

HIS *Life*
BROUGHT
Light
TO
EVERYONE

DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
2023 CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

The Christmas season is filled with lights—houses adorned with lights on their eaves, advent wreaths with candles shining bright, and trees filled with sparkling lights. On the DTS Dallas campus, we raise a thirty-seven-foot Christmas tree on the lawn, and our students, faculty, and staff gather in front of the lit tree to celebrate the season. It is a magnificent sight!

Lights are a fitting symbol of Christmas because Christmas celebrates the Incarnation of the One whose "life brought light to everyone."

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. (John 1:1–5, NLT)

We named the DTS 2023 Christmas Devotional collection "**His Life Brought Light to Everyone**" because the devotional celebrates Jesus, the true Light for all. Each devotional in the collection was written by a DTS faculty member. The devotionals feature people from both the Old and New Testaments whose stories point to Jesus.

This Christmas devotional is our gift of appreciation to you. For almost one hundred years, DTS has relied on the partnership of people like you who believe in our mission and support our students. You are a great encouragement to all of us at Dallas Theological Seminary.

I wish you much joy during this Christmas season, and I hope that the lights you are surrounded with continuously remind you of the One who brought light to everyone—our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Merry Christmas!



Mark M. Yarbrough, PhD
President

Celebrating
WITH YOU
the birth
OF OUR
Savior



THE YARBROUGHS

Yarbrough Family (L to R):
(Standing) Garrett & Kayla Chandler, Joseph, Kayci & Jacob
(Sitting) Ranger, Jennifer & Mark

All Eyes on the Baby

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. (Matthew 2:11a, NIV)

In December 1948, Prince Charles, who was the future king of England, was baptized in Buckingham Palace at the age of four weeks. The following day the first pictures of the royal baby and heir apparent were released to the public. One of the most popular pictures shows the royal family, including parents and grandparents, gathered around the little prince, gazing lovingly at him. The caption underneath read: *All Eyes on the Baby*.

Those words beautifully encapsulate the essence of Advent. Christmas is all about the baby who is King. The message of Christmas is—*All Eyes on the Baby*. This message is highlighted throughout the birth narratives.

- The lengthy genealogies, with all their difficult-to-pronounce names, are all about the baby. Matthew ends with the baby (Matthew 1:1–17). Luke begins with the baby (Luke 3:23–38).
- The Old Testament prophets peered down the corridor of time and saw the baby by faith (Matthew 1:23; 2:6, 15, 23).
- Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, sang about the baby (Luke 1:68–80).
- The angelic host announced the birth of the baby to the shepherds (Luke 2:10–14).
- The angel Gabriel made the rounds announcing the baby's coming (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:11, 26).
- The shepherds traveled immediately to see the baby and hurriedly left to tell others about Him (Luke 2:15).
- Mary treasured and pondered everything about the baby (Luke 2:19).
- The old man Simeon spotted the baby in the temple, took Him in his arms, and blessed Him (Luke 2:30).
- The aged Anna was all about the baby who would redeem Israel (Luke 2:36–38).
- The wise men traveled hundreds of miles to see the baby-King and worship Him (Matthew 2:10).

Again and again, the caption under the picture is the same—*All Eyes on the Baby*. Why? Because He is the Messiah—the virgin-born, Bethlehem baby, who lived a sinless life, died for sinners, rose from the dead, and is coming again someday as King when “every eye will see Him.”

As you celebrate this season in personal times of reflection, family gatherings, and church services, may this caption appear underneath all your pictures—“*All Eyes on the Baby*.”



Dr. Mark Hitchcock

Research Professor of Bible Exposition

Moses

“...call him Immanuel!” (which means “God with us”). (Matthew 1:23b, NIV)

The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” (Exodus 33:14)

GOD'S PRESENCE, OUR PRESENT

Presence—what a present! The gift of presence intentionally hears, engages, and attends to another as appropriate and necessary. It's really a present, a gift—undeserved, unmerited, unearned.

Among the deepest quests of the human psyche is a longing for divine presence. When God seems absent, we are compelled to invent an object to worship, trust, follow, and serve. This attempt to offset the absence of God with our own, creative substitutes for His presence is found in the events in the life of Moses.

The man of God on a mission for God had led the murmuring multitudes out of Egypt, based on the promise of God's personal presence (Exodus 3:12). God's people were doing rather well until Moses went up a mountain to meet with God. During Moses's extended absence, the people became corrupt and built a tangible object of worship (Exodus 32).

God decisively judged idolaters with a plague, withdrew His presence in mercy, and was willing to send His angel to take His rebellious people into the Promised Land (32:35–33:5). The people publicly mourned, and Moses pitched a portable tent and spoke to God face to face, “as one speaks to a friend” (33:11). Moses made a formidable case for someone to accompany him in leading God's people. Being a compassionate and gracious God,

The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Then Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. ...

What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?” (33:14–16).

What makes the presence of God certain for the believer, without any threat of divine withdrawal or the possibility of confusion?

CHRISTMAS! Christmas is God's gift of His own presence to humanity.

Humanity will never again have to wonder about the concept or certainty of God's presence. In Jesus, God's presence is not mere wish fulfillment; in Jesus, God fulfills our wishes for God's presence.

Immanuel reads, “With us, God!” Wow! With us, God? Yes, With us, God. God's presence with people is centered, concentrated, and concretized in Jesus. God's Christmas gift of His very presence not only lies in His authority—the commanding presence of God—but also in His accompaniment—the convincing presence of God. When you receive the Lord Jesus as God's gift of salvation, you also receive the gift of His presence—undeserved, unmerited, unearned. You become His, with whom He is! With you, God.



Dr. Ramesh Richard

*Professor of Global Theological Engagement
and Pastoral Ministries*

Jephthah's Daughter

When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of timbrels! She was an only child. (Judges 11:34, NIV)

ONLY CHILD

When we think of allusions to Jesus in the Old Testament, stories like Isaac's sacrifice, David's strength, and Job's suffering all come to mind. But can the story of an obscure Judge and his daughter allude to the Savior? Hopefully, a closer reading of this strange and tragic story shows that all Scripture points to Christ (Luke 24:25-27; John 5:39).

Here's a quick recap: Jephthah was born illegitimately and became a mighty warrior (Judges 11:1-3). When the Ammonites started attacking Israel, Jephthah's legitimate brothers came to him for help (11:4-11). Jephthah then asked the Lord for help, and God gave him a great victory (11:29-33). But in the midst of this, Jephthah promised that he would sacrifice whatever he saw when he returned home from victory (11:30-31). When the first thing he saw was his only child, he was devastated (11:34-35). She, too, was devastated and realized that she would never get the chance to bear children of her own. But rather than resist or rebel, she accepted her fate, asking only for a chance to mourn in community with her friends (11:36-40).

This story is often interpreted along moral lines with the application "Don't make rash vows." That's probably good advice, but I don't think it quite gets at the depth of the story and how it points to Christ.

Here are three ways it connects: First, both Jesus and Jephthah were rejected as illegitimate, but by the power of the Spirit, they would come to deliver their people and become their judge and leader. Next, notice that the word for "only child" in Judges 11:34 (Septuagint) is the same as the term (*monogenes*) used in the New Testament to describe Jesus as "only begotten" (John 1:14; 3:16; 1 John 4:9) and Isaac as an "only son" (Hebrews 11:17; Jephthah also appears in 11:32).

Finally, in all three stories, a loving father offered his only child as a sacrifice for the glory of Yahweh. In Isaac's story, God spared the boy and provided another sacrifice, which looks forward to Christ dying in our stead. In Jephthah's story, a woman longs for a child. Many years in the future, the child that the world longed for would come to a righteous woman who accepted her fate as the bearer of God to the world (Luke 1:26-38). This Christmas let's glorify God for the Only Child that was given.



Dr. John Dyer

*Vice President for Enrollment Services
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Assistant Professor of Theological Studies

Ruth

“Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life...” (Ruth 4:14–15, ESV)

HOW RUTH SAVED CHRISTMAS

If we think that the Christmas story started with Jesus's birth, well, we aren't reading the Bible closely enough! The roots of Christmas are deep in the Old Testament. Let me tell you just how Ruth saved Christmas.

During a famine, an Israelite family moved to Moab, and their two sons married Moabite women. Eventually, the men died, leaving the women in desperate straits. Naomi, the matriarch, urged her daughters-in-law to return to their birth families. One of them, a courageous and faithful woman named Ruth, refused to leave: “Your God will be my God,” Ruth said (Ruth 1:16). Despite her bold choice, the prospects for these two women were meager. But this is a Christmas story, complete with a happy ending. Three details reveal why that is so.

First, Christmas stories have stunning *reversals*. The King of kings arrived in very humble circumstances. Jesus was born in poverty, far from home and with a whiff of scandal. Each detail resonates with Ruth's story. Upon returning to Israel, the women's one hope was a distant relative named Boaz. He showed kindness to Ruth when she came to his fields for grain, so Ruth and Naomi devised a daring plan to enlist his assistance. Their bold approach with Boaz could have resulted in deep shame, but to their astonishment, Boaz fell in love with Ruth. So, beyond all expectations, this widowed Moab woman with no prospects won the heart of her Mr. Right.

Second, the story of Boaz and Ruth tells a version of the same *redemption* story of Jesus. Boaz was the kinsman-redeemer (“guardian”) (Ruth 4:14), who purchased Naomi's land and rescued Ruth and Naomi. Jesus, our Redeemer, secured our atonement by paying our debts with His blood. Boaz's redemption of Ruth is a foreshadowing of Christian salvation. When we see how Boaz saved Ruth and Naomi, we should smile because Jesus did the exact same thing for each of us.

Third, both stories are about *restoring* the good in spite of suffering. The crucifixion was a horrible defeat, until it became a great victory. The story of Ruth also looked like a tragedy, until Boaz married a daughter of one of Israel's enemies. It wasn't a sin, but a great act of faith. Boaz and Ruth became the great-grandparents of King David, and Ruth became an essential part of the legacy of the Messiah and His Christmas story.



Dr. Timothy Yoder

Professor of Theological Studies

Solomon

Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him. (Ecclesiastes 7:13–14, ESV)

SON OF DAVID

King Solomon, son of David, pursued life to the greatest extent possible. Through God's appearance to Solomon in a dream, Solomon was granted "a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have!" (1 Kings 3:12, NLT). In addition to this, God granted Solomon great wealth, extreme pleasure, widespread fame, significant productivity, and a long life.

In spite of, and also as a result of, all he experienced and possessed, Solomon exclaimed in the opening of the Book of Ecclesiastes that "Everything is meaningless...completely meaningless!" (Ecclesiastes 1:2). He expanded on this thought in a central thematic statement:

Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him. (7:13–14)

Solomon recognized that he was not, and never would be, God. Solomon could not make his path straight and, therefore, *could not ever see around the next turn*.

How often, in our own efforts, do we make the same attempt Solomon did? We so often turn our hearts toward pursuing knowledge, money, ease, notoriety, accomplishment, and longevity.

The Son of God (also named Son of David!) entered into His world as fully human and also fully God. Jesus possesses infinite wisdom and understanding. He has resources beyond measure. Jesus is perfectly satisfied as the second person of the Godhead. He has no beginning and no end. He created everything that has been made. Jesus is worthy of all praise, honor, and glory. So let's turn our hearts toward pursuing Him.

This Christmas, celebrate Jesus as the only One who can be fully trusted as we approach every turn in our lives.



Dr. Erik Salwen

Associate Professor of Counseling Ministries

Amos

"In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," declares the Lord who does this. (Amos 9:11-12, ESV)

A MESSAGE OF HOPE AND PEACE

The prophet Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa, a small town in Judea about ten miles south of Jerusalem. Like most prophets, he delivered a difficult message to the Israelites regarding their rebellion. Amos's book concludes with a message of hope about the future redemption of Israel and the Gentiles. Amos 9:11-12 says,

"In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," declares the LORD who does this.

Amos's final message of hope is that God would one day bring a redeemer to fulfill His promise, and Christ is this redeemer.

The prophetess Anna also spoke of the Messiah. We read in Luke 2:38 that Anna, "came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem" (NLT). This hopeful expectation began years earlier, as people such as Anna and Simeon gained an expectation of Israel's redemption from reading Old Testament prophets like Amos. Amos's words gave them hope that God would keep His promise of redemption for Israel and the world.

Just as Amos proclaimed a message of hope, so did the shepherds in Bethlehem who were guarding their flocks of sheep by night. When they saw the infant Jesus, the shepherds actually witnessed this prophecy's fulfillment. Luke 2:17 says, "After seeing [Jesus], the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child."

At eleven years old, I trusted Christ at Memorial Baptist Church in San Jose, California. After I was baptized, I wondered what I could do for God as a young boy. I haven't always followed Him perfectly over the years, but I've grown to trust Him more and more. Jesus gives us hope for a bright future in a dark world. Let us rejoice this Christmas in the hope that Christ brings and tell everyone that He is our, "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).



Dr. Rodney Orr

Dean of DTS-DC

Professor of Missiology and Intercultural Ministries

Zerubbabel

“On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts.”
(Haggai 2:23, ESV)

A CHOSEN PREDECESSOR OF JESUS

A small, worshipping remnant of the Hebrew people returned from Babylon in 538/536 BC. But they have no king; they are not a kingdom but rather a province of Persia under the Persian king. Furthermore, not only do they have no king, but the kingly line of David through King Jehoiachin has had a judgment placed on it. In Jeremiah 22:30, God declared of Jehoiachin: “Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, *for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah.*” Earlier in the Book of Jeremiah, God also indicated that King Jehoiachin had been removed as God’s representative, His “signet ring” (22:24).

But Matthew 1:12 records Jesus Christ descending through the line of King Jehoiachin (referred to also by the name Jechoniah or Coniah). How can the curse on King Jehoiachin be understood as not permanent so that Christ could be descended through him? The answer, recorded in Haggai 2:23, is that a faithful descendant of Jehoiachin will allow the curse to be reversed by God in the future.

Haggai, using an emphatic three-fold “declares the Lord/Lord of hosts,” recorded God’s sovereign choice of Zerubbabel, grandson of King Jehoiachin. It is through him that God will bring the promised Davidic King, rescinding the judgment on Jehoiachin. Again, using the imagery of a signet ring, the Lord declared that faithful Zerubbabel would now function as His chosen predecessor of the coming King. Zerubbabel never became king, but he was a symbolic representative of the One who would come as Davidic King to rule over an eternal kingdom. Luke 1:32b–33, referring to Jesus, reads: “And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Faithful obedience of Zerubbabel allowed the ultimate faithful obedient King to be born in David’s line (through Zerubbabel) and in David’s city of Bethlehem. This Christmas, as we look back and give thanks for the birth of Jesus, let’s also look forward to the complete fulfillment of God’s promise that the Lord Jesus Christ will reign as King forever in His coming kingdom. So we say, “Come again, King Jesus.”



Dr. Stephen J. Bramer

Chair and Professor of Bible Exposition

Isaiah

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:10–14, ESV)

ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

Scholars debate whether the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 was only realized in Mary and the birth of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. The language in Isaiah 7:14 implies that Isaiah was referring to a young woman in the presence of Ahaz, King of Judah. Isaiah informed Ahaz that God would give a sign to confirm that He was with Ahaz, and that sign would be that the young woman would bear a son, and she would be instructed to name him Immanuel (God with us). "Young woman," in this case, may refer to a virgin or simply an unmarried young maiden; in Isaiah's day, such a maiden would most likely have been a virgin. Regardless of how Ahaz understood Isaiah's statement and whether Isaiah was referring to a miraculous event given as a sign to Ahaz, God fulfilled His promise. By the time the maiden gave birth to a son and named him Immanuel, the kingdoms bent on conquering Judah were destroyed.

Biblical history links Isaiah 7:14 to a different and uniquely miraculous event that took place in Israel in the days of Herod, seven hundred years after Isaiah's prophecy. Matthew cites this exact verse in his Gospel (Matthew 1:22–23) when referring to the birth of Jesus. The Holy Spirit records for us through Matthew that Mary was indeed a virgin; that she conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, never having known a man; and she gave birth to a son, "God with us," who would save His people from their sins.

How would you respond if a young girl came to you today and said she was pregnant but had never been with a man? I suppose in today's medically advanced world, we could imagine alternatives. However, in Mary's day, such a thing was not medically possible, and Joseph would certainly have understood that. But that's what happened with Mary and Joseph. God did the medically impossible, without any human intervention whatsoever—a miraculous event. A second miracle occurred when an angel confirmed this to Joseph in a dream. Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled. A virgin did conceive, and through her, God gave the world the greatest Christmas present ever—His Son!



Dr. Jim Thames

Academic Dean

Professor of Educational Ministries and Leadership

Gabriel

“Don’t be afraid, Mary,” [Gabriel] told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” (Luke 1:30–33, NLT)

THE MESSENGER

Gabriel was not just your “normal” angel. In fact, God often asked him to do some very important stuff.

There was the time God asked him to interpret one of Daniel’s dreams (Daniel 8:16). Gabriel later fought a demonic prince. He needed Michael’s help with that one (10:13)! Then the LORD summoned Gabriel to visit Zechariah to tell him that Zechariah and Elizabeth would have a son named John who would prepare the people for the coming Messiah (Luke 1:13).

But this God-assignment to visit Mary was totally different! Was it unexpected? Probably not—Gabriel lived in the presence of the Almighty. Was it life-changing? Absolutely! The Son was coming to earth!

One can only imagine what must have been going through Gabriel’s mind as he delivered the message to Mary. I would like to think that Gabriel and the rest of the heavenly host knew what his message meant.

It was a message of an *invasion*. On D-Day, the Allies gave everything to free Europe from the tyranny of Hitler. The message of Gabriel was about an invasion needed to free humanity from the tyranny of sin. Heaven was about to commit everything it had to the invasion of earth. But it wasn’t going to be an army. No, the Invader was going to be an infant! *“You will conceive and give birth to a son”* (1:31).

It was a message of *liberation*. In a separate encounter with Joseph, Gabriel gave more details around the upcoming invasion: *“He will save his people from their sins”* (Matthew 1:21). Gabriel’s message was about the Baby to be born in Bethlehem who would bring freedom to a world imprisoned by disease, hopelessness, brokenness, and sin.

It was a message of a *coronation*. Gabriel had to be filled with excitement in anticipation of Jesus’s birth in Bethlehem because of these words to Mary: *“The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”* (Luke 1:32–33). From heaven’s perspective, that very first Christmas would be coronation day!

If there is one thing we need to understand this Christmas, it is what Gabriel understood—the One coming to that manger in Bethlehem is the King of kings and Lord of lords! Jesus didn’t become the King. He was born the King.



Dr. Philip Humphries

Associate Professor of Educational Ministries and Leadership

Elizabeth

“This is what the Lord has done for me at the time when he has been gracious to me, to take away my disgrace among people.” (Luke 1:25, NET)

CHRISTMAS CHANGED ELIZABETH PERSONALLY

Christmas is God coming to be with His creation, offering Himself as the Savior of the world. God’s people waited hundreds of years for the coming Messiah to be with them and change the world forever. However, throughout the Scriptures we see God working for His people even before Jesus was born. Elizabeth is one of those people. She was personally changed by God through a gift that redeemed the challenges of her past, grew her confidence in the present, and provided hope for her future.

Elizabeth lived a life she did not expect. Scripture introduces her as an elderly woman without children, living a visibly different life than others in her community. Before the first Christmas, God addressed Elizabeth’s difficulties. Through bearing a baby boy in her old age, Elizabeth was reminded that God saw her and remembered her suffering. She boldly declared that God had removed her disgrace from being childless (Luke 1:25).

This confidence in God ministered to others experiencing trials. Zechariah, Elizabeth’s husband, became mute due to disbelief in this gift yet rested on a promise that his voice would return at his son’s birth (1:20). Mary, Elizabeth’s cousin, hearing a woman in her old age conceived, learned nothing is impossible with God, which provided comfort in her Holy Spirit-inspired pregnancy (1:36–37). Elizabeth’s community witnessed the mercy of God to care for the hurts of His creation and rejoiced with her (1:58). Finally, everyone waited expectantly for God to do mighty works through her son in the future as they witnessed God’s hand fulfilling His promises by returning Zechariah’s voice (1:65–66).

This Christmas, remember that God meets your needs personally. Jesus is not merely a distant gift to be opened on Christmas Day. Elizabeth experienced that He is God with us; He restored the challenges of her past, worked in the uncertainty of her present, and provided her hope for tomorrow. Spend time reflecting on Elizabeth’s story. Remember that Christmas is God with you—removing your disgrace, showing you His power and mercy, and reminding you that your tomorrows are filled with His great plans.



Dr. Stacey Davis

Assistant Professor of Educational Ministries and Leadership

Zechariah

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High.
For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways." (Luke 1:76, NET)

BIRTH WITH PURPOSE

This year God allowed me to travel to Honduras to be present for the birth of my niece, Isabella. What a precious moment to see her, to have her in my arms just a few hours after she was born, and to see the joy of her parents and our family. Without a doubt, it was an incomparable moment of happiness for the whole family.

Luke chapter one narrates the birth of a child, John the Baptist, who filled his parents with joy and purpose. His parents, who were advanced in years and had not been able to have a child, received this miracle baby from God.

Zechariah described the birth of his son, saying, "And you child, you will be called a prophet of the Most High. For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways." John the Baptist had a calling and a purpose. He fulfilled his calling by being a prophet of the highest being that exists on earth and in heaven. Most High points to the hierarchical aspect; the One who is the highest, God Himself, the supreme being of all that exists, had a purpose for John's life.

John's purpose was to prepare the ways of the Lord and *to give His people the knowledge of salvation* (Luke 1:77). John made known the way of salvation, which comes only through the Lord, who forgives sins. What a great privilege!

The birth of my niece comes after a trying time for our family. This baby is God's answer to my sister after several lost pregnancies. It is also a year after God called our brother into His presence, after he fought cancer for the third time. Isabella is a gift from God that gives us His comfort and has the purpose of showing the way to the Savior.

The birth of our Savior truly provides salvation, which also brings hope and joy. His purpose was to bring salvation to humankind. This Christmas, let us celebrate the birth of Jesus, considering His purpose in coming into the world.



Dr. Williams S. Trigueros
Director of DTS en Español

DECEMBER 12

John the Baptist

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. (John 1:6, NIV)
He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. (John 1:8, NIV)
“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, NASB)

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

God has used many lives to point us to Jesus, but I can think of none greater than John the Baptist. This is especially interesting as John the Baptist is great for not making himself great. As he sets his life apart to prepare the way for God’s anointed One, he declares “He must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30). He even gets the ultimate reference from Jesus Himself, “I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John” (Luke 7:28a). And then, Jesus continued, “yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (7:28b).

This path to greatness is not merely taking a humble position. God revealed to John the glory of Jesus as the Messiah. John was moved beyond believing to beholding, “I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One” (John 1:34). Through his “beholding” he became a witness to the light, admonishing us to “Behold the Lamb of God.” The apostle Paul similarly beheld Christ in a transforming way and then prayed for the followers of Christ that they would know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (Ephesians 3:14–19).

In the Anglican tradition, we place a big emphasis on God leading us to behold Jesus during Advent. Advent is the first season of the Church year. It lasts for four weeks leading up to Christmas Day. “Advent” comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning “coming or arrival.” So, the season of Advent is a season of preparation and waiting to celebrate Christ’s first arrival at Christmas and for the second coming when Jesus the Messiah will make all things new (Revelation 21).

During the Advent season this year, let’s remember the life and ministry of John the Baptist pointing us to *“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* And may we enter a season of preparation and waiting as we heed the admonishment to *“Prepare ye the way of the Lord”* (Luke 3:4).



Dr. C. Gary Barnes
Professor of Counseling Ministries

David

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.” (Luke 1:32, NIV)

THE FATHER OF THE ETERNAL KING

When the angel Gabriel delivered the news to the virgin Mary that she would bear a child, he said that her son would be the Son of the Most High. Then he promised that this child, to be named Jesus, would be the fulfillment of the promise God had made to David. Rather than an eternal succession of Davidic descendants, Mary's son would be the eternal fulfillment of that promise (see 2 Samuel 7:11–16).

Mary expressed wonder and surprise as she reminded the angel that she was a virgin (Luke 1:34). The angel reassured her that her child would be conceived miraculously by the Holy Spirit (1:35). Mary, though, did not question the angel about Jesus's ability to fulfill the promise to David. This might have been because, as some argue, Mary herself was in the line of David. This view interprets the genealogy in Luke 3:23–38 as being Mary's. On the other hand, she surely knew that Joseph, to whom she was pledged to be married, was a descendant of David (2:5). Luke emphasizes that relationship many times, beginning with the account of the angel's appearance: “God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David” (1:26–27). Luke mentions Joseph's descent from David again when he explains why the couple traveled to Bethlehem (2:4). Matthew similarly records the angel's greeting of Joseph: “Joseph son of David” (Matthew 1:20).

Because Jesus is the final and ultimate Son of David, not simply one of many descended from the son of Jesse, Jesus fulfills the promises made to David. Jesus “will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:33).

In His ascension, Jesus has returned to the Father, where He sits on the throne of God as the Son of God and the Son of David (Acts 2:29–36). He will one day return to the earth to establish an earthly kingdom that never ends. Those of us who live between His ascension and His return wait patiently for that day when all will be made new (Revelation 21:5). While this is the season when we celebrate His birth, we should also celebrate the hope of His return: “Come, Lord Jesus” (22:20).



Dr. Glenn R. Kreider

Professor of Theological Studies

Editor in Chief, Bibliotheca Sacra

Joseph

“...and Joseph...being a righteous man...” (Matthew 1:19, NASB)

JOSEPH WAS ALSO A MODEL OF FAITH

The grounds for belief and disbelief are the same today as they were two thousand or ten thousand years ago. If Joseph had lacked the faith to trust God or [the] humility to perceive the holiness of his spouse, he could have disbelieved in the miraculous origin of her son as easily as any modern man; and any modern man who believes God can accept the miracle as easily as Joseph did. —C. S. Lewis

Each figurine of the traditional nativity set represents a significant portion of the Christmas narrative, whether it be the wonder and worship of the shepherds, the obedience of Mary, the proclamation of the angels, or the submission of Christ to His Father's will. One of the most neglected figures of the Nativity, however, is Joseph. Physically bypassed by the miraculous conception and virgin birth, he is nevertheless a significant role model of a faithful man. The following four character traits of his maturity provide a great pattern for our own continuing growth in the faith.

First, Joseph was *unblameable in his character*. Matthew calls Joseph a righteous man. Joseph was careful to maintain personal fidelity with regard to Mary and integrity in relationship to God.

Second, Joseph was *unselfish in his contemplation*. He modeled a servant's heart in both his purity and in his mercy. His purity is seen in his plan to divorce himself from Mary and thus separate himself from what appeared to be a sinful situation. Joseph's mercy was evident by not seeking his own self-protection. He sought to privately do what he thought would be appropriate without a desire to publicly defame or disgrace Mary.

Third, Joseph was *unbending in his control*. By ensuring Mary remained a virgin until Jesus was born, he protected the validity of the Incarnation. To be married and yet restrain from physical intercourse showed the solid commitment of this righteous man.

Fourth, Joseph was *unquestionable in his conduct*. Joseph married Mary and named the Child exactly as the angel had instructed. That name would be Jesus “for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

A righteous heart is always evidenced by an obedient life. May our continuing faith and obedience be our Christmas gift to the Savior this year.



Dr. Mark L. Bailey

Chancellor

Senior Professor of Bible Exposition

DECEMBER 15

The Innkeeper

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. (Luke 2:6-7, NIV)

THE IMPORTANCE OF HOSPITALITY

One of the most often overlooked people in Luke's Christmas narrative is the innkeeper. By turning Mary and Joseph away, the innkeeper forced Jesus's birth to occur in accommodations that were far from glamorous and unfitting for the birth of the Messiah. We may never know the real reason why Mary and Joseph were turned away from the inn. It could have simply been full, which would have been understandable considering the ordered census. It is also plausible that the innkeeper's decision may have been influenced by his fear of Roman authority, or perhaps he held a prejudice against poor or foreign travelers. Whatever his reasons, the innkeeper's actions were equally harsh and heartless. He turned away a young, pregnant woman who had traveled a long, significant journey, forcing her to deliver her child in a dirty manger. This act of rejection foreshadowed the rejection that Jesus would face throughout His life.

The innkeeper's narrative creates an implication around Christian hospitality—the act of welcoming and caring for others in a way that reflects God's love. In Scripture, we are taught that we are created in God's image and that we should treat each other with love. Yet, how often do we tend to turn away people in need in favor of caring for our own needs? How often do we fail to show hospitality to strangers because we are too focused on ourselves? The innkeeper's story reminds us that we should always be open to those in need.

During this Advent season, I encourage you to consider how you are practicing hospitality regularly. Advent is a wonderful time to practice sharing your hearts, hands, and homes with others. The innkeeper's story is complex, and there is no easy answer to why he acted the way he did. However, his story is a reminder that even the most unlikely people can play a role in God's plan. As we practice hospitality to those around us, we invite others into God's story, which could perhaps be the greatest gift we could ever give.



Dr. Kevin M. Gandy

Assistant Professor of Educational Ministries and Leadership

The Shepherds in the Field

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11, ESV)

THE ANGELIC VISIT

Have you ever experienced a transformative moment in your life, one that filled you with newfound hope? On a remarkable night over two thousand years ago, an angel of the Lord appeared to a group of humble shepherds. The angel delivered the good news that a Savior had been born for them. This tale follows a familiar pattern of a supernatural encounter with an angel, instilling joy in the face of fear for an unexpected audience (Luke 2:9–10; compare 1:13–14, 30). As we approach this season, do you recall a time when the Lord brought joy into your life, dispelling your fears?

On the first Christmas, the most unsuspecting audience, the shepherds, were taken aback by the angel's announcement of the birth of their Savior-King in the city of David (2:11). This joyful news, heralded by a heavenly angel, was regarding a noble King. The unique sign of this King—a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger (2:12). What a profound moment it was, as a noble King clothed Himself in poverty to identify with His people. From a dark and wearisome night, an unexpected and joyous revelation unfolded. The atmosphere continues to crescendo with the chorus of a host of angels, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased" (2:14). The good news of the birth of a Savior-King brings about two outcomes. Vertically, the Incarnation of God's Son, full of grace and truth, ascribes glory to God in heaven. Horizontally, it brings peace to those on whom His favor rests.

Beyond the creation of the world, the sending of a Savior brings immeasurable glory to God. In the heart of all those who are favored by God, it generates an unprecedented sense of peace. This peace is not only merely the cessation of hostility; rather, it embodies the Hebrew term "shalom," which conveys a profound sense of safety, security, and prosperity under the blessings of God. The advent of the Messiah ushers in a holistic peace, characterized by spiritual rest for all who find favor in God's eyes. Jesus's birth ignites wonder, joy, and peace. Does this extraordinary news ignite a spark within your heart? May the radiant light that shines out of darkness shine in your heart (2 Corinthians 4:6).



Dr. Richard Hon

Assistant Director of Chinese Studies

Associate Professor of Bible Exposition

Simeon

"My eyes have just seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." (Luke 2:30–32, NASB)

CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF JESUS LIKE SIMEON

Simeon is a great example of how to celebrate the birth of Christ.

(1) Simeon was righteous and devout (Luke 2:25). He represented true Israelites because he was living not only in obedience to the Old Testament but also in obedience to the Holy Spirit, who guided Simeon into the Temple just when Joseph and Mary "redeemed" their firstborn son, Jesus.

(2) Simeon's righteousness led him to wait for the Helper or Guardian (the Messiah) of Israel (2:25–26). There was great injustice in Israel, and many were praying for their righteous deliverer to be born to reestablish justice and righteousness. Simeon was waiting for the birth of the "Lord's Christ," the Messiah, who would be king as well as Lord.

(3) Simeon correctly embraced Jesus as Christ and Lord (2:28).

(4) Simeon's praise to God was because Jesus's arrival meant salvation for all "peoples" (2:30–31).

Simeon's example is one that we can follow to this day. We can dedicate ourselves to being obedient to God and His Word. We can faithfully wait for the return of Jesus Christ, our Lord, to reign upon the whole earth literally. We can embrace Jesus as our Savior and Lord. And we can praise God for His missionary vision to save all people groups of the earth through the death and resurrection of God the Son.

God loves people and wants to have a personal relationship with all humanity. There are likely more than seven thousand unreached people groups (almost five billion people). Christmas can be a time of gifts for friends and family and a time of sharing the heart of Jesus to reach all people groups on the earth. It is a special time when Christians have the great joy of not only sharing the truth of Christmas with friends, neighbors, and coworkers but also supporting foreign missionaries who are reaching people with the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Simeon recognized that the real meaning of Christ's birth was a salvation message for all peoples, not just for Israel. Let us all pray that the Holy Spirit will lead us to know how God would have us participate in spreading the message of salvation through Jesus to all people on the planet today.



Dr. Daniel Steffen

Professor of New Testament Studies

Interdepartmental Professor for DTS en Español

Anna

There was also a prophetess, Anna, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well along in years, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and was a widow for eighty-four years. She did not leave the temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayers. At that very moment, she came up and began to thank God and to speak about him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36–38, CSB)

A PATIENT AND FAITHFUL WOMAN

We meet Anna in the storyline of Jesus forty days after His birth when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to be dedicated (according to ceremonial law in Leviticus 12:1–8). One thing we know for sure about Anna is that she was a very patient and faithful woman. When the passage says Anna was a widow for eighty-four years, the Greek wording is a little ambiguous. Does it simply mean Anna was eighty-four years old? Or was Anna a widow for eighty-four years, making her over one hundred years old? While we don't have to settle this argument regarding firmly establishing her age, we know that Anna had spent decades devoting herself to serving God night and day with fasting and prayers. For sure, Anna was a familiar and known figure at the temple compound; her life centered around worship.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Anna showed up at the temple right at the very moment when Mary, Joseph, and Jesus arrived. Anna immediately began to thank God and speak about Jesus to others. Both actions are recorded in the imperfect tense, meaning Anna was continually giving thanks and continually speaking to others about Jesus. Anna continually told everyone who looked for the redemption of Jerusalem that their Deliverer had come, and she had seen Him. Anna continually told everyone she encountered that the comfort they were looking for was only found in Jesus.

What a simple yet powerful message for this Christmas season to share with others—the comfort you are looking for is only found in Jesus. Our family members, coworkers, friends, and neighbors are looking for comfort in a very pain-filled world. The comfort to their pain is only found in Jesus. Anna knew that comfort herself and could not stop sharing it with others.

May we be like Anna in continually sharing the “tidings of comfort and joy” found only in Jesus.



Dr. George Hillman

Vice President for Education

Professor of Educational Ministries and Leadership

The Magi

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem. (Matthew 2:1, NASB)

WHO WERE THEY?

As a little boy, I had questions about the three wisemen I saw on Christmas cards. Who were they, and where did they come from? As I got older, I still had questions. How did they know to go to Bethlehem? Matthew first presents them in his Gospel (2:1) with the words, “behold, magi from the east.”

It is difficult to identify the magi with precision, but the Book of Daniel offers insight into the mystery that surrounds them. When Judah was carried into captivity in 586 BC, Daniel was among those Jews taken to Babylon. For centuries Babylon had been a center for the study of the stars. The magi or wisemen were a group interested in dreams, magic, astrology, and the future. The first several chapters of Daniel’s book contain numerous references to wisemen, and we even read in Daniel 2:48 and 5:11 that Daniel was made ruler over the wisemen/magicians of Babylon. There is no question that Daniel, along with the other Jews in Babylon, had a tremendous influence on these magi.

Daniel prophesied about the death of the Messiah in Daniel 9:24–27. The accuracy of this prediction has led many to believe that this is the greatest prophecy ever given! One can easily see how the magi under Daniel would have been impacted by his teaching regarding the future King/Messiah and, yes, by a star unlike any other they had ever studied! Of course, there were those magi who were charlatans (Acts 8:9; 13:6, 8), but others were God-fearing Gentiles seeking the true God.

Unquestionably, the star caught the eye of these men from the east who studied the stars. When they saw it, they followed it. Scholars debate as to what the star was, but it seems clear that it cannot be explained in natural terms; it was simply miraculous. It led the magi first to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem, where the Child was.

When they arrived, the magi presented three gifts (the text doesn’t tell us the number of magi), each gift befitting a king. The gold was symbolic of the Child’s deity; the frankincense, of His purity; and the myrrh, of His death. Matthew tells us that even before they presented their gifts, they fell down and worshipped Jesus. Can we do less?



Dr. Joe M. Allen Jr.
DTS Campus Pastor

DECEMBER 20

A Father's Gift

"Anyone here who believes what I am saying right now and aligns himself with the Father ... has at this very moment the real, lasting life and is no longer condemned to be an outsider. This person has taken a giant step from the world of the dead to the world of the living." (John 5:24, MSG)

The early morning hours before the sun were Joseph's favorite for working on small, quiet projects. He bent low over the wood he was fashioning into a gift for his oldest son and eyed the grain. It ran straight and then swirled around the lower half. Beautiful. Practical.

He had cut the branch from an almond tree. He tried to focus on his work, but he was distracted. Just weeks before he had lost his twelve-year-old son briefly during Passover in Jerusalem. But after the relief of finding Him, Jesus's question pierced Joseph. "Didn't you know," Jesus had said, "that I had to be about my Father's business?"

Joseph understood that God was, in some mysterious sense, the Father of Jesus. But even after twelve years, Joseph still felt like an outsider, confused, stuck in his understanding like an oxcart in a muddy ditch. He felt stupid for not knowing that Jesus had to be about His Father's business. Or what that business might be.

But one thing was clear. Whatever "His Father's business" was it wouldn't be here in Nazareth. It would be out there in the world somewhere. Joseph loved Jesus so much, but he was coming to understand that if he truly loved his son, he would send Him into the world to do the will of His divine Father.

And this gift would help.

It wasn't perfect, but it was the best he could do. He took comfort in that. And in this staff. "Sturdy as the rod of Moses, and just as true," he said softly.

A staff for walking. This boy was going places.

Mary entered from the shadows. She had been watching. She placed her hand on her husband's shoulder and ran her finger along the length of the wood. "It's perfect."

Joseph smiled and shook his head. He carried the staff inside and laid it beside Jesus as He lay sleeping. He would find it when He woke.

"No," Joseph whispered. "There's only one perfect gift, and He is here with us."
For now.



Dr. Reg Grant

Chair and Senior Professor of Media Arts and Worship

Mary

“...the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” (Luke 2:35, NIV)

MOTHER OF JESUS

As someone who has spent years teaching and attending women’s Bible studies, I’ve scribbled my way through multiple workbooks featuring women in the Scriptures. Ironically, though, only one such study has included the fourth most described person in the New Testament: Jesus’s mother, Mary.

Considering that Mary is the only primary witness of the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection—three events on which Christianity’s core doctrines are built—such an omission is a major oversight. To neglect Mary is to miss an important figure with much to teach us.

In an early scene from Jesus’s life, we find Mary with Joseph taking Baby Jesus to the temple to dedicate Him. And there an elderly man, Simeon, took the child in his arms, offered praise, and predicted Jesus would be the light of the Gentiles and the glory of Israel. But then Simeon offered Mary a grim prophecy: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too” (Luke 2:34–35).

Three decades later, when a Roman sword pierced her son’s body, Mary stood watching as a sword pierced her soul. And that was not the first time following Jesus exacted a price from her. Yet from the beginning Mary had determined to do the will of God, as seen in her words to Gabriel, “I am the Lord’s servant. . . . May your word to me be fulfilled” (1:38).

At one point in Jesus’s ministry a woman in the crowd called out, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.” And Jesus answered, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (11:27–28). Jesus placed doing God’s will over physical reproduction. And as the New Testament reveals, Mary did both.

The One who “abhorred not the virgin’s womb” told His disciples that in the world they would experience trouble (John 16:33). Doing His will may bring soul-piercing pain. Yet Mary’s choices remind us that it is worth any cost to follow Jesus. We can even be merry—because He has overcome the world.



Dr. Sandra Glahn

Professor of Media Arts and Worship

DECEMBER 22

The High Priest

"I am," said Jesus, "and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14:62, NET)

JESUS AS SON OF MAN

During this season when we celebrate Jesus's birth, it is important to consider where the Christmas story takes us. It takes us on a journey through the twists and turns in Jesus's ministry and eventually leads us to a trial that points us to who Jesus is.

Jesus's exchange with the high priest, Caiaphas, is one turning point in Jesus's ministry. When Caiaphas asked Jesus, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" (Mark 14:61), he was not asking about Jesus's divinity. He was simply asking if Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, the Davidic king (2 Samuel 7:8–17, esp. 7:14). The high priest was probing to see if Jesus would claim to be a king Rome did not appoint in order to have Pilate charge Jesus with sedition.

Jesus's reply was a game changer. Mark 14:62 reads, "'I am,' said Jesus, 'and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.'" First of all, Jesus acknowledged not only that He is the Messiah but also that He is the *Son of Man* (Daniel 7:13–14), the one who was given judgment authority from the Ancient of Days. Jesus was saying, in effect, I may be a defendant before you, but one day I will be your judge! Second, by referring to the Son of Man *being seated at the right hand of power* (in other words, with God in heaven), Jesus was saying He shares authority with God the Father. Caiaphas, believing that Jesus had blasphemed, tore his clothes.

Only two options exist for who Jesus is—either Jesus is who He claimed to be, or he was a blasphemer. If Jesus is not who He claimed to be, Caiaphas's reaction would have been correct. Yet, God's vote in that dispute was settled with the Resurrection, which vindicated Jesus's claim. It brought Him to the very side of God—the place that Jesus said He would occupy with all the rights and privileges He claimed in His reply to Caiaphas.

Jesus's testimony about Himself ultimately sent Him to the cross. He was that committed to dying for us. In this season when we celebrate Christmas and the arrival of Jesus, we should remember to commemorate this part of His story.



Dr. Darrell Bock

Executive Director of Cultural Engagement

Senior Research Professor of New Testament Studies

Barnabas

When [Saul] came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. (Acts 9:26–27, NIV)

THE ADVOCATE

Acts 9 tells us that Saul (Paul), who had been breathing “murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples,” began proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God. Let’s imagine when Barnabas alone advocated for Saul.

“Absolutely not!” The seasoned fisherman-turned-apostle protests a ludicrous request.

“With all due respect, I would have to agree with Peter,” James, the brother of Jesus, cautions. “The Jewish leaders will do anything they can to snuff us out. How do you know this isn’t an elaborate—”

“Enough.” Barnabas interrupts. He rises from the table. “What if the resurrection power of Jesus truly transformed a terrible sinner into something—someone—beautiful?”

Silence fills the air in the dimly lit room at Peter’s home.

Barnabas continues, “You’re right. He has terrorized the church in Jerusalem with murderous threats—going from house to house, dragging off men and women, and putting them into prison. It is true. This man is responsible for the execution of many. Our hearts ache for Stephen.”

“We appreciate you and your wisdom,” Peter interjects. “But what evidence do you have to verify this is a true conversion?”

“Brothers, I am convinced that Saul is telling the truth, and witnesses confirm such. The Lord Jesus struck him like lightning, leaving him blind as he traveled the Damascus Road. The resurrected Jesus asked him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ The Lord independently called another faithful disciple to minister to Saul and He restored Saul’s sight. Consider Saul’s preaching and how powerfully effective he is in proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God and as the Christ.”

Barnabas pauses, sits back down, and looks straight toward Peter.

“Cephas, who stood in your corner even as the rooster crowed?”

Peter abruptly stands. His nostrils flare as he takes a deep breath. James’s eyes open wide, not knowing what Peter would say or do next.

“Okay! I’ll do it.” Peter complies with Barnabas’s request. “Saul can stay with me, and I will verify all this for myself.”

James was surprised. Barnabas was relieved.

Consider the example of Barnabas as a reminder that we are able to forgive because Jesus has forgiven us. This Christmas, may we remember that Jesus came into this world as our Savior and perfect Advocate. May we never forget that Jesus stands in our corner, providing forgiveness from sin to those who place their faith in Him and His finished work on the cross by the power of His resurrection.



Dr. D. Scott Barfoot

Director of Doctor of Ministry Studies

Jesus

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:18–21, NLT)

A CHRISTMAS CONUNDRUM

Joseph faced a Christmas conundrum.

He knew Mary was pregnant, and he could not possibly be the father. Things like this didn't go over very well in Nazareth. Or anywhere for that matter. What would the synagogue worshippers say? What about Mary's parents?

The young groom's thoughts churned wildly. Suddenly he had more than a wedding to ponder. He devised a plan to end the engagement in silence. More than likely, he turned to God in prayer just before heading off to bed.

After drifting into a deep sleep, Joseph had a dream. In his dream, an angel of the Lord spoke a startling message: *"Mary's Son would be the Savior! The infant would be Incarnation! This birth would be a blessing!"*

The truth of the angel's message changed everything. Mary had been faithful. Now God was asking Joseph to be.

When Joseph woke, I'm sure his mind went from racing to rejoicing. His heart from anxiety to adulation. His soul from pressure to praise! God's message to Joseph changed everything. Not only would Mary have a son—every Jewish father's dream—her Son would be their Savior!

As humans, we easily succumb to fretting thoughts and forget our faithful God. We need the truth that comes from His Word—we long for the wisdom we receive when we turn to Him in trouble. The Lord met Joseph in his restless sleep, solving his personal conundrum and offering hope for the world's ultimate conundrum of sin.

Is your mind racing anxiously over situations you cannot control? Are you allowing the pressure of the season to drain the joy of Christmas? Turn to the One who still changes everything. His name is *Jesus*. He wants to solve your conundrums, too. If you do not know Him, He invites you and yours to unwrap the free gift of His forgiveness this Christmas. If you do know Him, He asks you to be faithful. Trust Him.

Merry Christmas.



Dr. Mark M. Yarbrough

President

Professor of Bible Exposition

Strangely Wrapped, Silently Delivered

Ever since the first Christmas celebration, I think one word has fallen from everyone's lips more than any other. It isn't the word *joy* or *carol* or *tree* or *food*. It's the word *gift*. Gifts are so inseparably linked and interwoven with Christmas that we can hardly think of one without the other. However, we need to establish a priority. With all of the giving and receiving that happens at Christmas, it seems appropriate that we first think about God's gift to us.

What was that gift? Of course, it was His Son, Jesus, and with Him, the salvation He offers to all humanity. I never tire of repeating the greatest Christmas verse in the Bible: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

When God came to us that first night, He set in motion a plan He had established before the foundation of the world. And what was that plan? To give us the greatest gift possible—eternal life. He provided this gift through His Son, Jesus, who came to us because we could not come to God. As hard as we tried, we could not even get close to Him—our sinfulness kept us away. Now, because of Jesus, we have access to God Himself. God's gift invites us closer. Small wonder the apostle Paul announced, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

In spite of the great magnitude of His gift, God delivered it quietly and personally, announcing "good news of great joy" to a few obscure shepherds on a Bethlehem hillside (Luke 2:10). God chose to announce His gift to common men—nameless shepherds—because Jesus came to address humankind's common condition: our desperate need for a Savior.

Jesus came "that [you] may have life," John 10:10 says, and that you would "have it abundantly." Do you know this abundant life? Has the peace He offers made its way into your heart? I write this to those of you who have yet to know our Savior and to those who know Him but are missing the joy of this season. In the midst of the frazzled and harried days that often accompany this month, take time to unwrap His gift. It costs you nothing—it's a gift, remember—you need only receive what He's done for you.

God's gift waits for you this Christmas. He delivers it to the doorstep of your heart—quietly, as you wait on Him, and personally, as He answers your specific needs. Whatever your need may be at this time of year, trust God to give you that which is most abundant—delivered quietly yet with great joy.

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Dr. Charles R. Swindoll
Chancellor Emeritus



*Merry
Christmas*
AND *Happy
New Year*
FROM
*Dallas
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THE
Word GAVE *life*
TO
EVERYTHING
THAT WAS CREATED,
AND HIS *life* BROUGHT
light TO
EVERYONE.

JOHN 1:4 NLT



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