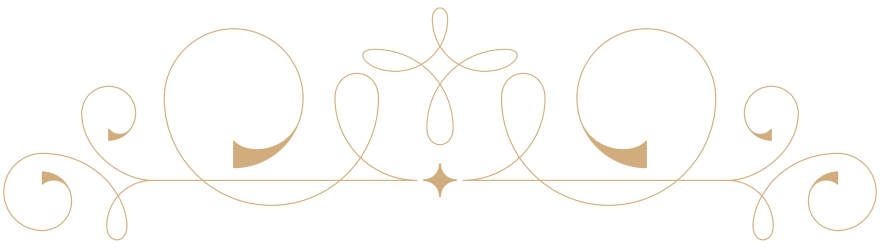




DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
2024 CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL
— CENTENNIAL EDITION —



This has been a special year at Dallas Theological Seminary—our centennial—and we have been celebrating God's faithfulness all year long. During the year, I have had the opportunity to visit DTS alumni in the United States and around the world, including in the Philippines, Argentina, Guatemala, and Liberia.

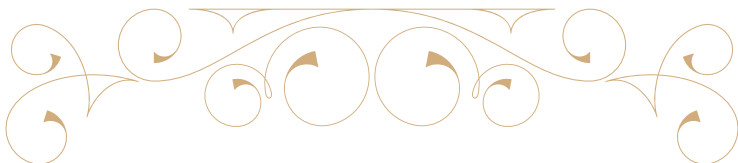
I have learned many lessons from the alumni and other believers that I met during my travels. One of those lessons was this reminder: there is no greater honor than to be able to share the greatest story ever told. It is the privilege of every believer to tell the story of Jesus Christ and His saving grace.

Equipping servant-leaders to share this story has been the purpose of DTS since 1924, and this purpose has not changed. While the Seminary has grown and our methods of training have expanded, our mission is the same. We are still teaching that true hope is found only in the gospel.

HOPE is the title of this DTS Christmas devotional collection. The devotionals included point to that essential gospel message: the hope that is found in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. For the centennial edition, we compiled some of our favorite previously published devotionals written by current DTS faculty. Also, we are honored to be able to include timeless classics written by faculty who are retired or who are with the Lord. These devotionals, from professors who have a meaningful legacy within the DTS community, were written over many years. However, they share one theme: the source of all hope is found in the greatest story ever told.

I pray you are encouraged by these messages during the Christmas season. As the end of this centennial year approaches, I am reminded that, for one hundred years, the support of friends like you has been vital to achieving the DTS mission. On behalf of DTS students, faculty, and staff, I want to express sincere gratitude for your partnership—and wish you a very Merry Christmas!

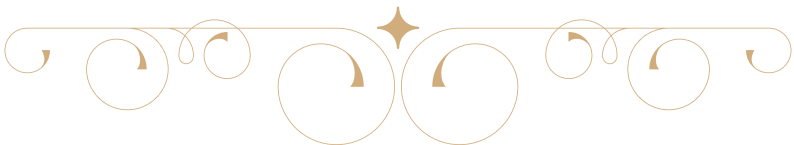
*Mark M. Yarbrough, PhD
President*





WARMEST CHRISTMAS GREETINGS
FROM THE
YARBROUGH FAMILY

L-R: Kayci, Joseph, Mackenzie & Jacob, Jennifer & Mark,
Kayla & Garrett Chandler



NOVEMBER 29

*I will always be ready to remind you of these things,
even though you already know them.*

— 2 PETER 1:12, NASB —

MY ADVICE THIS CHRISTMAS

If I may borrow from Charles Dickens's famous opening line, Christmas can be "the best of times and the worst of times." We have them both, don't we?

Who hasn't cringed in September as stores drag out and display the artificial Christmas trees? Who hasn't felt uneasy about the obligatory exchange of gifts with individuals you hardly know? Something about those annual experiences can make them seem like "the worst of times."

But I prefer to view Christmas as "the best of times." This is God's annual reminder to us, in effect: "Feel the warmth in all the lights? Smell that tree? See those gifts? Hear those songs? My Son came and died for you." The things familiar are reminders of things essential.

"I will always be ready to remind you of these things," the apostle Peter wrote, "even though you already know them" (2 Peter 1:12). Isn't that great? We need regular reminders of essential truths.

In the Old Testament the Lord used tangible objects and actions as memory triggers—phylacteries on the forehead, special food at Passover, stones beside rivers, and trumpets for the New Year. The sights, sounds, smells, tastes—these seasonal traditions—reignited the passions of God's people and reminded them of His love and His commands. Christmas can do the same for us.

You string up the lights. You trim the tree. You wrap the presents. You attend a Christmas Eve service. It's all familiar ... it's just words, just lights, just a tree, just gifts, just songs.

Wait a minute!

Remember that Jesus was born of a virgin. Don't forget how the angels lit the shepherds' field with God's glory, announcing the birth of a *Savior*. You and I *needed* a Savior—One who would and could die for our sins.

My advice this Christmas? Allow the traditions of the season to stir you up by way of reminder. Allow the things familiar to point you to things essential. Don't miss them.

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DR. CHARLES R. SWINDOLL
Chancellor Emeritus



In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

— JOHN 1:4, NIV —

LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS

DARKNESS. Deep below the earth's surface, lights went out as the tour guide in Carlsbad Caverns reminded us: this is total blackout. With no speck of light anywhere, all sense of direction was lost. It echoed the opening words of the Bible, "... darkness was over the surface of the deep" (Genesis 1:2). No life, no growth could be sustained. Then "God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light" (1:3).

No scientific theory can adequately explain the origin of light; we know only that we have it and it leads the thinker to ask: How? Who? What does it mean for me? Yes, I can see physically, but how do I know intuitively what is my next best move? My eyes see, but I struggle with private doubts. Is there a way to do life right, and what about the hereafter?

CHRISTMAS. The light shines in the darkness. Jesus, the babe of Bethlehem, the true eye opener, declared, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Just as God provided light for the physical creation, He revealed His solution for spiritual blindness. John's Gospel illuminates the core truth: this same Person who first brought physical light into the world is the same One who came to offer spiritual sight.

SOLUTION. Our spiritually dark world, groping for stability, stumbles into repeated disaster. Through His written word we see inner light. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105). No one need flounder in our world's present insecurity. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).



DR. HOWARD HENDRICKS

(1924–2013)



Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.

— MATTHEW 1:1, NIV —

SON OF DAVID, SON OF ABRAHAM “WHAT’S IN A TITLE?”

The opening line of Matthew’s description of the claims of a Galilean from Nazareth, an obscure village in the north of Israel (a blended Gentile-Jewish area), would have been met with shock and amazement, skepticism and ridicule by a Jewish reader of the first century. Even a later follower of this man shared this opinion saying, “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (John 1:46).

Matthew begins with three claims about Jesus. First, Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the promised one of the Hebrew Scriptures. He is the consummation of the promises of God (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6). The era of anticipation has ended, and the era of completion has begun! A light, the true light, has dawned in the birth of a child—a savior—who will bring peace to troubled hearts, reversing the tragedy of the devolution of creation. Second, this promised one is also royalty; He is of the Davidic line, the fulfillment of the promises to David (2 Samuel 7:12–16). The deliverer—the Christ, the Messiah—is a king! Third, He is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3) that through His seed, meaning the Messiah, redemption will come (Galatians 3:13–14, 16).

Wow! Think of this. Jesus is the Messiah and His first title became part of His name, Jesus Christ. Further, Jesus is the king; He rules with majesty and glory over His church, and He has brought untold blessings to us. He is the Christ, the true son of David, and the true son of Abraham!

This is what the Advent season is about for those of us who have experienced the significance of these titles in our lives. He is the promised one, the deliverer incarnate; He is the king, the sovereign who rules over us; and He has blessed us with innumerable blessings!



DR. JOHN D. HANNAH

*Distinguished Professor of Historical Theology
Research Professor of Theological Studies*

DECEMBER 2

“...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, NIV —

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 of Moses's life.

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*



"And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel."

— MATTHEW 2:6, NASB —

A MINOR PROPHET WITH A MAJOR MESSAGE

Imbedded in the memory of many of us who regularly celebrate Christmas is Matthew's quotation of Micah 5:2. "AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL" (Matthew 2:6). What is forgotten by most is the fact that there is a second half of the verse from Micah 5:2 that was not quoted by Matthew but would have been in the minds of most Jews familiar with this minor prophet who made such a major prophecy. The second half of the verse, in fact, is what makes the first half so significant.

The second half reads: "His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." Jesus did not begin with His birth in Bethlehem. While His earthly life began by means of the Incarnation in Bethlehem, Jesus was the eternal Son of God who existed from all eternity. As the God-Man Jesus alone can fulfill the prophetic expectation. Only an eternal being could ever be an eternal king over an eternal kingdom as the Bible predicts will be the case. Only an absolutely righteous One could reign in righteousness, justice, and peace as both Savior and Judge. Only Jesus could fulfill the prophetic expectations to be both the Son of David and the Son of God.

Micah continues in that same chapter to state, "And He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. And they will remain, because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth." Micah 5:2–4 is a directly messianic prophecy that the future King who would be born in Bethlehem and will ultimately reign as King in Jerusalem was none other than Jesus—the Son of God who became the Son of Man.



DR. MARK BAILEY

Chancellor

Senior Professor of Bible Exposition

DECEMBER 4

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

— ISAIAH 9:6, NIV —

PRINCE OF PEACE

Have you been singing “peace on earth, good will to men” but your life has been anything but? Christmas can feel like a race, making you wonder which will give out first—your wallet or your feet. It’s supposed to be the season of brotherly love, but it feels more like the season of “brotherly shove.”

For many of us, December days are jam-packed with rushing to find a place to park or locating that last-minute gift in a busy store full of irritable sales folk. Are you experiencing a season of peace or a season of push? Here’s the test: Is the day you really look forward to the day after Christmas?

Don’t miss Christmas this year. Don’t rush around decorating, buying, wrapping, cooking, and wishing for more hours in the day. You can choose a simpler Christmas. How? Make a to-do list and mark off anything that sidetracks you from the real meaning of Christmas. If it makes you cranky, it’s got to go. Stop worrying about impressing people, and give yourself time to pray, sing, sit, breathe, rest, laugh, ponder, and enjoy whatever makes Christmas about Christ.

Remember the first Christmas. The Prince of Peace was born in a place of utter poverty far from home. There were no lights or fancy candles. There were no colorfully wrapped boxes of new baby clothes or the latest gadgets to make life easier. You see, the most precious gift you can receive can’t be ordered from an online website or found in your local mall. It’s an inner peace from the Prince of Peace—peace with God, peace with others, and peace with oneself. Therefore, I urge you this December: replace the push with peace to make this the best Christmas ever.



DR. SUE EDWARDS

*Professor Emeritus of Educational Ministries
and Leadership*



*"To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,
who is the Messiah, the Lord."*

— LUKE 2:11, NRSV —

THE SUPERIOR SAVIOR

A savior rescues another from a difficult situation. The Roman world had a savior who delivered it from decades of civil war—namely, Caesar Augustus. Luke mentions Augustus (Luke 2:1) but does not call him savior; rather, Luke reserves this title for the infant Jesus. This claim for Jesus is a challenge to the savior of that time. Jesus is the superior Savior.

First, Rome's prosperity was limited. Many were left on the margins or outside. Life for shepherds changed little and remained hard. But **Jesus is a universal savior**. The Greek word translated "to you" enjoys a slight emphatic position. God's salvation leaves no one out. Even humble shepherds are included. It is "to you" whom Jesus has come to save.

Second, the peace of Augustus was temporary. Over the years the Roman Empire disintegrated, leaving only ruins to testify to a lost glory. **Jesus is an everlasting savior**. The work of Christ does not rust, crumble, or pass away. It is forever.

Finally, physical peace is important, but it alone cannot satisfy the souls of humankind, which long for peace with their Creator. **Jesus is a satisfying savior**. Humanity is in a hopeless state of separation from God. Our souls long for eternal peace. It is only through Jesus that this can happen. Augustus's main shortcoming was not the insufficiency of his deeds. He had no capability to do what is ultimately needed. He, like us, needed a savior. Thanks be to God that we have a Savior who can fully accomplish our salvation.

During this Christmas season, let us give thanks to God for sending us the gift of a universal, everlasting, and satisfying Savior who can restore humanity's relationship with its Creator and provide real peace.



DR. JOSEPH D. FANTIN

Professor of New Testament Studies

DECEMBER 6

“For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?”

— LUKE 14:28, NASB —

CALCULATE THE COST

All who were in any way connected with the Advent of the Messiah into this world paid an enormous price. Consider the following:

Mary. It could not have escaped Mary that submitting to God’s will would result in the betrothal arrangement with Joseph being terminated, being ostracized from her community, and possibly her death. Yet she responded, “May it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Costly.

Joseph. Based on an explanation for which there was no precedent that Mary’s child would be conceived by the Holy Spirit, Joseph “did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife” (Matthew 1:24). Costly.

The Shepherds. Owners had entrusted their flocks to the care of the shepherds who would be held accountable if any sheep were stolen or killed. But after hearing the angelic announcement “today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11), at personal risk “they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby” (2:16). Costly.

The Magi from the East. These magi were advisors to the king and would have been his diplomats in bringing tribute to the One born King of the Jews. Their journey necessitated a large retinue of servants, a long time of preparation, a long journey, and months of travel. This was occasioned by the revelation of the birth of the King of the Jews. Costly.

Simeon. He had been given the promise that he would not die until he had first seen the “Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:26). Seeing Jesus he exclaimed, “My eyes have seen Your salvation” (2:30). To await the fulfillment of this promised expectation required much perseverance. Costly.

Anna. As an 86-year-old widow she had fasted and prayed about the Redeemer. Her long wait demanded much patience. Costly.

Although what was asked of each was costly, each one received the same reward. Each one saw JESUS.



DR. J. DWIGHT PENTECOST
(1915–2014)



Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this for certain?"

— LUKE 1:18, NASB —

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

— LUKE 1:34, NASB —

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND?

In the months prior to the first Christmas night, the angel Gabriel visited two people and announced the same message of a miraculous birth. He declared to a priest named Zacharias that his aged wife, Elizabeth, would soon bear a son. Six months later, Gabriel surprised a young virgin girl, Mary, and announced that she had been chosen as the mother of the long-awaited Messiah.

Both Zacharias and Mary expressed great fear at the amazing news. The angel declared to each of them, "Do not be afraid." The soon-to-be parents responded in very different ways. Zacharias did not believe the angel's words, and his unbelief resulted in his inability to speak for the next nine months. In contrast, Mary expressed belief, yet wondered how such a miracle could occur in the womb of a virgin. As the angel explained the divine conception and proclaimed, "For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37), Mary willingly yielded to God's plan and responded with a song of praise for the gift of God's favor.

The choice remains the same today for men and women who enter the Christmas season each year. As God reveals His plan to you, will you respond in belief or unbelief? Will you willingly receive His plan or stubbornly refuse to accept it? Will you question His call on your life or humbly trust Him with an attitude of thanksgiving no matter what the path ahead may hold?

Zacharias's voice remained silent while Mary proclaimed praises to God. Each experienced the consequences of their choices. This Christmas consider what God might announce to you and prepare your heart to believe His words and willingly follow Him. He wants to bless you, no matter how difficult the path may be, and give you reason to rejoice.



DR. JOYE BAKER

*Adjunct Professor of Educational Ministries and Leadership,
Doctor of Ministries Studies,
and Doctor of Educational Ministry Studies*

DECEMBER 8

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.”

— LUKE 1:68–69, ESV —

POWERFUL BABY!

When you think of “baby,” a synonym or an adjective that accompanies it is rarely, if ever, “powerful”! Yet, that is precisely what Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, uses to describe Jesus who would be born in three months.

The exact Greek words he uses are normally translated “horn of salvation.” The term “horn,” referring to the pointed projection on the head that an animal uses to attack and defend, is used as a figure of speech in the Old Testament to signify power and authority (1 Samuel 2:10; Psalm 75:4–5; 92:10). This power would be used to bring salvation. It is an unusual expression to use of a baby soon to be born to Mary, but it is an absolutely true one since the coming Messiah would be powerful in word and in deed.

In 2 Samuel 22:3, David describes God Himself as his rock, his shield, and “the horn of my salvation” (see also Psalm 18:2). Yet Jesus could be accurately described as “the horn of salvation” since He would be a man exhibiting the power of God, being in reality divine—the God-Man.

However, in the New Testament, there is just a single occurrence of this term. It is found as part of the “Christmas story” when Zechariah, before he speaks of his own son, describes the Messiah for whom his son will be the forerunner.

Apparently, as the old priest looked at his newborn son, John (who would one day go preaching and baptizing, preparing the way for the Messiah), he saw by faith the Messiah who would come and so declared Him to be the “horn of salvation,” the Powerful One. He would be powerful in His healing. He would be powerful in His forgiveness. He would be powerful in delivering and defending His own from the power of evil.

So this Christmas, as you think of the sweet, helpless-looking babe in the manger, remember too that this babe is the Powerful Savior who can save, protect, and defend those who are His own.



DR. STEPHEN J. BRAMER

Chair and Senior Professor of Bible Exposition



"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 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; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

— LUKE 1:31–33, NASB —

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF GABRIEL

Gabriel, a super-soldier in the warfare against Satan, made an announcement that turned the world upside down. This archangel, a "prince of God," was chosen to be the courier of a three-part announcement. First, Mary would have a son in fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, "a virgin will be with child and bear a son." Second, Gabriel announced Jesus's greatness. And third, Gabriel announced Jesus's eternal reign described in Isaiah 9:6–7: "For a Child will be born to us... the government will rest on His shoulders.... There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace ... justice and righteousness ... forevermore."

What does Gabriel's announcement mean to us this Christmas? **First**, God does the impossible. Nothing we are experiencing or facing is out of the realm of possibility for the Lord. His announcements are supernatural. Embrace them. They are divine, not dependent on natural processes. **Second**, for our Savior, Jesus, to redeem us, the unthinkable took place... God became man. Satan turned every part of his degraded mind and kingdom toward destruction of this child (Revelation 12:1–7). He failed! Soon, Christ will administer the ultimate blow to the evil one (Revelation 19–20). Jesus wins! **Third**, as surely as Jesus was born, He will return to establish His perfect government with justice and righteousness. His kingdom, unlike human kingdoms, "will have no end." This, too, is the message of Christmas.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

John Newton, "Amazing Grace"



DR. LARRY J. WATERS
(1946–2018)



*“...the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.
And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”*

— LUKE 2:35, NIV —

MARY, 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).

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



*“Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife,
because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.
She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,
because he will save his people from their sins.”*

— MATTHEW 1:20–21, NIV —

QUIET HERO OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

When I stepped outside, the wind bit into my layers of high-tech clothes to let me know that winter was dominating the season. My initial shivering was out of respect. I pulled down my hat, cinched up my coat, and thrust my already-gloved hands deep into my pockets. Then, I turned west and started my brisk morning walk.

A striking nativity scene on a snow-covered lawn caught my eye. A manger cradled the baby Jesus. Mary was showering her motherly love over the newborn. Shepherds were watching.

What made me smile was the figure on the perimeter of this historic gathering. As quiet as he was in the biblical account, Joseph is observing the scene. But he is a hero that makes the Christmas story come to life.

As a very young man, poor by any economic standards, his greatest joy in life was to be pledged to Mary as her husband. According to the customs of his culture, they would be apart for a year. This would be the unequivocal proof of the purity of the bride.

Then came the devastating news. Sometime before the betrothal year was completed, Mary was found to be with child. Joseph was devastated.

Joseph was in agony. He decided to divorce Mary quietly. Then, the angel of the Lord commanded him in a dream to take Mary as his wife without fear: “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20–21).

The virgin birth was key to the Christmas prophecy (Isaiah 7:14). Joseph, a righteous man, was able to witness this miracle by being obedient to the angel's command. He is a hero of the prophetic virgin birth.



DR. BRUCE W. FONG
(1952–2022)



*“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity.”*

— MICAH 5:2, NASB —

O SMALL AND INSIGNIFICANT TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

Like me, do you remember fully inspecting your still-wrapped Christmas gifts for size, shape, mass, and volume? As a child, I used to think, “The larger the gift, the better,” and, “The larger the gift, the more valuable.” Over the years I have learned that this is not always accurate; many great things often come in small packages. This is also true of our eternal King, Jesus.

Notice how God’s majesty and reputation are not diminished or compromised at all by introducing Jesus into the world through such seemingly small and insignificant circumstances. In fact, it is in these small settings that we see more clearly God’s beautiful character of love and peace for us. Unlike humankind, God is never tempted to be a showy braggart. Even in the birth of the eternal King Jesus, He has allowed Himself to be approachable by all, especially the lowly and small.

Smallness and insignificance can never threaten true greatness.

This Christmas, I encourage you to enjoy and embrace all the small things this season brings: carolers, the smell of gingerbread baking in the oven, a crackling fireplace, the first snowflake, a reading of the Christmas story. And as you encounter many unsuspecting small things or small moments, I pray you will find them as a wonderful opportunity to worship and reflect upon the eternal King, Jesus Christ—the One from little Bethlehem.



DR. CHARLES W. DICKENS

Chair and Professor of Counseling Ministries

DECEMBER 13

*Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth...
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; Let the sea roar,
and all it contains; Let the field exult, and all that is in it. Then all the trees
of the forest will sing for joy before the LORD, for He is coming.*

— PSALM 96:1, 11–13, NASB —

A NEW SONG FOR CHRISTMAS

Gabriel has been summoned to the throne of God. He approaches the Son and bows. “Now, Lord?” he asks.

“Go,” He says, and the bright angel leaves in a flash of light.

The Lord rises from His throne and sets out on a long journey. He enters time and space, on His way to a faded blue speck of a planet hanging on the outer web of a galaxy He sang into being long ago. He passes constellations, and He hears their singing. But there is a sadness, a dying in the old starsong. “Is it time, Lord?”

“Soon.”

Descending, He walks on the river Euphrates—the wind a spiraling chaos above demon-haunted depths, where rebel angels rattle ancient chains.

He whispers, “Hush”—the waters calm. The waves, kissing His feet with their tears, ask, “Now, Lord? Now? Now, Lord?”

“Patience.”

He approaches the ruined portal of Eden, and enters in. He sits beneath a tree and scoops the earth into His palm. All the living things sigh with memory and groan with a longing for the last Adam to make them new again. They join the muted chorus of all creation, murmuring, “Lord...”

“Shh...”

He turns to the wilderness, feels burning sand beneath His feet.

Then, a shifting silhouette rises from the dust, buzzing, prattling. “Even now, you can avoid the pain. Of birth. Of death. Bow—”

The Son exhales—the Shadow retreats into the crags, and drifts away like chaff on the wind.

The Lord turns to a small, lighted home. To a young girl.

Gabriel is leaving. “She knows,” he says.

The Lord nods. “Now.”

The Son takes on flesh.

And the girl sings.

A new song.



DR. REG GRANT

Adjunct Faculty in Media Arts and Worship

DECEMBER 14

*Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says,
"Sacrifice and offering You have not desired,
But a body You have prepared for Me;
In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin
You have taken no pleasure.
Then I said, 'Behold, I have come
(In the scroll of the book it is written of Me)
To do Your will, O God.'"
— HEBREWS 10:5–7, NASB —*

THE LAST WORDS OF CHRIST IN HEAVEN

It is pure speculation to assert these were the last words of Christ before He became a baby in the womb of Mary. But they may have been! In Psalm 40:6–7, which the writer of Hebrews quotes here, David shows profound theological insight into the heart of God. He recognized that God was not satisfied with rituals and religious exercises like sacrifices and meal offerings; what God desires is a life that is completely dedicated to obey and serve Him. David knew that it was his personal responsibility to submit totally to God.

As David's greater son the Lord Jesus ultimately fulfilled this model. God's will was fully accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ when He took on human form and completely obeyed the Lord's good pleasure, finally to die on the cross and to be resurrected.

The writer to the Hebrews adds that the Old Testament sacrificial system was replaced by Christ's offering of Himself once for all (Hebrews 10:10). The Old Testament sacrifices for sins no longer were necessary. A better system has taken their place because in Christ sins are paid for in full. That is why Hebrews 10:12 says He "sat down at the right hand of God" and He is now waiting to reign (10:13). Praise God!



DR. STANLEY D. TOUSSAINT
(1928–2017)

DECEMBER 15

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 —

APPRECIATING THE PROCESS

The nativity sets that we see in homes, offices, and even on lawns during this season capture a still frame, a moment in time, but offer little to awaken our senses. I often read this passage in Luke and fail to linger in the process that brought Mary to the time when she gave birth to Jesus. We must call on our senses of taste, touch, and hearing to fully appreciate the process.

“The time came”: Those words are filled with many sights and sounds—Mary’s water breaking and her shrieks from labor pains as she tried to balance herself and stay upright, Joseph’s heart racing as he cared for his family, and finally a sigh of relief from the couple as a spot was chosen for the birth.

“She gave birth”: Mothers pause at these words, remembering the hours prior to their baby’s birth. Holding a baby is the prize for a mother’s long season of waiting and the pain of childbirth.

“Her firstborn”: Our eyes focus on Mary’s eyes as we imagine she gazed deeply into the eyes of Jesus, her firstborn. This young woman’s identity was forever changed when she became “mama.”

“She wrapped him”: Mary loved with action. Carefully she warmed and cleaned her baby. Don’t lose the humanity of Christ’s umbilical cord being cut and His first cries as oxygen entered and left His lungs. Don’t overlook the moment when Mary would have felt the beating heart of the Son of God.

What I sometimes miss when I read the Nativity story is that this young couple did not know the story the way I do. When I read the Nativity story with Calvary in mind, with Christ’s return in mind, I can miss the humanity of the story. I miss the messiness that is childbirth, the anxiety of being a new parent, the soft touch of an infant’s skin. But this mess reminds me that Christ, the Son of God, humbled Himself and became fully man, while still being fully God. He entered the mess because He loves us more than comfort. This Christmas, remember that Jesus came right into the midst of our mess when He came as an infant, and He remains with us in our mess because He is a God who comes near.



DR. ANDI THACKER

Associate Professor of Counseling Ministries



He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, for all things in heaven and on earth were created in him... all things were created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and all things are held together in him.

— COLOSSIANS 1:15–17, NET —

THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

Of all the wonders and mysteries of the Christmas story, none exceeds this: the child born and laid in a manger was the creator of heaven and earth. He was not only the One who spoke all creation into existence, but His powerful word continues to sustain it. Apart from Him there is nothing. Apart from His continual work of preservation, there would be nothing.

In Jesus, the creator became a creature. The transcendent fully divine One became immanent in the created order as full humanity. The One who is the source of all created things submitted Himself to His creation and became a human, a helpless and dependent infant. The creator of Mary submitted to her. The creator of the raw materials of the manger rested on the result of human craftsmanship. As He grew and developed, He would learn to eat, talk, walk, read, and everything else He would need to know to live as a human. The One in whom all things are held together became dependent on His creation for His needs to be met. He submitted to these creatures in order to grow up to die for them and to be raised from the dead to bring life into a world that is decaying and dying because of these creatures' sin.

He is the image of the invisible God—in order to become visible He must condescend to submit Himself to His creation. He must take on the limitations of creation itself. In so doing, He reveals to us a God who so wants to be known by His creation that He humbles Himself to make Himself visible. In this manner, He reveals humility to be an attribute of deity.



DR. GLENN R. KREIDER

*Professor of Theological Studies
Editor in Chief, Bibliotheca Sacra*



"This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

— LUKE 2:12, NIV —

WHERE TO FIND JESUS

Without ever being told, "Go find the baby Jesus," the shepherds just *knew* they had to find Him. In their minds there could be little doubt that they must locate this newborn Messiah. But where? How would they find a tiny baby in the hustle and bustle of overcrowded Bethlehem?

Would He be found in a palace, being admired by kings, governors, and princes? Or maybe they would find Him in a synagogue, attended by priests, prophets, and even angels. How would they find the baby?

The answer was so surprising! After being startled by the voice of an angel and struck by the glory of the Lord, these shepherds heard that the glorious Messiah would be wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger! The shepherds could not have expected to find their Savior sheltered in a barn and lying in a feeding trough for animals. Yet in just such a humble place they would find Jesus.

This year our Christmas lights and glorious anthems will again arrest our attention as the angelic voices did for the shepherds so long ago. We expect to find Jesus in the bright lights of the Christmas trees and in the pageantry of our celebrations.

Yet we will find Jesus not in these fireworks, but in humble acts of service and in times of quiet meditation. We find Him in the pages of our Bibles and in the folds of our heart. We find Him on our knees and in giving to a needy person who cannot give back to us. He is found, most surprisingly, in the humblest of places. Seek Him there!



DR. VICTOR D. ANDERSON

Director of PhD Studies

Interim Chair and Professor of Pastoral Ministries



The star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was.

— MATTHEW 2:9, NASB —

THE CHRISTMAS STAR

What was the star that led the wise men to Jesus? Since Matthew didn't say, Christians have speculated. Some believe it was one particular star that God illuminated in a unique way. Others believe the Christmas star was what we now refer to as a planet or perhaps a conjunction of two or more planets. Perhaps it was a special light that God created for this special purpose, or it may have been a manifestation of the presence of God Himself—the Shekinah. Another possibility is that it was an angel (compare Job 38:7).

The Greek word *angelos* (“angel”) means “messenger.” Certainly the Christmas star was a messenger from God that led the wise men to Jesus, regardless of whether or not the star was an angel. And because of this, we can identify with the Christmas star.

Every Christian has come to Jesus because of a messenger whom God sent to provide guidance. In my case, it was a gentleman named Mr. Mount who filled the pulpit in my home church as a visiting preacher one Sunday and, in his message, pointed me to Jesus. Who, like the Christmas star, captured your attention and led you to Jesus?

Having found the Babe of Bethlehem to be the King of kings, we have the privilege of playing the role of the Christmas star to others. We, too, can capture the attention of those whom God has called to “come worship the King.” We, too, should stand over where the Christ Child is so that others can find Him. We can be true angels, messengers from God, to those who presently sit in darkness. May we, whom God has called to be lights in the world, be Christmas stars to many who are seeking Jesus this holiday season.



DR. THOMAS L. CONSTABLE

Senior Professor Emeritus of Bible Exposition



I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart.

— PSALM 138:1, ESV —

ANSWERED PRAYER: EXUBERANT PRAISE

When David gave thanks, he used everything in him: “I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart” (Psalm 138:1). David’s life exemplified exuberant praise and worship of the Lord. Psalm 138 gives us a glimpse into why David was so exuberant about the Lord. He excitedly praised God because “On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased” (138:3). David’s fellowship with God was so intimate, God knew that the moment He answered David’s prayer, David would give Him praise.

The first Christmas was a time of many answered prayers. Just imagine how many people—Simeon, Zechariah, Anna, Elizabeth, Mary, and countless others—had prayed for the coming of the Messiah, saying “next year in Jerusalem,” “maybe this year will be the year?” Now their prayers were answered.

And, just like David in Psalm 138, they gave exuberant praise to God. It was almost beyond description as Mary recited her Magnificat (Luke 1:46–56), Zechariah prophesied (1:67–79), Simeon gave his praise (2:29–32), and the very angels cried out saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (2:14). Not only was God faithful but, imagine, “God was pleased!” The people had been praying for this very event for thousands of years. Wonder, amazement, and awe are words that cannot fully express the coming of the Messiah. But if we didn’t try to use words to describe it, the very rocks would cry out (19:40).

This Christmas, what answers to prayer have you had that lead you to praise God with exuberance the way David did in Psalm 138? Not only did God keep His word in the first coming, but He is coming again to take us to heaven where there will be no more tears, pain, sickness, cancer, or depression, and we will see our loved ones again. To quote a hymn from the past, “When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be. When we all see Jesus, we’ll sing and shout the victory.”



DR. RODNEY H. ORR

*Dean of DTS-DC, Professor of Missiology
and Intercultural Ministries*



The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

— 1 JOHN 3:8, NIV —

A STARTLING REASON FOR THE SEASON!

First John 3:8 doesn't sound like a verse for a Christmas meditation! There's no Christmas carol I know that exalts destroying the devil's work as a key contribution of Jesus's Incarnation, but this is a liberating and wonderful fact for those who have been living in darkness. Paul tells the Colossians that through the Father's intervention, they have been rescued from the kingdom of darkness and brought "into the kingdom of the Son He loves" (Colossians 1:12–13). Unsaved people in Jesus's time and today are living in darkness, a darkness that is not simply human ignorance or their own failure to respond to God's grace and the gospel, but rather a darkness that epitomizes Satan's control. As John also says: "The whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19).

Jesus, the Son of God, was manifest to rescue all who would believe in Him from the control of Satan and from their own sin. He did this by destroying Satan's principal strength, and that apparently was his ability to destroy people by blinding their eyes so that they would not see or understand the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4). But Jesus, the Son of God and Light of the World, *did* appear and provides deliverance by His life and death on the cross for the sins of the world. Jesus commissioned His disciples to take that Good News to the whole world. So perhaps we can count the Christmas carol "O Holy Night" as one that *does* carry the thought of our key verse.

*Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.*

Yes, it's true and wonderful! This is the reason the Son of God appeared: to destroy the devil's work!



DR. MICHAEL POCOCK

Senior Professor Emeritus

of World Missions and Intercultural Studies



"This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

— LUKE 2:12, NASB —

A SIGN

Steve Brown tells a story about the ugliest car he had ever seen. It had a large gash down one side; one of the doors was barely hanging on with bailing wire; large patches of metal were rusted out. The muffler was dangling down to street level. The car had been painted over so many times with so many colors it was impossible to tell the original color. But the most fascinating thing about the car was the bumper sticker. It read *"This is not an abandoned car."*

We live in a rusty world. It can be ugly and depressing. Hurt and heartache abound. A new shot of paint here and there can make things look brighter temporarily, but the daily Niagara of bad news jolts us back to reality. On top of that, our own personal sorrows and sin can sometimes leave us feeling guilty, isolated, and fearful. At times we can wonder if God really cares. But a long time ago, a baby was born and laid in a manger. He was born for us. He was a sign to us. His sign read *"This is not an abandoned world."*

When God visited our planet in human flesh, He gave us the assurance that He had not abandoned us or our world. What the angel said to the shepherds is the same thing God is saying to us today—a Savior has come. Even though we're often shocked and saddened by events in our world or our own lives, we can know that He has not abandoned us. God cares, and God is in control. You have not been deserted or forsaken. The best news is that someday Jesus will come again, and all the ugliness of sin will be removed forever. He will make all things new. His coming again will be His final sign to us that *"This is not an abandoned world."*



DR. MARK HITCHCOCK

Research Professor of Bible Exposition



“And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.... I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”

— JOHN 10:4, 14–15, NKJV —

JESUS, OUR GOOD SHEPHERD

Growing up on a small farm in rural Canada, I recall watching my grandfather tend to the growing flock of sheep that was closely huddled together in the six-generation-old barn for winter.

There was tenderness and warmth in his calloused hands that radiated nothing less than an abiding love. Each day he would feed his sheep grain and hay. He doctored the sick with penicillin. He often woke up in the early hours to ensure a safe delivery of a newborn lamb. If the pipes that lined the sheep’s manger froze during a bone-chilling snowstorm, he would be the first to hand-deliver a kettle of hot water, pouring it along the rubbery, iced pipes.

All of us who worked alongside Grandpa knew of his love for the flock. But it was those simple sheep that knew his love most.

“Come Nannie! Come Nannie!” Grandpa would call in a firm but gentle tone. The sheep were never startled or panicked by his beckon. They yearned for his voice of loving leadership. They followed him as he would feed and lead them each day.

How could they not trust such a good shepherd?

It brings comfort to know that, like my grandfather, Jesus is a good shepherd. He knows us by name.

Our Good Shepherd laid down His life for us—humbled Himself as a babe in a manger and though innocent, died on a cross for our sin.

Whatever you are facing today, will you trust Jesus, the Messiah, as your Good Shepherd?



DR. D. SCOTT BARFOOT

Director of Doctor of Ministry Studies

DECEMBER 23

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

— GALATIANS 4:4–6, NASB —

FAMILY

At its best, Christmas is a celebration full of family gatherings and giving. Because of our obligations, the Burnses rarely assembled from distant places to express our mutual love. However, Christmastime was "required attendance" for everyone. My father reminded us constantly of how wonderful those memories were.

In the "fullness of time," the Father so loved the world that He sent His Son to gather His family of believers in the Spirit. Galatians tells us that our faith in the incarnate Son gives us the highest privilege of membership in His family with an intimate "Abba, Father" relationship and shared inheritance (Galatians 4:6; see also Romans 8:14–17). The Son was sent from the Father as a coequal and coeternal member of the Trinity. He was "born of a woman," the fully human "seed" of God's promise to overcome sin and its curse (Genesis 3:15; Galatians 3:13, 19). The promise continued through the chosen offspring of Abraham, the "man of faith" (Galatians 3:10, 16). And the Son was born "under the Law," which had been a tutor and guardian that pointed to Him as the One who would redeem us from the curse by becoming a curse in our place (Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 2:16–17). Before the Son's incarnation, Old Testament believers were in "slavery" under the care of God's Word as they anticipated their Messiah. In the fullness of history, the Father placed His most precious gift in a human womb. The Father decreed the coming of His Son, so that by faith we can be adopted into His family, becoming full members of the family and its inheritance, and indwelt by the "DNA" of His Spirit.

Christmas celebrates the greatest gift ever given to believers, so our joyous family celebrations should remind us of joy in God's family. We as children should unceasingly praise our Father for His graciousness to us. "Joy to the world," we annually sing, "for the Lord is come ... let every heart prepare Him room."



DR. J. LANIER BURNS

*Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology
Research Professor Emeritus of Theological Studies*



Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

— HEBREWS 13:8, NASB —

UNFAMILIAR TRADITIONS, UNCHANGING TRUTH

In December of 1993, I visited Germany for the first time, stepping from my comfortable American surroundings into an unfamiliar European culture. During the Christmas season, the already charming country of Germany transforms into an enchanting wonderland. I had never experienced such magical sights, sounds, and scents as I did in that strange new world.

Or maybe I should say *strange old world*, because the German Christmas traditions I regarded as “new” went back centuries: real candles burning on real trees, vibrant Christmas markets peddling candied almonds and sugared stollen, a chorus of trumpets echoing through the vale, and a real goose for Christmas dinner. My German friends thought these traditions were normal. I thought they were strange. How could I enjoy Christmas without Charlie Brown, Frosty, and Rudolph? Where was Santa Claus with his flying sleigh? What about the inflatable snowmen, plastic nativities, and Christmas lights dancing to “Jingle Bell Rock”? *Germany was doing Christmas completely wrong, and they didn’t even know it!*

But on Christmas Eve, when I stepped out of the bustling market into a dimly lit church that had stood in that same place for six hundred years, my disorientation dissolved like melting snow. We sang “Silent Night” in its original German. The pastor read the real Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke. And I heard, loudly and clearly, the unchanging truth of the Incarnation—when God the Son stepped out of the comfort of His heavenly home into our own strange, old world. For that hour, gone were the tinny twangs of unfamiliar carols, the sweet scent of spiced wine, and the light of candles flickering through frosted windows.

There was Jesus—God in the flesh—the Savior from another world who had come to save ours. Though the montage of Christmas traditions may change from country to country and from age to age, the story of the Savior remains the same “yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).



DR. MICHAEL J. SVIGEL

Chair and Professor of Theological Studies



*“And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins.”*

— MATTHEW 1:21, NLT —

THE THRILL OF HOPE

My mind and heart can't shake the oft-sung carol of Christmas, “O Holy Night.” Here's my favorite stanza...

*O holy night, the stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth;
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.**

What strikes me most about that stanza is the phrase, “the weary world rejoices.” If anything is true, we live in a weary world—weary of conflict, weary of war, weary of turmoil, and weary of the brokenness that humans experience.

In our centennial year at Dallas Theological Seminary, we have highlighted our thankfulness for God's faithfulness in the past, our gratitude for His provision today, and our hope for a bright and fruitful future. That hope flows directly from the unlimited fountainhead of grace poured out on the world at Christ's birth.

The Bible reminds us that no one escapes the penalty of sin's condemnation, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Yet, the message of Christ is a message of hope—a hope that Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, came to set us free from sin. That message of hope fuels everything we do at DTS. The message of Christmas rings with the hope of forgiveness.

Because of Christ's finished work of redemption on the cross, the weary world can rejoice! You and I rejoice this Christmas, alongside countless millions of believers around the world, because in Jesus our Savior, our sins have been forgiven.

Let's do as the hymn writer declares and fall on our knees in hope-filled worship of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. And join us this season in sharing this message, won't you? May a weary world rejoice anew in the hope of Christmas: Jesus!

* Excerpted from “O Holy Night.” Hymns and Carols of Christmas, edited by Douglas D. Anderson, 1996.



DR. MARK M. YARBROUGH

President

Professor of Bible Exposition

CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

The Christmas memories that follow were written in 1998 by three DTS leaders who are now with the Lord: Chaplain Bill Bryan, who served as DTS chaplain from 1985–2015; Dr. Donald K. Campbell, who served as DTS president from 1986–1994; and Dr. John F. Walvoord, who served as DTS president from 1952–1986. These brief remembrances are a glimpse of the Christmas memories of these much-admired men who were pillars on the DTS campus.

A BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR JESUS

The thought of Christmas surfaces many nostalgic feelings for me. From the time of the birth of our oldest son in 1964, two years after I graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary, my wife Shirley and I started a family tradition called “A Birthday Party for Jesus.”

This became a Christmas Eve celebration in our home involving the singing of carols, a reading of the Luke 2 Christmas narrative, followed by the serving of a specially baked cake decorated in traditional Christmas colors stating, “Happy Birthday, Dear Jesus.”

We would gather together around the cake and sing, “Happy Birthday, Dear Jesus,” and then serve cake to each person along with a special ice cream sundae made of a dip of vanilla ice cream covered with crème de menthe syrup and topped with chocolate chips.

As our family grew to two and then three sons, we developed variations in this celebration by having our boys perform a drama of the Christmas story (when they were young of course). Now we enjoy having our grandchildren participate in the celebration. The size of the group has expanded significantly from our original three to about thirty, including extended family and selected friends.

As our boys were growing up, we would select four or five elderly members of our church who were shut-ins and go to their homes to sing carols for them and deliver specially baked cookies. We did this until all of our sons left the nest.

What a blessing it has been to see our sons, all of whom are married, and two of whom have children, desire to carry out these traditions in their own families. As we approach another Christmas season, I’m looking forward not only to our traditional Christmas tree, but also another “Birthday Party for Jesus.”



CHAPLAIN G. WILLIAM BRYAN
(1936–2018)

JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING

Although I have celebrated over seventy Christmases, my memory recalls the events of a much smaller number. Each is a lifetime present to be opened time and time again. Of these, I remember:

A depression-era Christmas when my four siblings and I each opened our one gift with gratitude...

A wintery Christmas at age 12, after I had been run over by a car, when I stuck my crutch into the snow on the front porch to measure its depth...

Church Christmas programs when I wore an old bathrobe to portray a shepherd or a wise man (singing “We Three Kings of Orient Are”). I never got to play Joseph! After the program, each child received an orange and a sack of hard candy...

As a teenager staying up all night after the Christmas Eve program at church to join two other trumpeters to play Christmas carols at the homes of sick and elderly friends. (They might have preferred their unbroken sleep!)

Bea and I celebrating our first Christmas in Dallas in 1947 around a tiny tree in our mobile home in Trailerville on the Seminary campus...

Christmas gatherings at home year after year with the children and later with their families, including spouses and grandchildren. The gift exchange was always preceded by a child or grandchild reading the Christmas story from Luke 2, “For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”...

The first Christmas after Bea died found us asking, “Do they celebrate Christmas in heaven?” The family all gathered in Colorado at the home of a friend. Some skied and all agreed it was the coldest Christmas we had ever experienced...

Approaching the new millennium celebrating the birth of the Savior is still a joy with LaVonne, Bea’s widowed sister, as my wife. “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5). Now we happily and wearily roam the malls to Christmas shop for the twelve children (and spouses) and fourteen grandchildren. Our spirits are lifted as we hear the Christmas carols. My response is always one of amazement and gratitude that they are playing our music—“Joy to the world, the Lord is come!”



DR. DONALD K. CAMPBELL
(1926–2018)

AN APPLE, ORANGE, AND CANDY PRIZE

Christmas was always a happy family time, and it followed a certain routine.

The church always had a Christmas Eve program with children reciting various things. As my father was superintendent of the Sunday school, I always got a place in the front row reciting something about the meaning of the birth of Christ. After the program, each child got a bag with an apple, an orange, and some hard candy, which was considered a great prize in those days.

After the program, we would go home, and the next morning the same Christmas tree we had at the church was in our living room. I never could figure out how the transition was made so quickly. Apparently, my parents stayed up half the night.

Our Christmas trees went back to a time when they had candles, which were somewhat dangerous, and were lit once or twice the whole Christmas season. It was a great advance when we got our first string of Christmas lights. Our family circle who celebrated Christmas with me then are all in heaven, but we have happy memories.

During my years as president of the Seminary, I wrote a Christmas devotional each year and treated the birth of Christ from the standpoint of the experiences of Mary, Joseph, the innkeeper, the innkeeper's wife, the angels, and the shepherds. Each had a somewhat different experience, and they obviously understood only a portion of the truth of the tremendous event of Christ's birth.

Christmas should be understood as an exchange of gifts, God's loving gift to us of His Son and the gifts of ourselves as we surrender to the Lord in faith and obedience.



DR. JOHN F. WALVOORD
(1910-2002)

THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST

The following is an excerpt from a radio broadcast of an interview with Lewis Sperry Chafer, which was conducted by Erling C. Olsen on December 27, 1936. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer was the founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary. He served as president from 1924–1952.

MR. OLSEN: As we are still in the midst of the Christmas season, I should like to ask some questions regarding the birth of Christ. We all appreciate the student of the Scriptures that you are, so that I am quite interested as to what your reply would be to certain questions that have arisen in my mind. May I first ask regarding this subject, Dr. Chafer, from the Biblical viewpoint, how important is the birth of Christ?

DR. CHAFER: The birth of Christ, Mr. Olsen, is one of the seven major events in the history of the universe; including things future as well as things past. These events are (1) The creation of the angels; (2) The creation of all material things, including life and man upon the earth; (3) The incarnation or birth of Christ; (4) The death of Christ; (5) The resurrection of Christ; (6) The second advent of Christ, when He comes again to take up His everlasting reign on the earth; and (7) The creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

MR. OLSEN: What reason does the Bible give for Christ's incarnation?


DR. CHAFER: There are three reasons, and each of these is a very great subject in itself. (1) He came to manifest God to men. Looking at Christ, we know what God is like. Every act of mercy and goodness, even His sacrificial death, discloses the loving heart of God for men. (2) He came also to fulfill the great prophecies that One would sit on David's throne and rule over the earth forever. Each of the two greatest passages of Scripture bearing on the incarnation declares that He came thus into the world that He might fulfill the promises of God regarding a world-Ruler. But (3) He came into this human family that He might be our Kinsman-Redeemer. As a type of redemption, the Old Testament declared that when a family in Israel had lost their estate, it could be purchased back by a kinsman, provided he had not suffered in the loss, was able to redeem, and willing to redeem. The Book of Ruth is the perfect picture of this redemption.

No member of our race could redeem us, for each one has suffered in the loss which sin has caused. Christ was free from sin. He was, therefore, the only One Who could redeem, but He must first become one of our human family if He serves as a Kinsman-Redeemer. This He did in the incarnation. He became a Kinsman. He was willing to redeem, and He alone could pay the price of redemption, which is the blood of the Son of God.

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DR. LEWIS SPERRY CHAFER
(1871–1952)



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JOY AND PEACE
IN BELIEVING,
SO THAT YOU WILL
ABOUND IN HOPE
BY THE
POWER OF THE
HOLY SPIRIT.

ROMANS 15:13 NASB





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