thought until the 19th century to be the creation of Martin Luther. In the United States, composer James R. Murray is the acknowledged writer of the tune, though outside the U.S., Kirkpatrick is said to have written it. His version is the second most popular Christmas carol in Great Britain.

In 1892, Kirkpatrick was a song leader at a camp meeting. The hired soloist had a tremendous voice but never stayed to hear the sermon. Afraid he wasn’t a Christian, Kirkpatrick prayed for him and wrote, “Lord I’m Coming Home.” He gave it to the soloist who, evidently moved after he sang it, stayed for the sermon and accepted Christ.

Kirkpatrick composed the tunes for two Fanny Crosby songs: “Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It” (1882) and “He Hideth My Soul” (1890). He also wrote the music in 1882 for “‘Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus” and “We have Heard the Joyful Sound.”

Kirkpatrick died Sept. 20, 1921. He told his wife before she slept that he had a tune in his mind and wanted to write it down. She awoke at 4 a.m. and found him dead in his study. A manuscript with two stanzas lay by his side — he had died writing another tune.

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).

ALABAMA BAPTIST CHURCHES

MINISTER AT

FAMILIAR STORIES OF THE SEASON POINT TO A SEEKING GOD

In July 2002, a coal mine in Somerset, Pennsylvania, collapsed, trapping nine miners. It was a terrible time, said Mac Brunson, pastor of Valleydale Baptist Church in Birmingham.

As first responders worked to rescue them, the miners tapped on the wall with a wrench nine times every hour, signifying nine men were alive.

“Suddenly they heard a voice asking, ‘Is anyone there?’” Brunson said. “They joyfully realized hope and help [were] available. All nine survived.”

The miners’ plight echoes the story of the Judean shepherds, watching their flocks by night as the story of Luke 2 reveals, Brunson said, addressing those gathered for the Birmingham Metro Baptist Association Ministers Conference Christmas celebration Dec. 13.

Dynamic truths

Familiar stories of Christmas can become rote, since pastors have preached them for years, Brunson said. But each contains dynamic and life-changing truth.

“These shepherds sat in darkness until the light of God suddenly appeared,” Brunson said.

“In the same way the glory of God appears to us in the frustrations of our lives and dispels the darkness.”

Light in the darkness

The shepherds knew darkness. They were “quarantined” all of their lives as unclean, they were considered thieves and liars by other Jews and they were unwelcome in the temple and synagogue, Brunson said.

“Into this darkness came the glory of the Lord. ... The glory appeared to the lowly shepherds, and their lives were changed forever.”

These men couldn’t testify in a court but became witnesses in Bethlehem. “They experienced the joy of the Lord.”

Such joy is all too often hard to find in our world today, but Christmas is a season to remember joy is present, even in the darkest moments, he said.

“There is a darkness that is darker than the absence of light. It’s a darkness that lives in us.

“This is, indeed, the message of Christmas: The glory of God appears in our darkness and hope and help has come.” (Michael J. Brooks)



Photo by Michael J. Brooks/TAB Media
Birmingham Metro Baptist Association moderator Greg Corbin (left) greets Mac Brunson for the association’s Dec. 13 Christmas celebration.



Photo courtesy of Roger D. Willmore

Above: Larry Bollinger (right), pastor of Post Oak Springs Baptist Church in Jacksonville, and Roger Willmore, director of missions for Calhoun Baptist Association, load 150 Christmas backpacks headed for Memphis, Tennessee.



Photo by Maria Camp/Franklin County Times

Above: Ashley Berry and Denver Loden portray Mary and Joseph in a drive-thru nativity at Mountain View Baptist Church in Phil Campbell. The Dec. 12–14 display included a number of painted wood cutout animals, including sheep, camels, donkeys and a cow, as well as live actors.

CHRISTMAS

Below: Central Baptist Church in Decatur invited its community to experience the wonder of the Christmas story and Jesus' coming at its Dec. 3-4 Christmas Drive-Thru Experience.



Photo courtesy of Central Baptist Church



Photo courtesy of Melany Weeks

Above: Winfield First Baptist Church celebrates the birthday of its pastor, Paul Murphy, at its missions conference dinner Dec. 1. About 120 members raised \$8,325.75 for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. The Girls in Action collected coins to add to the offering as well. Both youth, who had a separate dinner, and adults heard from missionaries. A local business donated ornaments for a LMCO fundraiser. **Below:** Members of FBC Troy's Ministry to Women prepare Christmas TLC gift baskets Dec. 4.



Photo courtesy of Patty Garvin

Above: Chuck Gross, member of FBC Tuscaloosa, receives a Bible from Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child for his dedication and hard work. Gross has served for five years as logistics coordinator for the West Alabama OCC Team. Patty Garvin, area coordinator, presented the Bible at the team's Christmas party Dec. 6 in Tuscaloosa. The West Alabama team collected a record-breaking 33,200+ boxes in the 2021 season at its various drop-off locations.

Below: Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover celebrates Keyboards, Carols and Candlelight. The Dec. 12 event featured children's and student choirs and highlighted young musicians.



Photo courtesy of Hunter Street Baptist Church



Photo courtesy of FBC Troy

Clay Holmes, then a pitcher for the Pittsburgh Pirates, shares his testimony at a Baseball Country outreach event in Aliceville in 2020.

Positive impact



Photo courtesy of Clay Holmes

Alabama pastor's son uses platform as Yankees pitcher to share hope of Jesus

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

When Clay Holmes was growing up, if his family wasn't at church they were at the ballpark.

At the time, his father, Wendell, served as pastor of New Teamon Baptist Church in Slocomb and led the town's youth sports programs.

As it turns out, both places ended up changing Holmes' life in a big way. His parents had poured into him from a young age, and at 11, he gave his life to Christ at a revival led by Sammy Gilbreath, director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

"I remember walking the aisle that night and beginning this journey of having Jesus Christ as my Savior and pledging to walk

with Him for the rest of my life," Holmes said.

Growing faith and skills

As he grew up, Holmes grew in his faith — and his baseball skills.

Wendell Holmes said he had coached a lot of boys and could tell Clay had a special talent even at a young age.

"I didn't talk much about it, but I knew it — I knew God was doing something with him," he said.

Holmes realized in 10th grade that he wanted to commit to seeing if baseball was something he could pursue, and in 2011, he was drafted out of Slocomb High School by the Pittsburgh Pirates.

He came up through their minor league system, made his major league debut in 2018 and was traded to the Yankees as a relief pitcher in July.



Photo courtesy of Clay Holmes
Clay Holmes was traded to the New York Yankees as a relief pitcher in July 2021.

He's known for his sinking fastball, which has been clocked up to 99 miles per hour.

"It's been a crazy story that's shown God's faithfulness in my life," Holmes said, "and just how He can take and use somebody from even small-town Alabama to make an impact for Him, and use the talents He's given me and make a positive impact."

"I'm definitely thankful for the game, the people He's surrounded me with and all the people who have encouraged me along the way, with obviously my parents being the two biggest of those."

One of the ways Holmes has used his platform is with Baseball Country, a ministry in west Alabama that uses sports as an outreach.

"Their mission is to use the greatest game ever played to tell the greatest story ever told," he noted.

The ministry, run by Sam Marsonnek, focuses on using baseball, softball, football and community revitalization projects to spread the gospel. Marsonnek, who once played professional baseball, moved to Alabama with his family in 2016 to lead Baseball Country.

Sharing Jesus

"The more I get to know Sam's heart, and what God is doing out of Baseball Country, the more I'm

drawn to it and want to help in any way I can," Holmes said.

He's helped out with a number of events, teaching game fundamentals to young players and sharing his faith in Jesus with them and their parents.

Discipling others

He also is involved with Unlimited Potential Inc., a group of former professional baseball players who now invest in and disciple pro players in the U.S. and internationally.

Wendell Holmes said that,

though he's proud of the accomplishments of Clay and his other sons, seeing them use the opportunities God has given them to share their faith is the best gift of all.

He admitted he got emotional the first time he saw a photo of Clay sharing his faith with a crowd at a Baseball Country event.

"I was more excited and more thankful for that than anything he could do in

baseball," he remembered. Now pastor of Place of Grace Church in Slocomb, he added, "To see him doing that was worth all the work and prayers and service and coaching and everything — it was worth it all. And to see it keep going and continue into even a larger platform for him, that's what I'm praying."



Photo courtesy of Clay Holmes
Clay Holmes playing for the Yankees — his hometown team in Slocomb — in 2001.

Hear more on the Stories podcast

Want to hear more of Clay Holmes' story? Check out Season 4, Episode 1 of TAB Media's serial-style "Stories" podcast, available now. Season 4 also continues the story of Sammy Gilbreath, who was featured in Season 1.

Listen at tabonline.org/stories or wherever you get your podcasts.



Heart for God

Rural church demonstrates God's love 'beyond the walls of the building'

By Margaret Colson
TAB Media

From the rural backroads to the ends of the earth, Randolph Baptist Church has discovered joy in going “beyond the walls of the building” to share God’s love.

Church member Kim Milstead said, “It is important for a church to show God’s love beyond the walls of the building,” even in something as simple as a shoebox. The more than 150-year-old church is located in a small community of around 1,000 residents in central Alabama about 50 miles south of Birmingham.

‘Different approach’

For several years Milstead had been actively involved in the church’s collection of Christmas shoeboxes, which are distributed through Samaritan’s Purse. Even community residents have participated in filling shoeboxes with gifts for needy children in the world. From 2015 until 2019, the church has donated between 150 and close to 300

shoeboxes annually.

“Then, COVID hit, and we had to take a different approach,” she said. Prior to COVID-19, the church drew a regular attendance of about 120.

‘Monumental’

In 2020, when pandemic restrictions halted the church’s collection of Christmas shoeboxes, the church rallied around a \$20,000 goal to help construct a church building in Bolivia. The effort was a “monumental challenge” for the rural church with a post-pandemic worship attendance of about 80 people, said Pastor Tony Reynolds, who has served the church bivocationally for 11 years.

“It’s not the size of the church, it’s the size of our God that matters,” Reynolds said.

If church members reached the goal, the church would match the funds collected. “God showed out,” and church members gave \$22,000, Reynolds reported.



Photo courtesy of Randolph Baptist Church

People of all ages at Randolph Baptist Church in central Alabama get in on the fun of preparing Christmas shoeboxes for children in need throughout the world.

This year, the church in Bibb Baptist Association is doing even more. In addition to collecting Christmas shoeboxes, the church is also collecting funds for construction of another church building and giving generously to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

“God does mighty things through the least likely vessel,” Reynolds said. “It’s not about us; it’s about Him. It’s amazing what God has done through our church.”

Church member Judy Miller agrees. “I think this is a tremendous witness as to what a rural church can accomplish,” she said.

Spreading good news

“The dedication and generosity of Randolph Baptist Church are evidence of a church with a heart for God ready to help spread the gospel.

“We are the church. We are so blessed. Take the gospel to the people,” she said.

As church members have been challenged in their generosity, they have been strengthened in their faith.

“It seems like God is

working on us,” Reynolds said.

One year, the number of Christmas shoeboxes was lower than Milstead’s expectations. “That year was probably the year I learned the most. My focus was not on God but on the number of boxes. I was strengthened in my faith by learning that God was in control, not me.”

Partner in the gospel

Randolph Baptist Church is “a great partner in kingdom work,” said Bill Russell, associational missionary for Bibb Baptist Association.

“This body of believers is faithfully doing its part to fulfill Acts 1:8,” using “its time, talents and treasures to reach, teach, win and develop” people in the local community and rippling out into the world, he said.

“This congregation is faithful to support Alabama Baptists’ and Southern Baptists’ efforts to make a difference in our world.

“It doesn’t seem to be a matter of size as much as a matter of being obedient to the Lord and discovering what He will do with obedience,” Russell said.

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Photo courtesy of Randolph Baptist Church

In 2020, when pandemic restrictions halted Randolph Baptist Church’s collection of Christmas shoeboxes, the church rallied around a \$20,000 goal to help construct a church building in Bolivia.

WORD search

- ALLELUIA
ANGELS
ANNA
BETHLEHEM
BIRTH
CENSUS
CHRISTMAS
DWELT
EMMANUEL
FLESH
FRANKINCENSE
GLORY TO GOD
GOLD
HEROD
HOLY SPIRIT
HUMILITY
INCARNATION
INN
JOSEPH
JOY
- JUDEA
KING
MANGER
MARY
MESSIAH
MIRACLE
MYRRH
NATIVITY
NAZARETH
SAVIOR
SHEPHERDS
SIMEON
STABLE
STAR
SWADDLING
VIRGIN
WISE MEN
WONDER
WORD
WORSHIP

R Q F R A N K I N C E N S E T N
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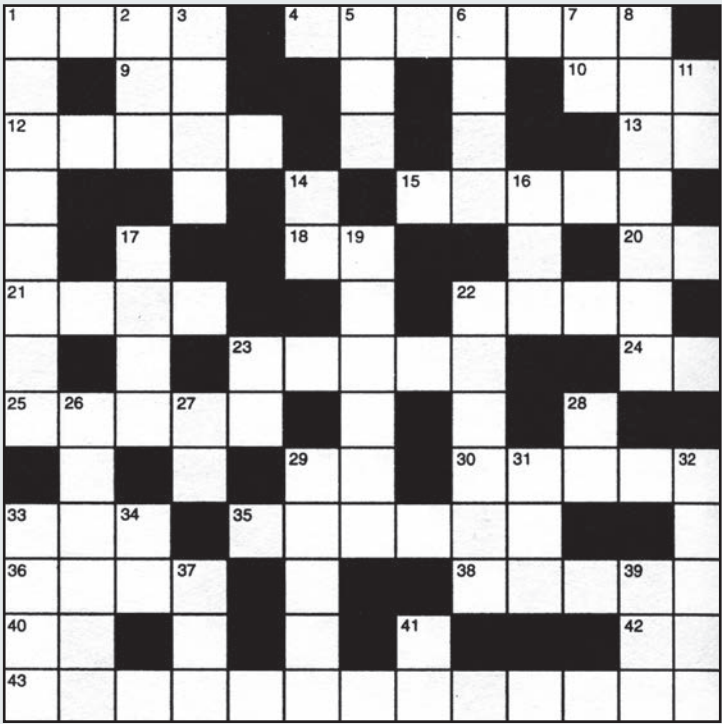
CHRISTIAN crossword

ACROSS

1. The book after John.
4. The priests.
9. Greeting.
10. Pester.
12. Alpha and ____.
13. Negative response.
15. This man was eaten by worms. (Acts 12:21-23)
18. Venture capitalist. (abbr.)
20. Anno Domini.
21. God created the dry ____ on the third day.
22. Galatians is an Epistle of ____.
23. An offense against morals; sin.
24. Italian for “yes.”
25. Peter saw this in his Acts 10 vision.
29. And the tongue ____ a fire. (James 3:6)
30. A teenager.
33. Whom ____ ye that I am? (Matt. 16:15)
35. This lady was King Xerxes’ wife. (Esther 2)
36. Kitchen appliance.
38. Fourth letter in Greek alphabet.
40. First person pronoun.
42. ____ of the Chaldees. (Neh. 9:7)
43. Amusement.

DOWN

1. And laid their



By Jonah and Sue Schrowang Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- hands on the ____.
(Acts 5:18)
2. Definite article.
3. Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a ____.
(Isa. 7:14)
5. Adam’s wife.
6. ... and eateth not the bread of ____ness.
(Prov. 31:27)
7. Suffix.
8. They wore these in Bible times.
11. ____ ye therefore, and teach all nations.
(Matt. 28:19)
14. Fifth month of the Hebrew calendar.
16. Rural Electrification Administration. (abbr.)
17. And as it is appointed unto men ____ to die.
(Heb. 9:27)
19. Then Philip went down to the city ... and preached ____
- unto them.
(Acts 8:5)
22. Paul did this frequently.
23. Extraterrestrial.
26. The windows of ____ were opened.
(Gen. 7:11)
27. Exodus. (abbr.)
28. Thirteenth letter of the Greek alphabet.
29. Small island.
31. Metal-bearing mineral.
32. Strongest muscle in your body.
33. ____, pastors and teachers.
(Eph. 4:11)
34. Know ____ that the Lord He is God.
(Ps. 100:3)
37. Maiden name.
39. Measure equal to 252 gallons.
41. Mathematical symbol for “3.14.”

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

FBC Dawes in Mobile, Ala., is seeking a full-time senior pastor. Email resumés to: fbcddpas-torsearch2021@gmail.com or mail to: FBC Dawes, 3941 Dawes Rd., Mobile, AL 36695. ATTN: Pastor Search Committee. Please include links to online sermons or other reference materials.

SENIOR PASTOR

First Baptist Church of Jemison is seeking a full-time senior pastor. He should possess a conviction to preach from the Holy Bible, teaching biblical truths and doctrine of Christianity, as stated in the Baptist Faith & Message 2000. Must provide pastoral care and counseling; be engaged to all age groups; mentor and supervise church staff; and provide visionary leadership for the future of our church. He will shepherd our congregation in worship, Christian spiritual growth and community outreach as we strive to carry out The Great Commission. Mail resumés to: Jemison First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 760, Jemison, AL 35085, or resumes@jemisonfirstbaptist.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Hughes Memorial Baptist Church in Bradford, Ala., is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumés to: ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, 535 Buck Ridge Road, Remlap, AL 35133 or email: hmbcpastorapps@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Northside Baptist Church, Selma, Ala., seeks bivocational pastor. Email resumés to: NorthsideBaptist2021@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Mount Philadelphia Baptist Church, Cordova, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumés to: Mount Philadelphia Baptist Church, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, 1885 Cordova-Gorgas Road, Cordova, AL 35550.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Liberty Baptist, Opelika, seeks bivocational pastor. Receiving resumés: Pastoral Search Committee, Liberty Baptist Church, 2701 West Point Parkway, Opelika, AL 36804. Email: liberty_baptist_oa@protonmail.com. Text msg: (334-444-9626).

MUSIC DIRECTOR

Ezra Baptist Church (Bessemer, Ala.) is seeking a part-time music director. This position is tasked with leading the music ministry of the church. Please email your resumé and cover letter to: ezrabcoffice@gmail.com.

MUSIC MINISTER

First Baptist Church of Red Bay, Ala., is in search of a part-time music minister. Anyone interested mail or email a resumé

to the church office. P.O. Box 616, Red Bay, AL 35582, or firstbaptistc110@bellsouth.net.

STUDENT DIRECTOR

Ezra Baptist Church (Bessemer, Ala.) is seeking a part-time student director. This position is tasked with leading the student ministry (6th-12th grade) of the church. Please email your resumé and cover letter to: ezrabcoffice@gmail.com.

PART-TIME/BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH MINISTER

Buhl Baptist Church is seeking someone with a passion for leading youth in their walk with Christ, teaching them to be disciples. Please contact us via email: timpatrick80@gmail.com or jgsv400@yahoo.com. We are located in West Tuscaloosa County, 10 minutes outside of Northport, Ala.

BIVOCATIONAL CHILDREN'S MINISTER

East Highland Baptist Church, Hartselle, Ala., is prayerfully seeking God's choice for a bivocational children's minister who will lead the children's ministry program. Applicants should subscribe to the doctrinal statement of the Baptist Faith & Message. See additional information under the announcements tab at ehbc.church. Please send resumé to: cmssc@ehbc.church.

OTHER POSITIONS

CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER DIRECTOR

Southside Baptist Church in Troy is seeking to fill the ministry position of child development center director. This is a full-time position that requires excellent management skills and experience in daycare or educational roles. Please send resumés to: southside@troycable.net.

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Theft of holiday food brings extra dose of holiday generosity

By Carrie B. McWhorter
TAB Media

Thanks to generous donations, a Christmas food distribution went on as planned Dec. 14 after thieves broke into a church and stole all the food slated for giveaway.

The Etowah Baptist Association regularly distributes food through the Mount Olive Mission Center in the Altoona community of Etowah County.

In advance of Christmas, plans were to give larger-than-normal holiday food boxes to about 75 families, according to Craig Carlisle, EBA's director of missions.



Photo by Craig Carlisle/Etowah Baptist Association

Volunteers from Grace Bible Church in Altoona and Altoona First Baptist Church helped distribute food to at least 75 Etowah County families Dec. 14.

Much of the food was stored in freezers at a local church because the missions center didn't have adequate space to hold it all.

But on Dec. 3, thieves broke into the church and

took all the food stored there, along with many items belonging to the church.

The theft could have meant many families would miss out on a holiday meal, but churches and the greater Etowah County community stepped up, Carlisle said.

'Ready to go'

"We got the call and immediately began to think about how we were going to replace the food in so short an amount of time," he said. "What then happened is our people, not just Etowah Baptist folks but people from across the community, sent us monetary donations."

"A local food distributor was very generous with us as far as the cost and helped us gather meat to replace what was stolen, and the food distribution went on as planned."

Carlisle said he was encouraged as donations large and small came in to help meet the need, including several from outside Etowah County. Another association also offered help, he said.

"It meant so much that they would take the time to call and offer to help us out," he said. "Churches and random people have stepped up. We're so blessed. We support each other."

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We wish you continued success in the coming year.



* Pulse Research, October 2019

Merry Christmas

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*"... when the fulness of the time was come,
God sent forth his Son ..." (Galatians 4:4)*

May the joy and peace surrounding the celebration of Christ's birth fill your heart and your home throughout this season. Thank you for your generous support of missions and ministry in Alabama and around the world!

Please be sure that your Cooperative Program and Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering gifts are sent in time to be received at the State Board of Missions by Friday, December 31, if you would like for them to be counted in 2021.



Dawson staff member finds joy in cooperation

By Grace Thornton
TAB Media

Meg Brown didn't grow up Southern Baptist, but when she decided to study at a Southern Baptist seminary, she was amazed to learn about their cooperation.

"How churches work together, how churches send together — it's beautiful," she said.

And now for Brown, it's "really fun" to explain that cooperation to others, whether the person is 7 years old or 19.

She got to share with both recently.

Brown, associate minister to children at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham, said her team spent the fall semester introducing children to the story of missionary Lottie Moon and the sacrifices she made to take the gospel to China.

"We wanted our kids to get a cool picture of who she was," Brown said of Moon, the namesake of Southern Baptists' Christmas offering for international missions.

As part of that effort,

Karmin Lytle, Dawson's student ministry assistant, emerged from a "time machine" on a recent Sunday at children's worship dressed as Moon, to share about her life and distribute her well-known tea cake cookies.

The children also had video calls with missionaries sent out by Dawson who now are serving on the field.

"That way, our kids got to learn about Miss Lexie (an International Mission Board Journeyman from Dawson) as well as Miss Lottie, and make that connection from the past to the present,"

Brown said. "It was great to see them understand the longevity of churches like ours supporting missionaries like this, and what that can do."

'Extremely proud'

The children also received foldable boxes printed with a QR code to use as banks for their gifts to the offering. The QR code took them to a website to learn more about Moon and even find a recipe for her cookies.

"Kids were extremely proud to have their own



Photo courtesy of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church

Dressed as missionary Lottie Moon, Karmin Lytle — student ministry assistant at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham — distributes Moon's tea cake cookies and shares her story during children's worship on a recent Sunday.

bank and to take part in praying for folks all over the world," Brown said. "We had moms and dads asking to take home extras."

It all helped the children understand they could be part of the fabric of God's mission right where they are, she added. "A 4-year-old or 9-year-old or 12-year-old really can serve in the same spirit Lottie Moon served within their own community. They're not just spectators. They can participate."

For Brown, it's been great on this side of seminary to see God weave together ordinary things that add up to a community of people excited about God's work overseas.

She was encouraged recently at her church's deacon ordination as men shared stories of time they've spent on mission.

On another recent night, Brown got together with a group from the women's basketball team at Samford University to watch "The Insanity of God," a movie about people in other parts of the world who are persecuted for their faith in Christ.

"I was truly shocked and encouraged by the stories we saw," Brown said. "This led to a wonderful discussion on the global Church, how the Southern Baptist Convention practically takes part in this and our piece in God's bigger plan."

"To see these college-aged women so stirred up and

moved by the goodness of the gospel and the commitment of other believers was wonderful."

Brown said she doesn't think Dawson is doing anything other churches aren't doing, but that all the ordinary moments together made her grateful for what Southern Baptists faithfully do together.

'Found faithful'

David Eldridge, Dawson's senior pastor, said his congregation wants to be faithful in its part of the mission.

"At Dawson, we give to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering as a way to be found faithful as God's people in sharing the gospel of Jesus around the world," he said.

"Lottie Moon was a missions pioneer who selflessly gave her life to share the gospel, and giving to the offering named after her is one way for our church members to join God in His mission to seek and to save the lost."



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 26

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Dean of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



JESUS WAS SOUGHT Matthew 2:1-12

Merry Christmas! I always smile when we include the visit of the wise men in the Christmas story.

Through the centuries, the visitation has gotten more and more elaborate. The wise men became kings, they were named and they arrived in Bethlehem around the same time as the shepherds to find baby Jesus in a manger. Fanciful storytelling, creative hymn lyrics and a conflation of the Matthew and Luke infancy narratives have led to amazing details found in Menotti's "Amahl and the Night Visitors," but not in the Bible.

As students of the Word, please note that Luke 2 records some rites of passage related to Mary's pregnancy and Jesus' significant early events. Luke records the birth of Jesus, His naming and circumcision, His infancy visit to the temple, His adolescent visit to Jerusalem and transitional verses that fill in the blanks of Jesus' life from birth to 30 years of age. Matthew provides other vital additions: angelic visitation to Joseph, visit of the wise men, flight to Egypt, slaughter of the innocents and return to Nazareth after Herod's death. We'll focus our attention on the magi.

The Arrival (1-3)

They were wise men from the east. Following customary protocols, they requested an audience with King Herod in Jerusalem, who had been granted the title "King of the Jews" by the Roman senate decades earlier. These magi had discerned a sign in the sky had appeared, so they came to worship the King of the Jews. Were they astrologers following an astronomical event? Or were they Mesopotamian magi who were affected by prophecies of Daniel?

Scholars have a variety of theories, but it is certain they had come to pay respect to the young king. Matthew indicates the boy may have been up to 2 years old.

The Direction (4-8)

Herod was unsettled by this inquiry, as was his political entourage. Early sources indicate Herod was

suspicious of conspiracies against him, suspecting even his own sons of planning a coup. He was going to protect his throne against any perceived enemy.

The religious leaders knew Micah's prophecy, and so they informed the king and international magi the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea (formerly Judah). Prior to their departure from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, however, Herod requested they return to him after their visit to the young king.

General revelation, through God's creative order, provides enough information for us to know of God and His handiwork (Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 1:19-20). Only special revelation, through His word, provides all that is necessary for us to come to saving faith. The sign in the sky brought them to Jerusalem, but Micah's prophetic word regarding Bethlehem brought them to Jesus. Creation reveals enough to make us accountable to God. Salvation by grace through faith "comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

The Discovery (8-12)

The king dispatched them to Bethlehem with instructions to return to him and give him directions to the boy. When the wise men arrived, they went into the house — not a stable. They saw the child — not a newborn baby lying in a manger. And they brought expensive gifts in worship. Note Christian Standard Bible footnotes explaining "to worship Him" also may be interpreted as "to pay Him homage."

Three gifts were mentioned as the wise men visited the boy, but the text does not indicate how many visitors offered those gifts. Common explanations of the significance of the gifts are as follows:

1. Gold represents His royalty
2. Frankincense represents His deity
3. Myrrh represents His mortality.

Jesus the Anointed One is our King of kings, our High Priest and the Prophet promised in the Torah (Deut. 18:15).

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical & Religious Studies, Samford University



THE KING WHO REIGNS FOREVER Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:26-33

While a certain amount of pomp and circumstance goes along with a presidential inauguration, even those who were glad to say goodbye to King George III in 1776 can admit our ceremonies pale in comparison to those accompanying the coronation of a new British monarch.

The service in which Elizabeth II was crowned took more than a year to prepare and lasted for more than three hours when it was held. Special hymns, elaborate costumes, a priceless crown, a golden carriage pulled by eight horses — all of these trappings and countless more were part of this unique occasion.

What is true for modern monarchs was true for ancient kings as well. The kings of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and even Israel were crowned with tremendous fanfare.

Adonijah's abortive effort to take his father David's throne was accompanied by countless sacrifices, a great company of supporters and an elaborate banquet (1 Kings 1:5-9).

His half-brother Solomon's more successful installment involved a journey to Gihon on the king's donkey, the blowing of trumpets, blessings, anointing with oil and a raucous musical celebration (1 Kings 1:33-40).

Because he would serve as God's representative among the people, the king's accession to the throne was a tremendously important affair.

A child will be born to reign on the throne of David. (Isa. 9:6-7)

The accession of Hezekiah to the throne of Judah was an event of extraordinary importance to the prophet Isaiah. Having seen his nation suffer under the threats (and worse) from Assyria, Isaiah spoke for the nation in longing for a time when deliverance would come.

The language of Isaiah 9:6-7 (vv. 5-6 in Hebrew) celebrates Hezekiah's coronation.

The language of "a child is born to us, a son is given to us" is the voice of the heavenly court, rejoic-

ing over the fact God had entered into a special relationship with the king. God would be Hezekiah's father, and Hezekiah would be God's son, His representative among the nation.

The birth of the King was divinely announced. (Luke 1:26-31)

What was simply a metaphor in the case of Hezekiah would be quite literally true in the case of Jesus.

Some seven centuries after Isaiah's message, the angel Gabriel would appear to a peasant woman in the obscure village of Nazareth to inform her that she, though still a virgin, would become pregnant with a son.

That son would be God's own Son, the true and ultimate expression of God's presence among His people.

Even with this angelic announcement, Mary could hardly have understood the full significance of what lay in store for her. Kings did not come from peasant mothers. Kings, regardless of the status of their mothers, certainly did not come from towns like Nazareth. And yet, Mary was destined to become the mother not just of a king, but of the King, the Messiah Himself.

Jesus is the King who rules forever. (Luke 1:32-33)

None of the New Testament authors directly applies the titles of Isaiah 9:6 to Jesus. The stamp of this verse is found all over the stories of Jesus' birth, however.

When the angels appear to the shepherds, they cry out, "To you is born this day a Savior"; the angels' words echo those of the prophet, "A child is born to us" (Luke 2:11).

Gabriel's own words to Mary echo those of Isaiah. Isaiah had said, "Authority rests on His shoulders"; Gabriel said of this yet to be born Son, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Michael Foust

TAB Media

Jeremy Camp wants his songs to ‘connect with the heart’

For 20 years, Jeremy Camp’s life has involved touring and writing songs ... and then touring and writing songs again.

Until the pandemic hit, that is.

When COVID-19 shut down public events in Spring 2020, Camp found himself at home and far away from the tour buses, airplanes and concert stages that were his life for two decades.

Without a live show to play — and with plenty of time on his hands — Camp had more time to pray and think deeply about the biggest issues in life.

Like faith and family.

A year to process, learn

Camp’s newest album, “When You Speak,” includes songs written during those introspective moments. He said he sensed God was saying, “I want to teach you some things. So be open.”

The album has 13 tracks — the most ever for one of his LPs.

“I had a whole year to just sit and process through all the things that I’m learning,” Camp recalled. “So there’s a depth, I believe, to this album for every song. ... There’s a depth in this album, overall, from start to finish, that I think is just probably greater than



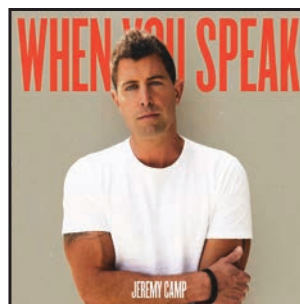
Photo courtesy of Sparrow

JEREMY CAMP

what I’ve done since I first started.”

The album is a mix of worship, pop, synth-pop and rock. The title track enjoyed more than 24 weeks on Billboard’s Hot Christian Songs chart.

“I’ve been telling people, ‘You have to listen from start to finish instead of just being like, ‘Oh, that’s the “radio” song.’ That is just the tip of the iceberg of things that God’s done in my heart. ... We’re really excited about the diversity of the album. ... I love different styles of music.”



“When You Speak” is the 13th studio album from Camp, who has 41 No. 1 radio hits across all formats.

One of them, “I Still Believe,” was the basis for the 2020 movie of the same name. It opened at No. 3 in theaters and was the No. 1 movie in America on its first night.

Camp, though, said he rejects the idea of writing songs for radio. For him, writing music is a process of listening to God.

“Early on, I would go into writ-

ing sessions with people. And if they were like, ‘Oh, man, that would be good for radio,’ I would kind of shut down. And I wouldn’t want to write with them again. Because I know that you can have a song that does well on radio, but it doesn’t connect with the heart. ...

“I’m looking to write a song that connects in people’s hearts. And if it does well on radio [then] that’s because it’s connected that way.”

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.

MEET THE REVIEWER

Michael Foust covers the intersection of faith and entertainment as a media reviewer for The Alabama Baptist. He also is the husband of an amazing wife and the father of four young children.

**For more about ‘When You Speak’ and
Jeremy Camp’s upcoming tour, visit JeremyCamp.com.**



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