



Merry Christmas

To: You

From: Jesus

Feel free to share!

Sunday, December 3rd
A Reflection by Dr. W. Joel Campbell
Joshua 10:25

25 Then Joshua said to them, "Don't be afraid or terrified. Be brave and strong, because this is how the Lord will deal with all the enemies you fight."

The week of Thanksgiving Jennifer and I attended the 28th Annual Rotary Club of High Point 2017 Thanksgiving Program sponsored by Dr. Nido Qubein and the Qubein Foundation. We believe that being active in the community is important for us and the church. But this meeting today was different, and it made me realize something. If you're asking what made it different, I'll have you know that I had so much going on this morning that I seriously considered not attending. My calendar *was and is* always full, and my planning for the busy season of Advent was behind, as it always seems to be. You know what? Being part of a community like this one has caused me to grow.

While Jennifer and I were there, we heard from two different speakers. First, we heard from Karen Jacobsen, the GPS girl who is the voice of many GPS networks, including Apple's Siri. We also heard the testimony of Mike Schlappi, Hall of Fame Gold Medalist, Author of *SHOT HAPPENS*, professional speaker, husband and father of five. He suffered an accidental gunshot wound as a child. We learned about the hardships of being paralyzed. As we sat through lunch, he asked a question that will stick with me for a while. He asked: "What is holding you back? What is the bullet you're carrying?" I was reminded that Mike has had to overcome so many things in his life, I should be grateful for the wonderful life that I have been given by God. If someone who is paralyzed can win a gold medal, I should know that God can use me for big things. Mike has a real peace in his life, one that can only come from God.

Will we carry around this same kind of hope this Advent? Or will we let work and worry consume this season? It should remind us that God sent His Son so that we might have peace in the midst of a chaotic world. I hope we will indeed be a people reminded of God's peace this season, like we've never experienced before. Let's meditate on this as we begin Advent: *Colossians 3:15* And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. What would our awaiting Christ look like if this was our mission beginning today?



Monday, December 4th A Reflection by David Williams

Have you ever been lost? *Hopelessly lost*? Well, I have.

I flew into the airport in Athens, Greece just as the Summer Olympics infrastructure boom was reaching a chaotic frenzy. Everything was behind schedule and the whole world was watching, expecting a grand unifying success, or an embarrassing failure. Precious time was running out and I soon learned they were far behind schedule.

I drove north towards Thessaloniki and Mt. Olympus, but first I had to negotiate Athens, home to three and a half million people. The rental car attendant said, in broken English, "no problem." I soon found that Athens was indeed, a "huge problem."

In an instant the well-marked highway ended into a swarming mass of congestion filled with cars, busses, scooters, bicycles and pedestrians crammed into narrow streets no wider than alleys. Lane markers and stop lights were merely suggestions as traffic filled every inch of real estate. Daylight was waning and smog kept the sun from telling me east from west and I didn't know a single person in all of Greece to ask for help.

I was lost. *Hopelessly lost*.

With no possible way to pull off the street and ask directions, I put down my window on both sides of the car and began asking for help from anyone that would listen. Athens continued to swallow me along with the others.

After an eternity, I heard someone say, "Can I help you?" I explained. He understood.

He held a white handkerchief out his driver's window so that I could follow him, at times several cars behind in traffic, for more than an hour as we inched forward. Then, suddenly, the traffic cleared and the road sign appeared pointing me north, away from Athens. With a beep of his horn and flashing a toothy smile, he waved me on. I mouthed "thank you."

At that moment for me, *that smile belonged to the face of Jesus...* and he was Greek. I have since known him as Japanese, German, Italian and Korean (all stories for another time).

As we celebrate the birth of our Savior, we should remember that everyone then was also watching and waiting for some grand unifying event, even as the whole world was *hopelessly lost*. How comforting to know that only by asking for His help, each of us can receive the blessing of being found (*saved*) by Jesus Christ.

We simply need to recognize Him when He beeps his horn and flashes a toothy smile.

.....
For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost. Luke 9:10 NLT

For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds... Luke 11:10a,b NLT

... God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. 1 John 4:16b NLT

And the King will say, I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me! Matthew 25:40 N.



Tuesday, December 5th
A Reflection by Rev. Bruce Hartgrove
Mark 13:33-37

To understand today's passage we need to read the beginning of chapter 13, *"As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!' 'Do you see all these great buildings?' replied Jesus. 'Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down' ...Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 'Tell us, when will these things happen? ...Jesus said to them... 'Watch.'" (NIV)*

In the passage for today, Jesus tells of a servant who is to watch the house while his master is away to illustrate that the servant should always be alert for the master's return whether in the evening, at midnight or in the morning. For us, the lesson is that we should be on guard day and night for the return of our Master, Jesus Christ.

Waiting can be extremely difficult. Our patience is taxed when we are waiting for the result of a biopsy, waiting for the surgeon's report on a family member's procedure, waiting for the call with a job offer, or the letter of acceptance into the college of one's choice. Even the disciples had difficulty waiting. We read in Matthew 26 that Jesus and the disciples went into the Garden of Gethsemane. Three times He told them to wait while He prayed and three times He found them asleep.

Happy events stretch our patience as well: anticipating a family holiday, waiting for the plane to land bringing your soldier safely home, a child's eagerness at a birthday party or a trip to Disney World. Have you ever told your child, "It's just around the next curve?" As a child I was always eager to see the surprise that Santa would leave under the tree. Once it was a Marx electric train set and another year it was a Western Flyer bicycle. While my excitement grew with each approaching Christmas, Mother would always tell me, "Now Bruce, just be patient!"

"I waited for the Lord on high, I waited and He heard my cry."

This excerpt from Petra's song, **"I Waited for the Lord,"** expresses both the anxiety of waiting, but more importantly, the joy which comes from the knowledge that God hears our cry in faith.

We should always be ready for our Master, Jesus Christ, to return. In our daily living, in our tough decisions, and in our anticipation of joyful times, our task is to watch and wait. In the watching and the waiting, serve with joy and gladness, spreading the love and good news of the long anticipated Messiah, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.



Wednesday, December 6th
A Reflection by Rev. John Adamcik
John 1:1-5

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

The Apostle John, known by Christians as the Apostle of Love, begins his Gospel with an echo and a summation.

The echo is of Genesis; here, as John introduces readers into the majestic story of God's love in Christ Jesus, come in the flesh, he reminds us that all creation owes existence to the Word of God, who from eternity past had enjoyed supreme fellowship and love within the Trinity. God is love. The three person God enjoys sufficient reciprocal love such as the world tries to understand and emulate.

In His creative work, God further expresses love by giving life to those made Imago Dei - humans - in the image of God. This life is sustaining, both for time and eternity. And we are not left on our own. God's life-giving Word shows us meaning, purpose, and destination (to borrow from Ravi Zacharias). We gain understanding of who we are - our meaning - through the light God shines on us and around us. We express ourselves with purpose because we have light to see, and plan, and move. And, if we trust in His light, our movements bring us to our intended destination, which is a deeply personal, loving relationship with the one who made us - God.

John's summation is a reminder that Jesus the Christ, Son of God, is the Word. God's Word.

As we prepare for a meaningful Christmas celebration, let us reflect on the love God has shown us. He has created us for a purpose. He gave his very Son so that we might realize this purpose to perfection. He has given us His Word.



Thursday, December 7th
A Reflection by Rev. Michael Stamey
Testify to the Light ~ John 1:6-9

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

It's important to note that in the Gospel of John, John serves a slightly different purpose than from the other three gospels. John is never identified as "the Baptist," nor is he ever called the forerunner of Jesus. Instead, John has one function within this gospel-to testify to the light (Jesus). In Hebrew the meaning of the name John is: Jehovah has been gracious; God has shown favor. In short John's name means grace. How fitting that he whose name means grace was sent to prophesy about a messianic figure greater than himself and all before that would come to be known as the full embodiment of grace. The Advent season is a wonderful time to reflect upon that grace as we await the birth of the Christ Child.

As I read this I wonder what it must have been like for John to be a witness and to testify to the people of the coming of the Messiah. What would I say? What would you say? I'm sure John had plenty of questions but, what he most certainly had was faith. John diligently witnessed, baptized, and disciplined people in anticipation of the Messiah arriving. He knew that the Messiah would be the light that could enlighten everyone.

The mission that you and I have been given as Christians is not much different than the one that John received. The only difference is that we are to be Witnesses of Jesus' second coming. We are to witness and to testify with the light of Jesus and with it the truth that he has brought and will bring again so that all may believe. Just as John knew that he himself was not the light we shall know too. We witness and testify of the One who will come again that is greater than you and me. Like John, we have the knowledge that He comes after me is greater than all before me.

Prayer: Lord may your light shine bright in my life so others may be enlightened by your love. Help me to witness and to testify of your truth to all as diligently as your servant John did.
Amen.



Friday, December 8th
A Reflection by Michelle Gardner
Jeremiah 33:14-16

"¹⁴The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill my gracious promise with the people of Israel and Judah. ¹⁵In those days and at that time, I will raise up a righteous branch from David's line, who will do what is just and right in the land. ¹⁶In those days, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is what he will be called: The Lord Is Our Righteousness." Jeremiah 33:14-16

I think hope can be found in the phrase "the time is coming." Sometimes I get so caught up in the outcome or the worry about getting there that I forget about what can be gained in the waiting. I also forget that it is not my sole responsibility for a successful outcome. God is gracious and always keeps promises. We just have to remember the time is coming and patiently wait. In my experience, God always does amazing things during the waiting time.

Jesus was sent to do what was right and just. This world would be a much better place if everyone had that motive. So many problems could be solved by everyone or just Christians or even just the members of FBC High Point striving to do what is right and just. Let's take the season of Advent to enjoy the waiting, treat the people around us with justice, and do what is right.



Saturday, December 9th
A Reflection by Helen Lowery
Isaiah 60:19-22

Do not long for the absence of problems in your life. That is a very unrealistic goal since in this world we will have our troubles, but thank God we all have an eternity of problem free living reserved for us in Heaven. We need to rejoice in inheritance which no one can take away from us. Just read the scripture for today.

He promises us that our sun will never set and our moon will not go down. He is and always will be our everlasting light and our days of mourning will be over. What a day that will be. I am looking forward to that day.

I wonder, how many times we say to ourselves, "I'll be happy once I get over this" or "I'll be happy once I finish this project." We have a thousand reasons for why we are unhappy and many of them are simply that we are waiting for some source of pain to leave us. Like a day of mourning, God has a different idea about happiness.

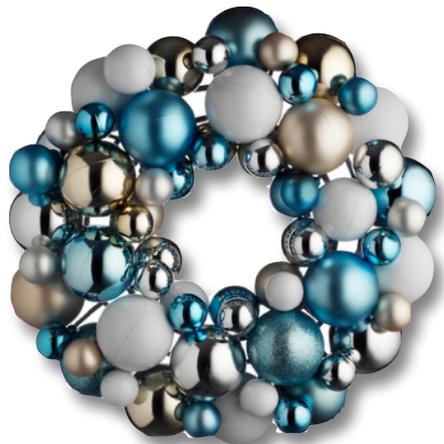
In our search for love and happiness we might sometimes ask, "Where does love come from?" The answer is something of a mystery sometimes even as we experience it. Believers start by making this assertion "God is its source and its keeper." Live into this gracious truth as you set aside some time alone with the source of all love. God so loved the world that he sent us His Son and no greater love or gift can be given.

Imagine a stream running over its banks. The water cannot be held back and will not be contained. Tell the good news and warn everyone God's loving flood is coming.

God is the greatest gift we can imagine, when we have Him we have everything we need for this life and the next. No matter how much or how little we have in this world our relationship with Him makes us very rich. When you are counting your blessings be sure to count the wealth you have in Him. We need to rejoice in the fact that His love is both priceless and unfailing. We can always count on His love because it is more reliable than the rising sun. So we need to let His unfailing love fill us with joy as we walk along the path of life with Him. It has been said that love is not something you find, it is something you do. Every day I thank God for the small kernel of determination and the support of my friends who are helping me to find and free my rainbow during my stormiest times.

Life is never a burden if love prevails. God gives us love. He lends us something to love.

The Lord will be our everlasting light and all our days of mourning will be over and gone. All our people will be good. At first my scripture scared me when Joel gave it to me, but the more I studied it, the more I loved it.



Sunday, December 10th
A Reflection by Amy Williams Thornton
Home for Christmas ~ Colossians 1:19-20

19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Christmas 2001 found me seven months pregnant with our first child and in a contemplative frame of mind. Life as I knew it was about to change. In a big way. I remember sitting in the stillness of our living room, lit only by the lights from our Christmas tree, listening to Christmas music and feeling overwhelmed when the song "*Mary, Did You Know?*" began to play. Suddenly, with both hands resting on the swell of new life inside me, the questions of the song and thoughts of Mary's Christmas day became uncomfortably intimate, almost unbearably real for this mother-to-be.

I thought about our local hospital's birthing suites my husband and I had toured, the doctor I'd known for years, and my family only a phone call and a few hours away. All of which helped calm my fears about labor and child birth. None of which Mary had. She was in a strange place, alone but for a new husband. No comfortable hospital or even hotel suite awaited her, just a humble stable. No comforting presence of midwife or family members with capable and experienced hands to help her through her labor greeted her, just a stranger who said there was no room and the furry stench and jostle of farm animals.

Was Mary afraid? Did she long for her own bed? Did she call out for her mother? Did she just want to go home? No, I think she knew even then. Even before she'd held the miracle of the Messiah in her arms, or kissed the face of God, she knew that her Son would be bringing *home* with Him. That in Him all people would finally have the opportunity to know the security, love, and acceptance of home. That He would make home universal and eternal.

My musings cast the star in a new light, too. The star that shone like a beacon, lighting the way for those who sought Him - is it too much of a stretch to see it as a divine porch light, a sign that this is home, He's here, come and visit? That first Christmas the Wise Men recognized this message and used its' light to navigate the darkness to find Him. But wise men and women can still use that light to find their way home. The porch light is still on. Only now it shines not from celestial heights, but from the depths of human hearts. For those of us who have found their way home are like the manger, cradling within us the breath and presence of God. But we also have something in common with the star. Our lives can now shine into the darkness, helping show others the way home.

This Christmas I wonder - if you've found your way home, is your porch light on? Can others see that you're at home with Him? Do you have the welcome mat out? But, what if you're still looking, and feeling lost this Christmas? Maybe you've done the best you can to make this world feel like home but still don't feel secure. Maybe you're not even sure what you're looking for, or what would fill the empty inside you. Wouldn't you love to come home? Home - where you're always safe, always loved, always forgiven and accepted.

I'll be home this Christmas. Home in Jesus. Won't you join me?
Monday, December 18th



Monday, December 11th
A Reflection by Rev. Jennifer Campbell
Romans 15:4-13

4 And the Scriptures were written to teach and encourage us by giving us hope. 5 God is the one who makes us patient and cheerful. I pray that he will help you live at peace with each other, as you follow Christ. 6 Then all of you together will praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Honor God by accepting each other, as Christ has accepted you. 8 I tell you that Christ came as a servant of the Jews to show that God has kept the promises he made to their famous ancestors. Christ also came, 9 so that the Gentiles would praise God for being kind to them. It is just as the Scriptures say, "I will tell the nations about you and I will sing praises to your name." 10 The Scriptures also say to the Gentiles, "Come and celebrate with God's people." 11 Again the Scriptures say, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles. All you nations, come and worship him." 12 Isaiah says, "Someone from David's family will come to power. He will rule the nations, and they will put their hope in him." 13 I pray that God, who gives hope, will bless you with complete happiness and peace because of your faith. And may the power of the Holy Spirit fill you with hope.

In this passage in the book of Romans, Paul is writing to the church in Rome reminding them of the Old Testament story in Genesis of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah. In Genesis Chapter 12 verses 2-3 God says, *"2 I will bless you and make your descendants into a great nation. You will become famous and be a blessing to others. 3 I will bless anyone who blesses you, but I will put a curse on anyone who puts a curse on you. Everyone on earth will be blessed because of you."* Contemporary English Version (CEV)

I can't imagine how Abraham and Sarah must have felt when they heard God's promise. They were very much past the age when most people have children. After God made this promise to Abraham and Sarah, they still had to wait about 15 years before their son Issac was born. Waiting and hoping. Don't those two things often go hand in hand? While we wait for God's plan for our lives to unfold, we hope. We hold fast to the hope that God will fulfill His promises to sustain us, provide for us, be with us, forgive us and most importantly love us.

During this season of Advent we wait. We wait to celebrate the promise that was fulfilled when Jesus sent his Son as a baby to save us from our sin, to save us from ourselves. We wait, and we hope for the promise that He will one day come again to save us and that we will live with Him for eternity in Heaven.

How can we stay hope filled during this Advent season in a world where things don't always seem hopeful? One simple, practical thing we can do each day is look at the Kindness Advent Calendar that I shared on our church Facebook page, or the Kids Calendar that I gave out on the first Sunday of Advent, and do one kind thing each day of Advent to spread the hope of Jesus to others.

Dear God,
While we wait this Advent season, help us to remember to focus our thoughts on You. Let our thoughts and our hearts reflect you in our actions as we seek to do your work, to serve others, to be your hands and feet, to spread kindness and to love others as you have loved us. It is in your son's name Jesus that we pray. Amen.



Tuesday, December 12th
A Reflection by Jennie Counts
Psalm 43:3-5

The Christmas season has begun—but wait a minute! As I write this, it isn't even Thanksgiving yet and we see decorations everywhere and hear Christmas music all around. The thought might cross our minds that all of this is a bit premature. Are we so ready to slide through Thanksgiving so that we can enjoy the splendor of Christmas? Are we so anxious for the glitter, the noise, the busyness, and the commercialization of a sacred holiday that we lose the true meaning?

Perhaps it is best for us to slow down and use the Thanksgiving holiday to express gratitude to God for His generous provision. In so doing, we become prepared and ready to focus on the mysterious story of the birth of Jesus on that cold, winter night so long ago. Advent is a *season*, a specified period of time in which we are called to a higher plane of goodwill, compassion, and giving. It is the time for our best selves to be revealed.

In Psalm 43:3-5 the Psalmist is praying for *light* and *truth* to come. The exhortation, "*Send Your Light and Your Truth*" was not a request in the form of a question. But rather it was a statement of assurance, a declaration of expectation that if they could come to the holy mountain, there would be great joy and praises of songs at the altar of God. There was indeed faith in God that He would provide deliverance for His people in a way like none before.

We are no different today—we desire the personal presence of the Baby Jesus and the Risen Christ! Jesus came as a baby but grew to be a man to declare and assure us, "*I AM the truth and the light.*"

How does this Old Testament plea speak to us today during Advent 2017? We are still busy; we are still getting ready for Christmas. Yet, the pure joy and wonder of the Christ Child and His birth is not in the hustle and bustle of the season, the shopping, the gift wrapping, food preparation, house cleaning, or the hour-by-hour plan that we have in our heads for a perfect Christmas.

Yes, there is a perfect Christmas for each of us. It is found in the light and the truth when we see our need for Jesus and bow down to worship, adore and serve Him. Christmas—light and truth—is all about relationships: our relationship with Jesus and with each other. It is a new awakening within us once again of the truth and light that is Jesus Himself and His love for us. Let us join together at the manger to feel and share the love of Christ!



Wednesday, December 13th
A Reflection by Brian Garis

Psalm 27:1-4

1 The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid? 2 When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. 3 Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident. 4 One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

Have you ever just thought about, or do you know, what it is that you fear? What or who is it that you consider to be your enemy? Do you fear death? Do you consider a neighbor or a far off foreign ideology as an enemy? Do you have an internal battle with a particular vice or addiction? David, as a man and as a king, had many battles to fight and many enemies to defend against. Some were foreign, some were domestic, some were mental, and some were spiritual. Many of, if not all of, the struggles you may have gone through, are going through, or will go through David also went through. However, he always either started out or ended up in the presence of God, his guide and guardian. We should also seek to be in God's presence daily. He can be our fortress, our source of strength, and our protector through prayer, through fellowship, and by reading and understanding and following God's Word. Do you believe that the Lord is your light and your salvation? To do so is to confess confidence in Him as the source of life and salvation. Some of our enemies/fears may be bigger than we can handle on our own. Some of them may not be as big as we think they are. And some may be small but we still see them as fears/enemies. David sought and we too should seek...seek the stronghold of our life in his temple that we may also be fearless and confident.

May you have a happy, safe, and blessed Advent Season!



Friday, December 14th
A Reflection by Cynthia Eddinger
Psalm 119:105-106

I literally could not see my hand in front of my face. Two hours into a 4-hour tour of Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, the guide had us sit on benches and turned out the lights. If I didn't know other people were around me, there's no way I could have seen them. It was the darkest dark I'd ever known. How soon would the nothingness affect me?

In one scientific experiment, the participant who was subjected to complete darkness, all alone and was bored within a half hour. He experienced paranoia by 18 hours. Within 30 hours, he was pacing like a caged animal. By 40 hours, he was hallucinating and no longer wanted to live.

Light is very important to us humans...in more ways than one. Besides allowing us to view the world around us, it provides understanding of that world.

After the guide in the cave turned the lights on again, I could see. I saw my spouse, the inside of the cave, the light source, the other tourists and the guide. All that was uncertain a moment ago was familiar again. I could see whom to trust to show me the path out of the cave.

The psalmist in today's passage equated God's written word with light and with a light-containing lamp. It allowed the writer not only to see his life and world from God's perspective. It also allowed that writer to understand how the world and his life operated within God's law. The psalmist even took an oath to obey those laws. He trusted God and God's instructions to lead him in righteousness.



Friday, December 15th
A Reflection by Phil McNeill
John 12:35-36

35 Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. 36 Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light. When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

Jesus knew there wasn't much time left. His ministry on earth had almost expired. In two days he would hang from the cross on Calvary. Yet his concern, even in these dire moments, was not for himself, but for his followers...his children. His portrayal of himself as the light speaks to his disciples in a manner they can grasp. The last rays of light are shining, he solemnly warns them. I will soon be leaving you. Walk in my light while you still can. Don't waste this opportunity! Don't ask questions to raise objections, but ask so that you may know the truth, so that you may too possess the light and become children of the light. Use my light so that you will not stumble in the darkness or become lost! After telling his disciples these words, Jesus left them alone for awhile so his message could sink in. Whether or not they fully understood what he was telling them is unknown, but they would later recall his words and understand.

Nowadays, at Christmas time lights take center stage. We adorn our streets, buildings, homes, sometimes even our pets with lighting! Decorating the Christmas tree and hanging lights are a focal point of the secular side of Christmas, and bringing joy to families as they share these moments. Just imagine Christmas without lights! Hard to do, right?

This year, as we enjoy the holiday sights and sounds, when we behold the Christmas lights, just imagine Jesus in each pinpoint of light! Even though his light was briefly extinguished, it arose three days later, and will shine forever more! Jesus Christ, the light of our lives, the light of the world!

Jesus, thank you for sharing your light with us, not just at Christmas, but every single day of our lives. Truly, your light is the greatest gift ever given to mankind!

May God bless our church family, and allow each member to carry, and share, his or her own light of Jesus' love!





Artwork by: Jerry Le

Artwork by: Mary Cao



Artwork by: Sarah Van



Artwork by: Vivian Le



Artwork by: Samuel Van



Artwork by: Hadley Absher

Saturday, December 16th
A Reflection by Pam Burgess
Ephesians 5:6-14

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be associated with them. 8 For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light — 9 for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10 Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13 but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

*“Sleeper, awake!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”*

Why do we, who call ourselves Christians, let others dictate what we believe? God’s word and guidance should be our beacon that leads us daily rather than outside influences that constantly shout in the media *this is “fake”* or *that is how “Christians should behave.”*

Just because a person is an authority figure or a religious leader, does that always make every word they say true? How can we discern the difference? In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he was admonishing them to take care in words that have no truth. They just serve to lead us astray. We need to say STOP to these outside forces that seek to lead us off the correct path! God’s word is the way, the truth and the light. He should be the only one that we follow and look to without question.

Prayer: Father, be our lighthouse that keeps us away from the rocky shores. Help us to discern truth and give us the strength to follow that truth in our daily lives. Amen



Sunday, December 17th
A Reflection by Dr. W. Joel Campbell
Psalm 85:8-13

- 8 *Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.*
- 9 *Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.*
- 10 *Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.*
- 11 *Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.*
- 12 *The Lord will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.*
- 13 *Righteousness will go before him,
and will make a path for his steps.*

One of the key aspects of Advent as we await the Christ-child is that Mary willingly listened to God. What would the first Christmas have looked like if Mary decided she wasn't willing to "*hear what God the Lord would speak?*" As followers of Jesus in 2017, it is becoming more and more of a reality that we don't really listen to God. It is easier to always know what we want instead of knowing what God wants for us. I love the words of the Psalmist that remind me, the Lord will lead us in paths of righteousness if we've tuned in our hearts and ears to simply listen to what the Holy Spirit wants us to know and do next. Are you tuned in to listen knowing that steadfast love and faithfulness will meet us? Mary must have had her iPod "*tuned in*" to God's track. How about you?

Dr. Campbell



Monday, December 18th

A Reflection by Jennie Counts

1 Peter 2:5-9

Advent 2017 is a holy time when we symbolically stand at the manger to experience the awe of God's grace to His people. We recognize this reverent time of preparation and prayer, remembering and receiving; and believing and belonging.

I Peter instructs us to build our lives based on this re-visitation to the manger. Scripture tells us how to move from the manger to Advent 2017 to be the church today. Jesus is the stone that was rejected and became the cornerstone: the most important part of the structure, tested and found to be sound and enduring. Without a cornerstone, there is no basis upon which to build.

I Peter 2:5, "...you, yourselves as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." One translation describes the stones as "lively." If you have ever built a house, you probably followed the progress from the digging of the foundation, the placing of the "cornerstone," until the last coat of paint was drying on the wall. "Stone" by "stone" the house took form and shape. You were invested in every stone that was added to make the house a home.

The "house" is The Church and the stones are God's people, acceptable to God through Jesus. Imagine a house that is "alive" with activity—joyful when each new person is added; it is heartbroken when one person grieves; touched when a new baby arrives; compassionate when others are in need; of one mind in being God's hands; alert to new experiences and above all, it is in close relationship with God and with others. I am thankful for The Church and especially "our church." We have been chosen! No longer is our direction in doubt; no longer do we have to search for purpose and meaning; no longer is there a question of where and to Whom we belong.

Verse 9 states our destination and I would add an exclamation to each thought: *"But you are a chosen race! a royal priesthood! a holy nation! a people for His possession! so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light! Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people!"*

How will we be different because of our journey to the manger? Will the journey end at Christmas or New Year's? We may mark off the days on the calendar into 2018, but what if our calendar took on a new look and purpose? What if we named it a "relationship journey?" Write "Christ" at the top of each day and also designate a line for one new relationship.

How can we do less than carry the feeling and message of Advent and the birth of Jesus to everyone we meet, and thank God that we are blessed to be the "lively" stones that make up His house?



Tuesday, December 19th
A Reflection by Bryan Culbreth
Isaiah 60:1-3

1 Arise, Shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. 2 See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the people but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. 3 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

While reflecting for this devotional with a cup of coffee at 06:45 in the morning and searching for inspiration of some sort, I'm peering from my back deck across the fields, pasture land and tree tops with just the slightest view of the very beginning of a new day peeking above the horizon almost as if it was looking to see if the world was ready for the start of another day. After a few minutes more and another slug of coffee the illuminations of the light grew brighter, bolder... and AHA... there it was, right in front of me...my Advent scripture inspiration...the sunrise!

In experiencing this Advent period to its fullest extent, let us celebrate in the light of the Christ Child and the glory of that miraculous birth that would change and impact this world forever for all who believe and for all who will, in time believe; The unimaginable sacrifice that would so unselfishly cleanse us all, saving us from ourselves and our mortal shortcomings; And not least the glorious sound of that Trumpet that will call his disciples home.

Let us be steadfast and hold our shield against the darkness of evil and wrong doing that surrounds us and let the glory of the Lord's light and promise resoundingly shine through our actions, words and deeds making a difference where and when we can.

Individually it is sometimes daunting to feel that our small contribution is making an impact. In fact it does, but most importantly know, that as we have seen, the sharing of our love, our service and heartfelt humanity collectively as a church family and community will touch and inject our loving spirit across many paths giving the greatest opportunity to be that light in the darkness and to share our gifts and blessings from God.

This little light of mine...I'm gonna let it shine !

Prayer: Father I pray for your mercy on us and to place us into situations where your light can shine through to show Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Be with those in need, not only during this Advent period but each and everyday, those who struggle with dire situations, urgent personal needs or just a gentle word of encouragement. Hold us close, deliver strength, bless us and keep us for the betterment of your World....Amen.



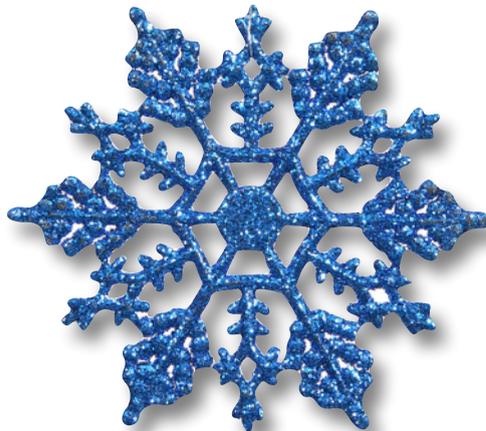
Wednesday, December 20th
A Reflection by Diania Baum
2 Corinthians 4:3-6

3 If there is anything hidden about our message, it is hidden only to someone who is lost. 4 The god who rules this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers. They cannot see the light, which is the good news about our glorious Christ, who shows what God is like. 5 We are not preaching about ourselves. Our message is that Jesus Christ is Lord. He also sent us to be your servants. 6 The Scriptures say, "God commanded light to shine in the dark." Now God is shining in our hearts to let you know that his glory is seen in Jesus Christ.

In Paul's second Letter to the church in Corinth, he writes of the gospel being veiled to those who have been blinded by Satan. He refers to those false apostles who have been preaching untrue doctrine. Paul assures the church that he has kept the right perspective in his preaching by not participating in self-promotion. Even today, Satan is committed to keeping people from seeing the light of Christ's glory.

In Genesis 1:3, God separated the light from darkness and saw that it was good. Light and darkness are used in both the Old and New Testaments as metaphors for good and evil. The light that shines in the hearts of Christians, and brings us knowledge of God in the face of Christ, lifts us out of the power of darkness into the light of the kingdom of the Son of God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the light of your word. Help us to not only live by your light, but share it with those who are in darkness. Amen.



Thursday, December 21st

A Reflection by Byron Godfrey

Sorry, You Are Not on the "Need-to-Know" List
Luke 1:26-31, Matthew 1:18-21

Mary excitedly ran home to tell her mother about her visit from the angel, Gabriel. We can imagine the girl was very close to her mom and had never lied to her. She never dreamed her parents would hear nothing she said after the words, "I'm pregnant."

Of course, Gabriel could have visited Mary's parents, but there is no record. They were not on the angel's "need-to-know" list. Their daughter and her dowery had been pledged. Mary was no longer their responsibility. There was only one name on the list — **Joseph**. And after letting the heartbroken man struggle with "What should I do?" after many missed meals and sleep, Gabriel appeared to him and said, "You know what you *want* to do. Just have the courage to do it. Take Mary as your bride, and do not be afraid!"

So, what if we are not on the "need-to-know" list? If you believe as I do that Luke has recorded Mary's memories faithfully, then we don't *need* Gabriel - Just faith in the word.

An Angel Tells about the Birth of Jesus

Luke 1:26-31

26 One month later God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee **27** with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. **28** The angel greeted Mary and said, "You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you." **29** Mary was confused by the angel's words and wondered what they meant. **30** Then the angel told Mary, "Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, **31** and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus.

The Birth of Jesus

Matthew 1:18-21

18 This is how Jesus Christ was born. A young woman named Mary was engaged to Joseph from King David's family. But before they were married, she learned that she was going to have a baby by God's Holy Spirit. **19** Joseph was a good man and did not want to embarrass Mary in front of everyone. So he decided to quietly call off the wedding. **20** While Joseph was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, the baby that Mary will have is from the Holy Spirit. Go ahead and marry her. **21** Then after her baby is born, name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."



Thursday, December 22nd
A Reflection by CAPT Terry Eddinger
John 3:16-21

Today's Reading: John 3:16-21. *This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.* (3:19)

Yesterday was the winter solstice. It is the day when the angle of the sun causes it to shine along its southernmost trek across the earth. For us in the northern hemisphere, it is the day of the year with the least amount of daylight, or, in other words, the darkest day of the year.

John spoke of darkness and light in today's passage. The pair together is a major theme in John's Gospel, with darkness being bad and light good. Human nature is for one to dwell in darkness. In darkness we lose our way. We can't see what we are doing, nor can we see what others are doing. We are blind. Even worse, we think we are hidden. But thanks to God, we have light in Christ Jesus. This Light shows us the way to God. It exposes our deeds, both our victories and our shortcomings. It makes clear what is real and what isn't. As we approach Christmas, examine yourself in the Light. See the Light. Go to the Light and be washed in His forgiveness.



Tuesday, December 23rd
A Reflection by Nanette Cornwell
Isaiah 40:1-11

*1 "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God.
2 "Speak kindly to Jerusalem;
call out to her, that her warfare has ended,
That her iniquity has been removed,
That she has received of the Lord's hand
Double for all her sins."*

The prophet is buoyant with good news of forgiveness and hope. God's mood is loving, gentle, forgiving, and (say it twice for emphasis) one of comfort, great comfort. A new day is here for God's people.

*3 A voice is calling,
"Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness;
Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.
4 "Let every valley be lifted up,
And every mountain and hill be made low;
And let the rough ground become a plain,
And the rugged terrain a broad valley;
5 Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
And all flesh will see it together;
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

God is doing the impossible, clearing a highway, lifting valleys, flattening mountains, smoothing terrain, removing obstacles, for the coming of a new relationship with His people. His Chosen are to announce it to the world.

*6 A voice says, "Call out."
Then they answered, "What shall I call out?"*

But there is confusion among God's people in Babylon or Persia or Palestine. All they see and touch is poverty and ruin. Call out? Call out what?

*All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.
7 The grass withers, the flower fades,
When the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
Surely the people are grass.*

The Babylonians had everything, but are gone. Now Cyrus has everything. But, he is nothing more than a temporary beauty of a blossoming flower that will wither and blow away. People can be mighty, but not Almighty.

*8 The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.*

Your message to kinsmen and world is God's Word never withers or fails. Cry out that God's almighty power, bringing His forgiveness and love, is for all generations forever.

Continued

*9 Get yourself up on a high mountain,
O Zion, bearer of good news,
Lift up your voice mightily,
O Jerusalem, bearer of good news;
Lift it up, do not fear.
Say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"*

This is your mission, people of God: fear not. On the highest soapbox declare this turning point. Reveal this unalterable, imperishable good news to Jerusalem, Judah, and every nation.

*10 Behold, the Lord God will come with might,
With His arm ruling for Him.
Behold, His reward is with Him
And His recompense before Him.*

*11 Like a shepherd He will tend His flock,
In His arm He will gather the lambs
And carry them in His bosom;
He will gently lead the nursing ewes.*

He will be a Conqueror embodying love for His people as a gentle shepherd cares for his sheep. Almightyness wrapped in love, forgiveness, compassion. Little ones are His, weak, strong, red, yellow, black and white. Your new cry is that this very moment He is bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to earth.

Today would be a perfect day to listen to Part I of Handel's *Messiah*. The music may be over 200 years old, and prophecy over 2,000 years old; but the cry of God's people, of His everlasting mercy and love, embodied in the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus the Christ, is more current than our most recent breath.



Sunday, December 24th
A Reflection by Dr. W. Joel Campbell
Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

What was your journey through Advent like this year? Was it busy and a season where you just checked the next item off of your to-do list? Did it seem much more secular than spiritually focused on waiting for the Christ-child? I hope that no matter what our season was like this year, we will remember that this is just the beginning! We must celebrate the birth of Jesus, and tell the story of Christmas throughout our daily lives. Now that we've journeyed and waited, will we begin 2018 like a people that know: "the grace of God has appeared?" As I always say this time of year, maybe we attended a stressful family gathering, or maybe our season of Advent was the opposite of peace, and we're excited about the calmness a boring frigid January might bring, but hopefully our attitude will be one that reflects Jesus.

It is my prayer that we will be a group of Jesus' followers that live our lives showing His grace to those who we come into contact with. These thoughts always lead to questions. What would this look like for you? What difference did this season make in your life? I hope that 2018 is a year that calls us to be a people who know that our relationship with Christ makes a difference in our lives—the difference that we celebrate and share, not just at Christmas time, but every day of our lives.

Merry Christmas to you and your families! The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all!

Dr. Campbell



The Arrival of the Christ Child

Luke 2:1-20(NRSV)

2 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" 15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Monday, December 25th



Merry Christmas

The Song Heard 'Round the World

Sunday, December 17 at 11:00 AM

A cantata of both familiar and new Christmas carols by Joseph Martin presented by the combined Children and Adult Choirs. A procession of flags. Global Missions Offering will be received in this service

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Global Missions Offering

First Baptist Church will be receiving our CBF Global Missions offering on Sunday, December 17th. One hundred percent of your gift helps sustain the long-term presence of CBF field personnel serving at home and around the world.

Lunchtime Advent Concerts

Bring your friends and co-workers to enjoy a concert and a lunch of homemade soup and sandwich. Concerts begin at 12:10 P.M. An optional lunch is served in the Dining Room at 12:30 for \$6.00.

Wednesday, December 6 - Flute and Guitar Duo

Carols played by Linda Brown and Ken Wilson

Wednesday, December 13 - Olson Vocal Duo

Nathaniel and Julianna Olson with Suzanne Polak, piano, doctoral performance majors at UNC-G School of Music.

Wednesday, December 20 - NC Brass Band Quintet

Brass Quintet directed by Dr. Brian Meixner.