



# *Adoration*

2022 CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

## DEAR FRIENDS,

Adoration—the Christmas story is filled with it! Before Jesus was born, Mary's spirit "rejoiced" in God, her Savior. A multitude of angels expressed their adoration at His birth: "Glory to God in the highest!" The shepherds who saw the Babe in the manger glorified and praised God "for all that they had heard and seen."

Their reaction is not surprising, is it? Jesus—Son of God and Son of Man—deserves abounding worship. Adoration should overflow to the One who is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Colossians 1:15).

The DTS 2022 Christmas Devotional collection, entitled *Adoration*, reflects on Jesus—His incarnation, His saving grace, and His life-changing message. I hope you find new perspectives and rich teaching in these devotionals written by members of the DTS faculty.

*Adoration* is our gift to faithful friends of DTS, such as you. Your partnership and prayers for the Seminary encourage us not only at Christmas but every day, all year long.

During the Christmas season, may your thoughts constantly return to the One who is worthy of adoration—our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. On behalf of my family as well as the DTS family of faculty, staff, and students, I wish you a very Merry Christmas!

*Mark M. Yarbrough*

**Dr. Mark M. Yarbrough**

*President of Dallas Theological Seminary*



**The Yarbrough Family** (L to R) Joseph, Kayci, Mark & Jennifer, Kayla & Garrett Chandler, and Jacob. (Sit... Stay...) Ranger



*The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29 (NASB)*

## A Greeting for Christmas

We have a familiar greeting for Easter: "He is risen," with a response, "He is risen indeed."

Do we have an appropriate greeting for Christmas? I am not aware of one, but John the Baptist's clarion call at Bethany is a good one. When responding to Jewish leaders at Bethany, who had inquired about whether he was the Messiah (John 1:19–20), John emphatically declared: "I am not!" As Jesus approached him, John the Baptist proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29).

"Behold" is an older English translation that has been replaced by "Look!" in many contemporary versions. This older rendering was used 1,298 times in the King James Bible. It has an urgency that contemporary substitutes lack and connotes a searching gaze beyond a mere glance. For John the Baptist, the gaze was transformative. He saw and testified to Jesus's Messiahship (1:31–34) and knew that the "Lamb of God" reached into the reservoirs of biblical atonement.

In Leviticus 17:11, we read of the connection between life and blood: "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." Hebrews 9:22 emphasizes the connection, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." The principle was applied to Israel's salvation from Egypt: "The blood will be a sign for you . . . when I see the blood of the paschal lamb on your door, I will 'pass over' you and not strike down your firstborn" (see Exodus 12:12–13). So, "Christ, our Passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7) is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, accepting the Father's will for the salvation of all who believe. However, John 1:29 and 1:36 are even stronger. Jesus is not compared to a lamb (lamb-like, with the use of "as"). Jesus is literally God's Lamb: God, in human flesh, who came as a paschal sacrifice for sin.

Jesus, the greatest gift in all of history, is a reflection of God's love as the only begotten Son, and whoever believes in Him will have eternal life (see John 3:16). So, our clarion call at Christmas should be the same as the Baptist's: "Behold! God's Lamb who takes away the sin of the world." The appropriate response would be, "He is indeed!"



**Dr. J. Lanier Burns**

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



*Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. Isaiah 49:1 (ESV)*

## Called from the Womb

One of the big questions of life revolves around discovering our calling. Growing up, we were asked questions like “What do you want to be when you grow up?” or “What are your plans after you graduate?” If you had asked me as a child what I was called to be when I grew up, I would have said either a zookeeper or a tank driver. I did not end up doing either of these—even though some days I feel like I work at a zoo and some days feel like a battle. I can now see the LORD guiding my steps and calling me for His work. I can confidently say the LORD has a calling for your life too. We’re not random accidents but are called for a God-glorifying purpose.

Our passage talks about a Servant who was also called. Isaiah 49:1–13 is the second of four Servant songs in Isaiah (Isaiah 42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12). In Isaiah 40–48, it is revealed the LORD would rescue Israel from their Babylonian Exile. However, there was another (and more important) spiritual rescue Israel needed—rescue from their sins. Isaiah 49–55 paints a picture of a future Servant who would bring this salvation.

We hear from this Servant Himself in Isaiah 49 as He paints an image of His own calling. The announcement of His calling was to the entire world (“coastlands” and “peoples from afar”). And His calling was never in doubt since He was called “from the womb.” As we continue in Isaiah 49 (it is well worth reading the entire chapter), the Servant tells us He was empowered to redeem His people and to be a light to the nations.

Of course, this Servant is Jesus. As the Charles Wesley Christmas hymn proclaims:

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,  
Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us,  
Let us find our rest in Thee:  
Israel’s strength and consolation,  
Hope of all the saints Thou art;  
Dear desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart.

This Christmas, remember we are servants of this Servant and called to proclaim His glorious good news to the world.



**Dr. George Hillman**

*Vice President for Education*

*Professor of Educational Ministries & Leadership*



*“He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go as forerunner before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him.” Luke 1:16–17 (NET)*

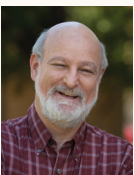
## John the Baptist’s Birth: John the Baptist Prepares the Way

John the Baptist is appropriately called the forerunner, the one who prepared the way for Jesus. But what exactly does that mean? Luke 1:16–17 tells us, and there is a little surprise in the mix. That text reads, “He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go as forerunner before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him.”

The idea that John called people back to God in preparation for the coming of Jesus is no surprise. That is what prophets do—call people back to God. The call to repent was what Elijah did when he challenged the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:16–46).

But notice John was to do something else: call fathers’ hearts back to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. His preparatory work was also reconciling, whether in families or in public space. Then the passage goes on to say this is what a people prepared for the Lord look like! They are realigned not only with God but with their neighbor, or at least they are prepared to be so. This means that our religion is not a privatized affair between an individual and God. No, that vertical relationship has a horizontal dimension that impacts how we live and act with those around us. It opens the door to reconciliation.

Another example of this can be found in Luke 3:8–14. Repentance defines and impacts how we treat others. What this shows is that Jesus’s coming was to clear a path of restoring a person’s relationship not just with God but also with others. Jesus came and died in part to make that vertical-horizontal reconciliation possible. When we say Jesus came to save the world, that is one of the ways Jesus does it and that is part of the way John the Baptist prepared for it as Jesus’s forerunner.



**Dr. Darrell L. Bock**

*Executive Director of Cultural Engagement  
Senior Research Professor of New Testament Studies*

**NOVEMBER 30**

*For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;  
And the government will rest on His shoulders;  
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.  
There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,  
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness  
From then on and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. **Isaiah 9:6-7 (NASB)***



## For unto Us a Child Is Born

Sin, injustice, and unrighteousness have reigned supreme since Adam was expelled from the Garden. These truths were revealed to Israel through the prophets. However, the people of Israel were called to be different. Israel was to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation—a kingdom in which justice and righteousness reigned according to the word of the LORD. The problem, of course, was that Israel was no different from the nations. The same sin, the same injustice, and the same unrighteousness reared its ugly head in Israel as well. Now the hope of all creation awaited the birth of the Promised One of whom Isaiah and the prophets wrote.

For some seven hundred long years after Isaiah wrote his book, a believing remnant held on to their hope that the LORD God of Israel would prove Himself faithful. Then, just according to the words of the prophets, the Promised King was born. So, again this year, we remember back to the birth of the Promised Child, descendant of David, born of a virgin, born to fulfill all of Scripture. Yet still today, sin, injustice, and unrighteousness not only abound but seem to be rewarded. Evil seems to be winning!

Oh, dear friend, do not fret. The King did not stay in His grave! The King's work is not finished! The Prince of Peace will return, and then the government will rest upon His shoulders. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace. He will reign on the throne of David and over His kingdom with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this!

So, during this special season of the year, celebrate His birth. Rejoice in His resurrection. But never forget, the Great King is coming! Even so, come LORD Jesus!



**Dr. David Klingler**

*Associate Professor of Bible Exposition*

*In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. Hebrews 1:1–2 (NIV)*



## A Superior Revelator

The author of Hebrews reminds his readers that God desired humanity to know Him. This, in and of itself, should cause us to pause and marvel. The Creator of all things wants us to know Him! And so, over the course of human history, He utilized prophets as His agents of communicating Himself. He did not do it just once, but many times! The means by which He communicated to the prophets were many—visions, dreams, audible voices, angels, a burning bush, and more. But these agents of communication were infinitely inferior to what was to come.

On Christmas, we celebrate the Incarnation—a Superior Revelator. The eternal God entered time and space. He clothed Himself with humanity and chose to take on Himself the limitations of a human body. He became a Superior Revelator and provided a Superior Revelation.

The author of Hebrews makes it clear that

- 1) the prophets were temporary—their ministries were limited to one lifetime, and when they died new prophets would be needed;
- 2) they were just humans—they did not speak as God but on behalf of God; and
- 3) the revelation that they provided was indirect—they were merely a mediator of revelation, not **the** revelation.

On the other hand,

- 1) God the Son is eternal—He has always existed and, in fact, was intimately involved in the creation of everything;
- 2) He is one with God the Father—Jesus is not just a mediator of revelation but **the** source of revelation; and
- 3) the revelation He provides is direct—He spoke not merely as a communicator of revelation but as **the** revelation.

As we celebrate Christmas, may we never forget that God wants to be known! He wants to be known so much that He not only provided general revelation (creation around us and the moral law within us), but He has revealed Himself many times, over thousands of years! But in “these last days” He has revealed Himself through the Son!

This Christmas season, may we strive to be as passionate about making Him known as He is passionate to be known!



**Dr. Paul D. Weaver**

*Associate Professor of Bible Exposition*



And Mary said:

*"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.*

*From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things  
for me—holy is his name.*

*His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.*

*He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their  
inmost thoughts.*

*He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.*

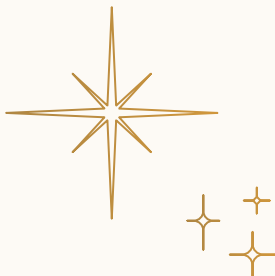
*He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.*

*He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants  
forever, just as he promised our ancestors."* **Luke 1:46-55 (NIV)**

## The Magnificat

Here we experience one of the greatest prayers in the entire canon of Scripture—Mary's "Magnificat." Whilst some writers are quick to posit Mary as the shining star and main character of this passage, this is a mistake. No doubt Mary is a special woman, called by God to mother His own Son, Christ Jesus. However, the main character of this prayer is far more likely to be God Himself. Except for the first two sentences, every sentence utilizes God as the subject. Mary's prayer is powerful indeed, but the beauty is that Mary isn't praying in response to her own needs or wants, like many of our prayers today. Rather, she is praying in response to the power and mercy of God as her creator, as king, and as ruler of the cosmos. Mary's prayer serves primarily as a reflection of God's characteristics—namely, His blessings (1:48), holiness (1:49), everlasting mercy (1:50), and power (1:51). Yet, a more subtle purpose unfolds in verses 52–53 as the prayer turns into a revolutionary proclamation—noting how God brings down powerful earthly rulers and the rich, all the while exalting poor and humble servants of heaven.

During this Advent season, I might encourage you to regularly pray through Mary's "Magnificat." This practice serves far greater a purpose than a mere Christmas devotion. As you join Mary in prayer, may you feel an invitation into God's story and consider how God's power and majesty may shift your own vision of the world at large.



**Dr. Kevin M. Gandy**

*Assistant Professor of Educational Ministries & Leadership*



*"And I give unto them eternal life..." John 10:28 (KJV)*

## The Manger, the Shepherd, the Sheep

The humble birth of our Lord hardly was suggestive of the uniqueness of the person who was placed in a manger (royalty enshrined in human flesh, the Savior of humankind). There was no heralding of trumpets, no grand parade, just the sounds of animals and the gaze of an adoring mother. Yet, that life has changed our lives forever.

John 10:22–30 explains how Jesus accomplished that. The religious leaders of that day, despite the validation of His claims through His words and miracles, repudiated Him, thinking He could not be the Promised One. The stunning confrontation at the Feast of Dedication in the Temple revealed the calloused hearts of the nation's leaders (10:24). This occasioned an explanation for John's readers as to why Jesus came among us and what He accomplished in doing so! Simply put, He came to seek "sheep" (weak, defenseless, dependent, fearful people).

Jesus described the people that He came to gather into His fold. First, they are people who know Him as their shepherd because, like sheep, they have heard His voice and have responded with obedience (10:27). Jesus knows us! Second, the reason that they have become His sheep is that He has placed in them life, eternal life (10:28). Third, the life that he has "given" is of unique quality and duration because it is a sharing in the life of the shepherd; consequently, it will never end and no earthly potentate, however powerful, can prevent God's destiny for His sheep (10:28). *This is one of several biblical passages that makes the claim that anyone who believes in Jesus for salvation will never be lost!* Fourth, everyone who believes in Jesus for salvation does so because the Father has given them to Jesus to redeem (10:29a). Fifth, the Father's actions are incapable of failure ("snatch" suggests robbery) because He is omnipotent (10:29b). His people are secure. Sixth, God's children are doubly secure because the intent and purpose of the Father and the Son are the same: unpreventable, undefeatable, and wonderfully consequential.

The baby in the manger, one born to us among sheep, has become the great Shepherd for all who believe. He has gathered a new "flock" from the nations of the world who have heard His voice and followed His leading. This is the meaning of Christmas: the true Shepherd has come!



**Dr. John D. Hannah**

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

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (NIV)*

## God Is with Us

God is with us. An amazing and almost shocking claim. The Creator of the universe, the transcendent and wholly other God, the Holy One of Israel, the pure and perfect Sovereign over all creation, condescended to become a creature, to become one of us. Many religions say that their gods come to earth and visit mortals, sometimes to bring them something they need, like fire, and sometimes to punish. The biblical story is different. The Word, the Son of God, became a creature, not just for a visit to earth, but a creature forever, without surrendering any of His deity.

God created the universe out of nothing; there was nothing except God, eternally triune, in perfect love and unity. God spoke and the universe was created. God called it “very good” (Genesis 1:31).

Tragically, the world God created didn’t remain good for long. Moses recorded the story of rebellion and disobedience in the Garden (Genesis 3). The man and woman, created to care for the world God had made, listened to the serpent, ate of the tree from which God had forbidden them to eat, and introduced sin—which brought death—into this good creation. In His judgment of these rebels, God declared that their end would be death, “for dust you are and to dust you will return” (3:19).

But the good news is that God’s plan does not end with death. God’s plan is full of life, not death; good, not evil; and light, not darkness. Throughout the Scriptures, this plan becomes clearer and clearer; the plan includes the Incarnation and the promise, “I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:5).

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He made several promises to His disciples. Among them, He promised to return: “I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:3). He promised in the meantime the presence of the Holy Spirit: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth” (14:16–17). Although we have not seen the risen Jesus, we experience His presence in the Spirit while we wait for our Savior to return. “Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).



**Dr. Glenn R. Kreider**

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

*And Joseph also went up from Galilee...to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2:4-7 (ESV)*

## Jesus, Prince of Peace

Under his rise to power in 27 BC, Caesar Augustus inaugurated the historic *Pax Romana*—a Roman order of world peace. Rome’s political influence and military might spanned from the Roman peninsula to southern Europe, the Middle East, and northern Africa for years.

During this time, the Empire—with Koine Greek as the common language and religious tolerance as a virtue—provided a secure and accessible network of roads for safe passage, commerce, and communication among its culturally diverse peoples.

However, Joseph and Mary’s lives were everything but peaceful. Betrothed to be married, Mary became unexpectedly pregnant. Joseph, feeling betrayed, planned to divorce her quietly. But an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and informed him that the conceived child was from the Holy Spirit. This baby, the promised Messiah, would become the Savior-King of the world.

The Book of Luke tells us that while Quirinius was governor of Syria, the deified Caesar Augustus summoned a census. Joseph brought Mary to register in Bethlehem, for his ancestral roots traced back to King David.

Picture this: As they arrive, Mary goes into labor. With no room in the inn, the simple stable will serve best for their newborn’s birth. Mary’s water breaks while Joseph frantically prepares a DIY crib. He cleans out the leftover wheat from the animal feeding trough, adds fresh straw, and then lines it with a cloth. Mary delivers a healthy baby boy as she cries out His name, “*Jesus!*” “And He will save His people from their sins,” Joseph whispers. “Immanuel—Our Prince of Peace!”

Jesus, this promised Messiah, would establish the Lord’s rule and reign, bringing true and lasting peace—not by force, like Caesar Augustus, but by being a humble servant.

This Christmas, let us renew our trust in the Lord, for God’s timing is perfect, He rules over even the most powerful, and His power is made perfect in weakness.



**Dr. D. Scott Barfoot**

*Director of Doctor of Ministry Studies*

*Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us.”* **Matthew 1:22-23 (NASB)**

## God Is with Us in Adversity

The path of the Christian journey is full of “highs” and “lows.” Some believers may not be aware of it and are tossed back and forth by the waves of negative thoughts and experiences in this world (Ephesians 4:14). Car wrecks, sickness of loved ones, detention, hospitalization, theft, conflict, terminal illness, and other unfortunate events may happen unexpectedly. Have you experienced these things recently? What do you look for when you face adversity? Some people may seek for physical supplies, financial aid, support groups, or just an escape by joining a cruise. Before the end of 2022, it is good for us to look at a promise precious to all believers in a time of “lows.”

The story begins with Joseph’s unexpected discovery of the pregnancy of his bride-to-be. This was such a bad piece of news for this righteous man (Matthew 1:19a). Bible scholar John A. T. Robinson wrote, “The first and most indisputable fact about the birth of Jesus is that it occurred out of wedlock.” Something miraculous must happen to turn Joseph around from privately handing Mary a divorce certificate (1:19b). What happens is a dream to explain the impossible by an angel of the Lord (1:20). Mary, an unknown virgin in an obscure village, is the chosen one to fulfill the word of Isaiah the great prophet (1:22; see Isaiah 7:14). This is an unprecedented miracle with an everlasting promise—the birth of Immanuel, which means God with us (Matthew 1:23). Jesus fulfills the prophecy literally with His physical presence in the first century and His spiritual presence in the age to come (28:20). How can it be? First, it is the will of God with the underlying work of the Holy Spirit (1:20). Second, it is the faith and obedience of Joseph and Mary (1:24; Luke 1:38).

Are you at a “low point” in your Christian journey? Do you worry about what will happen in 2023? Learn from Joseph and Mary, ordinary people who faced an extraordinary trial. Three proven ways to overcome adversity: first, be sensitive to the message from God; second, depend on the leading and working of the Holy Spirit within you; third, respond to God with faith and submission. Jesus has come and fulfills God’s promise of salvation. The promise of spiritual presence is just one step away from your faith and surrender.



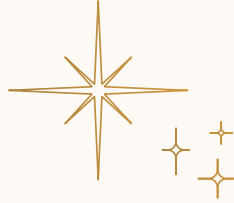
**Dr. Kam-Cheung Richard Hon**

*Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition*

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Micah 5:2 (ESV)*

## O Little Town of Bethlehem

*O little town of Bethlehem,  
how still we see thee lie!  
... yet in thy dark streets shineth  
the everlasting light.  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
are met in thee tonight.*



At the time of the birth of Christ, Bethlehem was truly “a little town.” Scholars have estimated, based on archaeological remains, that the population was probably around three hundred. The name Bethlehem means “the house of bread,” and the town is located just over five miles south of Jerusalem in the hill country of Judea in the region of Ephrathah (meaning “fruitfulness”).

In New Testament times, messianic expectations were rising during the reign of King Herod over Judea (37–4 BC). It was in the context of hearing news of a possible king’s birth from some traveling wise men that the Old Testament prophecy of Micah became extremely relevant. In response to Herod’s question of where the Christ was to be born, Matthew states that the religious leaders told King Herod, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel’” (Matthew 2:5–6).

Matthew’s use of the term “shepherd” (“who will shepherd my people Israel”), rather than the term “ruler” used in Micah, seems to allude to 2 Samuel 5:2. Interestingly, in Samuel this verse describes David’s rightful kingship over the fateful reign of Saul, and Matthew is demonstrating the rightful kingship of Jesus over Herod.

Having the birth of the Messiah occur in Bethlehem, not in Jerusalem where King Herod was reigning, demonstrates continuity with David, a shepherd from this small town (1 Samuel 16:11). It was a descendant of King David (who reigned a thousand years before Christ) who had the right and authority to be designated as King of Israel. Jesus, not Herod, is the true King of the Jews.

The coming of this King of Israel was a fulfillment of prophecy; the One born in Bethlehem would rule/shepherd the nation of Israel. This Christmas, as you sing “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” let your heart rejoice that in Bethlehem “an everlasting light” began to shine that would change your life and, in fact, the world.



**Dr. Stephen J. Bramer**

*Chair and Professor of Bible Exposition*

*And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:7 (NASB)*



## Was There Really “No Room at the Inn”?

When my daughter was in preschool, she was absolutely overjoyed to be chosen for the role of Mary in the Christmas play. She and an adorable little Joseph acted out the familiar scene of visiting several humorously named hotels (Bethlehem Inn & Suites), each of which told them they were full before the third one suggested a stable out back where Jesus, the Savior of the world, was born.

As cute as it was, would you believe that this story we know so well might not quite be the way it happened? It turns out that a minor mistranslation and cultural misunderstanding have caused us to miss something wonderful about the Christmas story.

Here’s what happened: In King James Version, the word *kataluma* was translated as “inn” in Luke 2. But this word usually means “spare room” such as the one we read about in Luke 22:11–12, when Jesus asked the disciples to reserve a “guest room” for the Last Supper. In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:34), we find the usual Greek word for a commercial inn (*pandokheion*). This means a better rendering of Luke 2:7 would be “There was no space (*topos*) left for them in the spare room (*kataluma*).” Remember, Joseph and Mary were traveling to Bethlehem for the census, and he would likely have had many relatives in the city. In their culture, it would be shameful not to host visiting family members. The only problem was that during the census, other relatives had already filled the spare room.

So, what about the manger? In the King James era, mangers belonged outside in a barn where the animals are kept. But most first-century houses in Israel had two stories, an upper floor for sleeping and a lower floor for cooking and keeping animals, including their mangers.

This means the picture Luke paints for us is not of inns and barns but of family, food, and adaptation. When the weary Mary and Joseph arrived at his relative’s house, the spare room was already filled, so they put baby Jesus right in the middle of the chaos.

Isn’t that a wonderful picture? For many of us, Christmas brings back memories of traveling across country, with kids running around, sloppy pets, amazing food, raucous laughter, and awkward sleeping arrangements—just like the first Christmas.

So this year, whether your Christmas is calm or chaotic, I hope it includes Jesus right there in the center of everything.



**Dr. John Dyer**

*Vice President for Enrollment Services & Educational Technologies  
Assistant Professor of Theological Studies*

... *being born in the likeness of men* ... **Philippians 2:7 (ESV)**

## Humble Child, Humble Church

Humility indicates lowliness in rank or status. Within God's creation, humble creatures tend to be smaller and less powerful than others—think the ant vs. the elephant, the hummingbird vs. the golden eagle, or the infant child vs. the king. As we turn to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the theme of humility runs through that central event in the Christmas story in at least three different ways.

First, the God who created all things took on human flesh. God the Son is the all-powerful and all-knowing God, and yet, in taking on human flesh, He agreed to experience the natural limitations of being human. Of course, God the Son never ceased to be that all-powerful and all-knowing God, but the mystery of the Incarnation says that God the Son took on human flesh, thereby like us in all respects, sin excepted. Jesus was the God-Man. The same man Jesus, who got tired and felt hunger, was Himself God.

Second, when God the Son took on human flesh in the Incarnation, He did so as a baby. Philippians 2:7 tells us that the Son was “born in the likeness of men.” There is no more humble human than an infant. Human babies have no ability to care for themselves, able only to cry out for help when they need to be fed, changed, or moved. Could the God over all creation have placed Himself in a more humble position?

Finally, Jesus lived His life in line with the bounds of humility. Paul tells us in Philippians 2 that Jesus took on the form of a servant or slave (2:7). This God-Man lived His life by considering Himself more lowly in rank or status than other people! He came not to be served, but to serve, even to the point of giving His life for rebellious and murderous human beings (Mark 10:45).

The mystery of the Incarnation points us to humility. Don't miss the context of these truths in Philippians: humility was not just for Jesus. We Christians, the church, are to “have this mind among yourselves” (Philippians 2:5). May Christmas remind us of the centrality of humility. May we be humble, and may our churches be humble.



**Dr. John A. Adair**

*Associate Professor of Theological Studies*

DECEMBER 10



*Now there were shepherds nearby living out in the field, keeping guard over their flock at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were absolutely terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid! Listen carefully, for I proclaim to you good news that brings great joy to all the people: Today your Savior is born in the city of David. He is Christ the Lord."*

**Luke 2:8-11 (NET)**

*When the angels left them and went back to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, that the Lord has made known to us." So they hurried off and located Mary and Joseph, and found the baby lying in a manger. **Luke 2:15-16 (NET)***

## Worth Seeking Out

How do you respond when you hear news that is unexpected? Perhaps it depends on who is sharing the news, and whether it is good or bad. The Bible tells us that the shepherds were terrified when the angel made a grand entrance out of nowhere to proclaim the good news.

Place yourself in that scene. Here we have ordinary people doing ordinary things at night. While they were together, some may have been feeling alone. Some may have seen their hopes and dreams fading into the darkness beyond their flock. Others may have been lamenting that their legacy was being a shepherd who worked 24/7 for very little pay and with few rewards.

Notice their lackluster expressions. Many of them must have been weary, apathetic, and uninspired. How blessed they were to have the Lord infuse their physical and mental darkness with the good news. For them it was a miracle that made them sit up, look up, and get up to seek the Lord.

During this busy holiday season, you may need to seek out the good news about Jesus like you never have before. The birth of Jesus is significant for deliverance from bondage so that people can be set free to experience the fullness of life. The shepherds were eager to seek out Jesus. They knew through faith that He would cause men and women to find joy, salvation, and peace. Jesus is the reason for this and every season.



**Dr. Michelle Woody**

*Associate Professor of Counseling Ministries*



*When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. Luke 2:15-17 (NLT)*

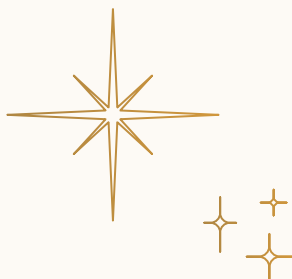
## Ordinary Shepherds and an Extraordinary Event ✨

The shepherds we read about in Luke 2 were ordinary people doing their ordinary jobs, much like David was doing when Samuel came to anoint him as king (1 Samuel 16:13). They react with terror—in much the same way we would—to the angels filling the sky. The angels know exactly how to encourage ordinary people not to be afraid. But the shepherds could not have known how their lives would be changed by a single birth in a little stable in Bethlehem.

The shepherds had seen the angels and now they hurried to see the Messiah. They became witnesses of a transformational event in history, so they "told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child" (Luke 2:17). These shepherds were not that different from most of us. Ordinary in every way, yet their lives were touched by something that happened at the first Christmas so many years ago.

I spent Christmas in Israel in 1971, and although Bethlehem was filled with pilgrims, we managed to get into the Church of the Nativity to see the stable where Jesus was born. It was not a nice place to have a baby even then, and I imagined it was much worse 2,000 years ago. It wasn't until the summer of 1974 when I told God I wanted to live like the shepherds that Christmas really made sense to me. It wasn't just about getting and giving gifts. Like the shepherds' lives were changed that night, life changed for me when the true joy of Christmas became real in my life. It hasn't always been a life of ease, but it has been a life of joy because Christ came.

This Christmas, take an assessment of how far God has brought you since you came to know Him and, like the shepherds, rejoice as you tell others of what He has done for you.



**Dr. Rodney Orr**

*Dean of DTS-DC*

*Professor of Missiology & Intercultural Ministries*

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. **Luke 2:9 (NIV; see 2:9-12)**



## Woosah!

Man, it's quiet tonight...

I've been thinkin', guys. You know what?

...until now.

I'm gonna blow this two-bit town.

And, here we go.

I'm gonna amount to somethin'.

Mm-hmm. It's a wonderful life, Hiram, just waitin' for you.

Hey, you make fun all you want. I'm a shepherd-priest, just like you guys, and I'm gonna make my mark, you just wait.

Hiram...

Leave him alone. He's young; he'll grow out of it.

No, he says this every time he comes down from the watchtower. He's up there dreaming when he should be watching the sheep. Hiram, listen. For the hundredth time, this is our job. We watch over lambs for sacrifice. That's it. You keep wantin' something bigger, something better, you're going to wind up like Jacob here...

Hey, now...

Bitter and lonely, and ugly as a one-eyed goat!

**Guys!**

Auggghh!

What th'... what is it?

Oh Lord, oh Lord, save us!

**Guys! Woosah! Listen, I've got news. Really. Good. News!**

Ok, ok, ok—just don't kill us!

**What did I just say?**

I don't know. What did he say, Caleb?

**OK, focus. I've got GOOD news! Back there. In the city of David, a Savior has been born for you! He is Christ the Lord! But this news isn't just for you, OK? It's for everybody.**

Seriously. A Savior for us? And we're supposed to tell—who?

**Once again—It's for everybody.**

Look, all due respect, but this is really out-there.

**You want proof? Go back into Bethlehem and you'll find a Baby—**

Lots of babies in Bethlehem, sir— 'specially, this time of year—thick as thieves.

**This One's no thief. Though He will take your breath away. And your heart if you let Him.**

So, it's a boy.

**Oh, He's a Son all right! OK guys—time for me to go!**

Wait, wait! How will we know we found the right one?

**You'll know because He'll be wrapped in the same type of cloths you guys use to keep your lambs spotless for sacrifice. You'll find Him lying in a cattle trough.**

OK, but...

Hey, you hear that?

Yeah, across the valley there—by the inn—a baby. That's a baby crying!

**Booyah! Heads up, boys! It's about to get loud!**



Dr. Reg Grant

Chair and Senior Professor of Media Arts & Worship

*"Today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*

**Luke 2:11 (NASB)**



## The Shepherds at Christmas

When you hear "Christmas," what word comes to mind? Jesus? Mary? Joseph? Bethlehem? Presents? I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that the word was **not** "shepherds."

On the night of Jesus's birth, the Lord sent an angel to tell shepherds the amazing news: "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

God choosing shepherds for this life-changing news was significant in several ways.

**First, in Jesus's day, the role of a shepherd was not at the top of the job-wanted list.**

A shepherd was viewed as a simple, lowly, and unlearned man.

Years ago, there was a country song entitled, "Mammas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys." In Jesus's day the song could have been, "Mammas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Shepherds." The fact that God chose shepherds to be the first to hear of Jesus's birth makes a huge statement. The baby in the manger came for all people but especially for those who are lowly and brokenhearted (4:18).

*Jesus came for us.*

**Second, the shepherds ran to the baby in the manger.**

The text says, "The shepherds began saying to one another, 'Let us go straight to Bethlehem...' They came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger" (2:15-16). The shepherds took off running. They threw down their shepherding tools, left their flock, and ran as fast as they could to find the Christ child. Upon arriving they were captivated with the child who was lying in the manger. Why? This baby was their Messiah, Savior! This baby was the Lamb of God! They knew their lives would never be the same.

*Run as fast as you can to Jesus. Become captivated with Jesus. You will never be the same!*

**Third, the shepherds couldn't keep quiet about the birth of Jesus.**

"After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child." (2:17). The first messengers to share about the birth of Jesus were shepherds. And they told everyone!

This Christmas we, too, can spread the word about the greatest Present ever: the Savior of the world.

*Just like the shepherds, we are chosen. Run to Jesus. Be captivated by Him. Tell everyone!*



**Dr. Phil Humphries**

*Associate Professor of Educational Ministries & Leadership*

*"Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people."* **Luke 2:10 (NASB)**



## The Joyless Club

Our world is well into the third decade of the third millennium. When the decade began, the world sensed new, big optimism. No one expected what happened—with speed, depth, and breadth—to pummel the entire human race.

As I write this 2022 Christmas devotional, the world still sits under a gloomy cloud: a pandemic that is threatening comebacks, a European war that could escalate, and an economy that is in the unpredictable dance between inflation and recession.

If I were to place a word on the global situation, it would be “joyless.” Our entire world belongs to the Joyless Club, filled with sadness and dismalness, dreariness, and depression. This is a joyless world.

In one of Jesus’s birth narratives, the Lord’s angel announced joy to shepherds groaning and grieving under social, economic, and political heaviness. “Do not be afraid,” the angel said, “for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people.”

“Do not be afraid” is a standard greeting in the Bible because fear and joy do not go together. Since this message arrives from heaven, it generates confidence, assurance, and enthusiasm despite the shepherds’ membership in the Joyless Club.

God’s angel brings “good news.” In the middle of bad news, sponsored news, and fake news, there is good news, true news, and real news to be heard, received, and experienced.

This good, true, and real news from heaven is filled with great joy—literally, *mega-joy*.

Joy is much more and very different from happiness. Happiness is hollow, shallow, and thin. Joy is deep, weighty, and thick. Happiness can be faked. You can fake the emotion with yourself and others. Joy, however, sends signals that you cannot fake—to yourself or to those who are watching.

Happiness is temporary. Joy can be sustained, even eternally.

Notice that this good news of great joy is to “all the people” In its historical reference, it is a joy to all the people of Israel to whom the hearers belonged. It is also a joy to the world, for later in the same book, the invitation of the good news goes in all directions of the compass (Luke 13:29), with forgiveness preached in Jesus’s name to all nations (24:45–47).

Like the angelic host, we shall sing and bring “Joy to the World” to the Joyless Club year-round and worldwide.



**Dr. Ramesh Richard**

*Professor of Global Theological Engagement & Pastoral Ministries*

*Those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look. 1 Peter 1:12 (NASB)*



## Angels' Interest in Salvation

Angels are associated with Christmas like turkey is associated with Thanksgiving. Everywhere we turn during the Christmas season we see angels...on wrapping paper, on top of Christmas trees, and certainly in nativity scenes. Is this biblical?

In Luke 2, we read that an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before the shepherds. At the very hour of Jesus's birth, this angel proclaimed the gospel to shepherds, announcing that Jesus—the Savior, the Anointed One—had been born! Furthermore, this good news of great joy is for *all* people. Truly, the fullness of time had come for God to send forth His Son. In so many words, this messenger was delivering the message that this little baby was the long-awaited Messiah.

Then, according to verse 13, there suddenly appeared with the one angel a multitude of angels (called a heavenly host). The word “multitude” can also be translated as an army or a band of soldiers. Ironically, this army of soldiers announced peace!

Use your sanctified imagination for a moment and picture the scene. The sky is filled with angels, a vast host of them, from horizon to horizon, as far as the eye can see. And what are they doing? They are praising God! They are giving glory to God in heaven and proclaiming peace to people on earth!

God created angels as intelligent, moral creatures. Many of the angels rebelled; yet, Jesus did not come to redeem angels. Instead, the Babe of Bethlehem came to redeem human beings who have sinned and turned away from God. Moreover, we learn from 1 Peter 1:12 that angels are keenly interested in this grand work of God. Peter tells us that angels “long to look” into these things. (The same Greek word is used of John peering into the empty tomb in John 20:5.) Meaning, these heavenly beings “stretch forward the head” or “stoop over to look” to gain information on human salvation. If the angels praised God for the birth of the Savior, how much more should we, the ones He came to save!



**Dr. Joe M. Allen, Jr.**

*DTS Campus Pastor*



*But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. Luke 2:19 (NIV)*

*Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. Luke 2:19 (MSG)*

## A Rhythm of Pondering

Moment by moment our emotions and behaviors are shaped by what we allow to capture our attention. Even the seconds you are reading this, you are being molded. I invite you today to join me on a journey where we take a moment to allow God's Word to shape our souls, emotions, and behaviors.

Begin by relaxing your soul, letting go of the many tasks that accompany the Christmas season. Take a few deep, nurturing breaths. No, really, pause. Breathe deep. Deeper still. Bring your attention to the Lord's presence with you during this time of reflection. Take a moment to slowly and reflectively read the following passage.

"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

Pause here...allow those words to just sink in.



Let's read this verse again. This time, just a little bit more deliberately.

"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

In your mind, paint a picture of what is happening in the story here. Young Mary has just received news from the shepherds about the angels' proclamation of Jesus's birth. She took this information in, allowing it to take root in her heart.

What phrase from this verse captures your attention? Take a moment to consider the meaning of the phrase. Allow yourself to contemplate what caught your attention and allow it to resonate with your soul. What do you notice happens within you as you consider this phrase?

Take a few moments to talk to God about what caught your attention about this verse. Express your love and gratitude to God for His Word.

Consider what God might be trying to teach you through this verse, and ask Him for greater wisdom to understand. Again, take a few deep breaths, remembering that the Holy Spirit is present with you.

As you go through your day and this season of Advent, continue to intentionally ponder and treasure the birth of our Savior.



**Dr. Andi Thacker**

*Associate Professor of Counseling Ministries*

*"On earth peace among those with whom he is pleased."* Luke 2:14 (ESV)



## Christmas Spirit

A lot of Christmas angst is expressed every December. There's Charlie Brown who ponders what Christmas is really all about, and folks everywhere trying to make this season the most wonderful time of the year. Let's pause on that word *wonderful*—it means to be characterized by wonder, by awe; to be overwhelmed by something bigger than ourselves, like a choir of angels or a virgin giving birth.

If you don't believe in miracles, you won't track down the Christmas spirit. We have to be like the poor, humble shepherds who were so smitten with awe and wonder that they left their fields to find the miracle baby. Now, we have our secular versions of Christmas miracles—a jolly, old, present-delivering elf; a reindeer with a luminous nose; and even a wedding-performing snowman. These "miracles," however, are only poor reflections of the real thing. We settle for attenuated miracles and then expect them to fill us with awe. The wonder of Christmas blossoms only when we grasp the fact that the eternal and transcendent God wrote Himself into our story. He placed Himself in a Bethlehem cave; wrapped in rags, He shivered in a manger. The baby whom Mary bore would one day bear all our sins.

"Peace on earth and goodwill to men." We long to believe this peace is possible, if only for a day. Contemporary Bible translations capture better what the angels said, even if less poetically: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased." Peace is God's Christmas gift. Without wonder, we will never get peace. It came in human packaging, within which the fullness of the Deity dwelt. The peace we desire—that evasive Christmas spirit—is not manufactured by our efforts to fix the world or even to find that perfect Christmas present. The trappings of Christmas don't contain the Christmas spirit. At best, they point to it. Many people work so hard to achieve heaven on earth for that one best day each year, not realizing that it already happened. Heaven came to earth over two thousand years ago, and the peace of God is available for all who embrace, with wide eyes and wonder, God's Christmas present, Jesus Christ.

That's what Christmas, and the Christmas spirit, is all about, Charlie Brown.



**Dr. Timothy Yoder**

*Associate Professor of Theological Studies*

*But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son... Galatians 4:4 (NIV)*



## The Hope of Christmas

I'll admit it...I get incredibly sentimental during the holiday season. I start listening to Christmas music in November (yes, I'm one of those people!), my wife and I watch as many holiday movies as possible after Thanksgiving, and we've cultivated a number of meaningful traditions with our children.

With all of this celebration, though, comes the temptation to allow the nostalgia of the season to overshadow the birth of the Savior. To help keep my focus on Christ's First Advent beyond the holidays, I'm drawn often to the beginning of Galatians 4:4. Paul's declaration that at the right time God sent His Son offers two critical truths that can help anchor our attention on the hope of Christ's birth long after Christmas has come and gone.

First, we see that God keeps His promises. To the Jews living in the first century, I'm sure it may have seemed that God had forgotten them. But of course, He hadn't. Instead, the Father chose to send His Son into the world at exactly the time He knew was best. He kept His promise, as He always has and always will. And so, especially when our circumstances look bleak and discouragement abounds, reflecting on Christ's birth can bring us much-needed hope throughout the year as we, His people, now await His next coming.

Second, we're reminded that God is with us. Sadly, this reality has become so familiar to us that we often fail to fully appreciate its significance. Just imagine: on the night Christ was born, God was actually there in the flesh—breathing, crying, eating—with the people He had come to redeem. After living a sinless life, He died, rose again, and was exalted at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 1:3). And from there He now offers limitless grace and mercy to His people (4:16). All of this is made possible because of what happened in Bethlehem all those years ago.

In a few weeks, most evidence of the holiday season will be gone. And, like we do with our Christmas decorations, we'll be tempted to tuck away Christ's birth and barely think about it until next year. Perhaps instead we can remember that the manger offers us powerful hope of a promise-keeping, ever-present God *all year long*.



**Dr. Nathan J. McKanna**

*Dean of Academic Administration*



*"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.  
"Come and see," said Philip. John 1:46 (NIV)*



## All That Is Gold Does Not Glitter

Thirty-two years ago, I launched two life-changing experiences. I began a PhD program in Counseling Psychology at Columbia University, and I began attending Tim Keller's church in New York City. A Keller Christmas sermon from that time continues to have significance for me, and so I share it with you today. He challenged me with a key question from the Christmas story: *"Can we live in a place of brilliance without being blinded by it?"*

As we celebrate the miracle of the Incarnation, we read that the "Son of God" and "Son of Man" comes from Nazareth. A common theme of biblical accounts is that Jesus was born into insignificance. Nazareth was the backwoods of Galilee which was the backwoods of Israel which was the backwoods of the Roman Empire. In that backwoods of the backwoods of the backwoods was the King of the universe. In that weakness was the all-powerful God. In that obscurity was the greatest event in history.

True greatness is naturally invisible to worldly eyes. God loves to use things that turn the values and expectations of the world upside down. Human culture flows from the top down and from the center out. God's spiritual renewals and awakenings tend to come from the margins to the center; from the outside in. We can see this looking at Jesus and His disciples and at spiritual revivals throughout history.

The Christmas story confronts us with the question of what is truly great. It is commonly said that "All that glitters is not gold." I was immersed in a glittery graduate program in a glittery city, and it was easy to mistake it all as "gold" according to the world's measuring stick. The Christmas story, however, tells us real greatness is naturally invisible to the worldly eye. As J. R. R. Tolkien wrote, "All that is gold does not glitter."

Can anything good come from Nazareth? The "Son of God" and "Son of Man" emptied Himself in the obscure backwoods of Nazareth that we may participate in the eternal exchange of love of the Trinity and celebrate the greatest story ever told. Now that's truly gold!



**Dr. C. Gary Barnes**

*Professor of Counseling Ministries*

DECEMBER 20



*Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of God's glory.*

**Romans 5:1-2 (NET)**



## Access to Hope

The use of the word “link” has increased in recent years. Through a link, people have the freedom to have direct access to certain information on social networks or the Internet. If you do not have the link, you lack access to such information. In difficult times, the need to access hope is visible. Our recent experiences in this conflictive, broken world, including the experience of a global pandemic, have amplified this need for hope. Romans 5:1-2 tells us about the link that provides hope, and that link is Jesus; through Him we have access to God, who gives us peace, especially in difficult times.

The first two verses of Romans 5 explain one aspect in the past, but also various comforting words for the present. The action of the past is that we were declared justified through Jesus. The decision we made at some point in the past to believe in Jesus marked our lives and now we are justified before the eyes of God. Now we are made justified before Him by faith in Jesus. This action, however, also impacts our present.

Our present is described in the verses with various verbs and a few key nouns: “we have peace,” “we have also obtained access,” “we stand,” and “we rejoice.” These four phrases show what the link, Jesus, has given each of us access to through faith in Him. Today we have peace, we have access to His grace, and we are participants in His glory. All peace, grace, and glory are aspects that the believer can enjoy and has access to in the present, especially in a world with so much commotion. We need to remember, in Him we have hope; He has the control of everything in the world.

This is a good reminder for this holiday season, when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. In Him we have peace with God, justification, His grace, and joy. The act of believing in Him has justified us, and today is the time to live accordingly, knowing that He has forgiven us. Jesus is the only link to access true hope.



**Dr. Williams Trigueros**

*Director of DTS en Español*

*Adjunct Professor of Educational Ministries & Leadership*

*"For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." John 18:37 (ESV)*



## Telling the Truth Like It Really Is

The Gospel of John is known for the extended employment of irony, both by Jesus and by John, the author. A prime example is how Jesus framed one of His many reasons for His Incarnation. In John 3 we read it was not God's purpose to send His Son to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him (John 3:17). Ironically, at the conclusion of the narrative of the healing of the blind man in John 9:39, "Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.'" Jesus divided the world into two groups: people who are blind that end up seeing, and people who "see" that end up blind.

In reaction to Jesus, the Pharisees asked a question expecting a negative answer as to whether Jesus thought *they* were blind. Jesus answered, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains" (9:41). Jesus was teaching the need for people to be humble enough to admit they have a spiritual need for salvation that only He can provide. Only Jesus can solve the problem of human guilt due to sin. Those trusting in their own perceptions are unwilling to acknowledge sin as their real issue and are therefore blind to their own need. Such people remain in their state of continuing condemnation (3:18–20). Those who recognize their spiritual blindness and come to the Light are blessed with spiritual sight.

The judgment Jesus came to bring was the clarification between people of faith and the unbelieving world. This is the truth Jesus had in mind when he stood before Pilate and claimed that His purpose in coming into the world was to "bear witness to the truth." He is the Truth and people of truth rightly listen to Him. The climactic irony is that while it appeared Jesus was on trial before the world of His day, the reality is that the world represented by Pilate stood and still stands for trial before the One who is the Truth. Jesus alone has the right of final judgment (5:22–23).



**Dr. Mark L. Bailey**

*Chancellor*

*Senior Professor of Bible Exposition*



*"My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand."*

**John 10:27-28 (NASB)**

## The Security That Christmas Brings

Even though we live in a very insecure world, Christmas offers the security of eternal life.

During the Feast of Dedication, Jesus was walking in the Temple and was asked if He was the Messiah (John 10:24). His answer brings great security to those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the true Shepherd of Israel.

The Feast of Dedication (10:22), also known as Hanukkah, is when the Jewish people celebrate the rededication of the Temple after Antiochus Epiphanes (164 BC) profaned it with the sacrifice of swine and the worship of foreign gods. Hanukkah continues to be an eight-day Festival of Lights in memory of the menorah that burned in the Holy Place during the rededication.<sup>1</sup> The Maccabees are those who rededicated the Temple and liberated Israel, and they ruled until 63 BC. Many in Israel thought that the Maccabees would fulfill their hopes for the Messiah; however, the Maccabees were false shepherds and became corrupt priests/kings. Their dynasty lasted only one hundred years, and the Jews very soon began hoping for a true Messiah to establish a lasting righteous kingdom.

John 10 explains that Jesus is the true Shepherd of Israel (see Ezekiel 34:12; Zechariah 11:16), and those who believe and follow Him as His sheep have eternal life (John 10:28). Jesus is our eternal Savior. He gives eternal life to all who believe that He was the God-Man who died on the cross to receive upon Himself the wrath of God for the sins of humanity and that He rose again victorious over sin and death.

Those who believe and follow Jesus have an eternal secure salvation held fast by the triune God. The entire Trinity holds us secure: we are in the secure hand of Jesus (God, the Son) (10:28); we are held firmly within the all-powerful hand of God, the Father (10:29); and we have the eternal presence of the Holy Spirit (God, the Spirit) (14:16-17). Since the entire Trinity as One (10:30) holds us secure within His all-powerful "hand," there exists nothing with sufficient power to remove us from eternal salvation.

There is little that is secure in this present world. But what a comfort Christmas brings when we celebrate the birth of the true Shepherd who promises a secure eternal life held sure by the entire Triune Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

<sup>1</sup> See 1 Maccabees 1-4.



**Dr. Daniel S. Steffen**

*Professor of New Testament Studies*

*Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father. **Colossians 3:16-17 (NLT)***



## The Richness of Christ's Message

When they have reached a capable age, I have backpacked with each of my two sons up the same wilderness trail in Colorado. Much of the first day is spent hiking up a gulch that increases in elevation by 2,000 feet. The consistent incline produces complaints from both of my sons, as they wonder, “When are we going to stop climbing, Dad?” Some of the trail is fairly treacherous, and the trailhead sign warns of the presence of bears in the area. The dangers of what potentially waits ahead and even of where to place our next footstep are real.

My sons and I certainly are mindful of these dangers, but something else happens on the climb that we are unable to ignore. The regal trees, gorgeous flowers, powerful waterfalls, and majestic mountains fill the senses in such a way that the difficulty of the hike simply seems to fade away. The richness of the views, fragrance of the mountain air, and melody of the cascading water fill us with such gratitude for the opportunity to be together in such a place.

The same is true of the “message about Christ.” Its richness, by the power of the Holy Spirit, has the power to “fill” our lives. We are given the opportunity to “teach and counsel” with God’s wisdom. We are encouraged to “sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God.”

It is not a chore to do these things. In fact, they are the natural outflow of the joy of Christ with which His Holy Spirit fills us. If this is not already clear, we are reminded of the thankfulness “through Him to God the Father” that infuses every “representative of the Lord Jesus.”

The difficulties and dangers of this life are real, but the richness of the message about Christ—of Christmas—overwhelms everything else.



**Dr. Erik Salwen**

*Associate Professor of Counseling Ministries*



DECEMBER 24

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.* **Isaiah 9:6 (NIV)**

## Put on Your Dancing Shoes!

I was once driving down an old country road. As the rubber tires crunched through the gravel, I looked over and saw a field of sunflowers looking straight at me with their bright yellow manes. It was beautiful! As if in formation, they saluted me in chorus. Did someone plant them to face the road? Or was there something else greater at work?

I later found out that God was at work in their organization. In botany, heliotropism is the scientific phenomenon of plant motion in response to the direction of the sun. The most common example of a plant exhibiting this spectacle can be seen in young sunflowers. Throughout the day, these flowers dance and follow the lead of the sun from east to west.

Most people don't associate flowers with the winter season, yet December can be a season of blooming, growth, and "Son" gazing. Just as sunflowers turn their heads toward the sun, during the Advent season we, too, are given the opportunity to turn our heads toward Jesus. God promised that a child would be born for God's people; a Son would be given (Isaiah 9:6). With the birth of Jesus, that promise was fulfilled. Jesus, who is both man and God, provides hope during difficult days.

On Christmas Day, all of creation gets the chance to celebrate the day this child arrived. Will you clearly see Him? Will you gaze upon His beauty? Will you hear His voice?

He has a message. Listen close, and you will hear Him.

He is saying *"I love you, and you are worth it. I came for you."*

Don't miss your moment to turn toward the Son! It matters because others are looking at you.

You see, there are countless people driving down the proverbial gravel road of life. It may be family members who do not know the Lord. It may be neighbors who do not embrace the gospel. It may be a random acquaintance you encounter—one who does not yet profess Jesus.

What will they see when they look at you? Like sunflowers raising their petals to the sun, will they see you in full gaze toward the Savior—celebrating the One who came into this mess in order to pull you out?

Come on, "Son" follower. Put on your dancing shoes. Look at the Son.

He's worth a brand-new gaze.



**Dr. Mark M. Yarbrough**

*President*

*Professor of Bible Exposition*



## NOW IN THOSE DAYS

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all the people were on their way to register for the census, each to his own city. Now Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was betrothed to him, and was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock at night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood near them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. And so the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army of angels praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth peace among people with whom He is pleased."

When the angels had departed from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem, then, and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen Him, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it were amazed about the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Luke 2:1-20 (NASB)





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