



# BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS



## Grand View Baptist

### The True Meaning Of Christmas Jesus, The Reason For The Season

By Glenda Ward  
McDowell County



Jesus – The True Meaning of Christmas – The Gift of God.

Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus came into this world as a tiny infant born over 2000 years ago. The purpose of Jesus’ birth was to enter into the world and become one of us to deliver us from our sins (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus’ birth was unlike any other. Jesus was born of a virgin woman – He was in human form and born as a Jew. He was subject to God’s law and fulfilled it perfectly. Mary was a young teenager, living in the village of Nazareth and engaged to be married to Joseph, a Jewish carpenter. God’s angel Gabriel was sent to Mary to deliver the news of God’s plan. Mary would become the mother of the coming Messiah. The angel told Mary she would deliver a Son by the power of the Holy Spirit and would name Him JESUS.

The birth of Jesus was a historical event. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a small village about 5 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Jesus’ birth came under the law (Galatians 4:4). Jesus is the second person of the trinity. He was born of a virgin in a lowly stable. He was wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger (a trough used for feeding cattle and livestock). The Baby Jesus was visited by humble shepherds keeping watch over their flock. Later Jesus was visited by the wise men who rejoiced with great joy, and when they saw the young child with his mother, they fell down and worshipped Him. They presented Him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Jesus is not just any person. He is God in the Flesh. As Jesus grew and taught, and what He did for us is tied inseparably to who He is. Jesus is fully human and fully God. Jesus took upon Himself full humanity. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice because, although He was fully human, yet He never sinned. Jesus was subjected to the same temptations and limitations that we are. God’s Son entered into our world so He could display the perfection and holiness through His Work of living a perfectly sinless life and dying on the cross for us who are not perfect and living in a sinful corrupt body so that all who trust in Him would be saved from the righteous judgment of God. God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world could be saved through Him (John3:16-17). Jesus’ birthplace, Bethlehem Ephratah, was prophesied in the Old Testament (Micah 5:1-2). Jesus is preceded by a great prophet who was prophesied in the Old Testament. Esaias told people to prepare to see God work (Isaiah 40:3). John the Baptist used

these words as he challenged people to prepare for the coming Messiah (Matthew 3:3).

Christmas is the time of year when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. The meaning of Christmas is and should be the recognition, appreciation, and honor of the Birth of Jesus, God’s only Son who took possession of our sins upon Himself suffering the punishment we deserve that we could be saved by His saving grace through our faith in Him. Jesus suffered on that cross on Calvary’s Hill, dying in our place for our sins which we chose to commit.

Jesus is the Reason for the Season. Jesus gives meaning to Christmas. Jesus was God in the flesh, perfect, pure, and Holy. He died on the cross and rose from the dead. The True Meaning to Christmas is the celebration of Jesus’ incredible act of love (John 3:16-17). The True meaning of Christmas is the Real Story of God becoming a human being in the person of Jesus Christ. Christmas was necessary because we needed a Savior. Christmas is celebrated each year and the reason we celebrate should be out of gratitude for what God did for us. We remember Jesus’ birth by worshipping Him, being conscious of the poor, and giving to those less fortunate by remembering the gift of Jesus as Jesus gave of Himself.

God loved His own and provided a way “the only way” for us to spend eternity with Him. God reached down His hand and gave His only Son to stand for our sins that we might go free. Jesus took our punishment for our sins by dying on the cross. He paid the price in FULL!!! We are free from God’s condemnation when we accept God’s free gift of love – Jesus Christ. Read Romans 5:8. Through God’s unfolding plan we should be in Thankful appreciation for the Grace and Forgiveness that God has made available to us through His Son “Jesus Christ”, our Lord and Savior. The real meaning of Christmas is rooted in the lives of God’s people.

Who today would know of Mary, Joseph, or Bethlehem if it were not for Jesus?

*Glenda Ward is a member of Grand View Baptist Church in McDowell County. She is the mother of five grown children. Glenda is a Christian writer/author of “Something to Think About” – weekly Christian Articles. She writes Church Programs & Bulletins, VBS Material, Christmas and Easter Programs; all material based on the KJV of the Bible. Also testing the field in tributes, individual memorial writings, etc.*





# What We Believe

Here are some of the essential elements of our faith at the Blue Ridge Christian News:

### God

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He has existed eternally in three persons and chooses to manifest Himself in these three ways: as God the Father, as God the Son, and as God the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal and are one God.  
(Genesis 1:1, 26-27; 3:22; Psalm 90:2; Matthew 28:19; 1 Peter 1:2; and 2 Corinthians 13:14)

### Jesus

Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, who is fully God and fully human in His incarnation. He lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all humanity by dying on a cross. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to heaven and will return again to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.  
(Matthew 1:22-23; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1-5; 14:10-30; Hebrews 4:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 1:3-4; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Timothy 6:14-15; Titus 2:13)

### The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the very Spirit of God, fully divine, manifested in the life of every believer from the moment of salvation. He is equal with the Father and the Son as God. He is present in the world to make men aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. The Christian seeks to live under His daily control.  
(2 Corinthians 3:17; John 16:7-13; 14:16-17; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 3:16; Ephesians 1:13; Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 5:18)

### The Bible

The Bible is the divinely inspired, authoritative, infallible, living and active Word of God to all men. It was written by human authors under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the ultimate source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. In it we find a guideline for right relationship with God and God's creation, and a blueprint for personal, emotional, and spiritual growth.  
(2 Timothy 1:13; 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:2-21; Psalm 119:105, 160; 12:6; Proverbs 30:5)

### Humanity

Humanity is designed and made by God in His image. We have been created as cognitive, moral, ethical, and physical beings and have been equipped by God for both relationship with Him and with one another. Both male and female are gifted by the Creator with characteristics which equip them for the purpose for which they have been created: relationship, dominion, and responsibility. Although God designed us to have fellowship with Him, we became alienated from God through disobedience. As a result, all human beings are born with a sinful nature and choose to sin against God. We are incapable of regaining a right relationship with God through our own efforts.  
(Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8:3-6; Isaiah 53:6; 59:1-2; Romans 3:23; 5:22; Colossians 1:21; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

### Eternity & Eternal Security

Our soul, the essence of our being, was created by God to exist forever. That forever is spent in one of two places: eternally present and in union with God because of His forgiveness and salvation or eternally separated from God because of sin and unbelief. At the moment that our physical body dies, those who are saved are immediately taken to heaven. Those who have rejected God's gift of salvation will spend eternity separated from God in hell. Because God gives man eternal life through Jesus Christ, the believer is secure in that salvation for eternity. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. It is the grace and eternal power of God that gives this security.  
(John 3:16; 5:11-13, 10:29; 1 John 2:25; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:15; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 7:25; 10:10-14; 1 Peter 1:3-5)

### Salvation

Salvation is God's gift of redemption and reconciliation to Himself and is offered freely to all who accept, by faith alone, Jesus Christ as God's only son and receive Him as Lord and Savior. We can never make up for our sin with self-improvement or good works. It is only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God's offer of forgiveness that you can be saved from sin's penalty. Eternal life begins the moment you receive Jesus Christ into your life by faith.  
(Romans 5:1; 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 1:12; 14:6; Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:26)





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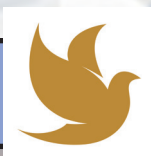
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“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation: that saith unto Zion. Thy God reigneth!”

Isaiah 52:7 KJV



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# Church Directory



## Bear Creek Baptist Church

327 Bear Creek Road  
Bakersville, NC 28705  
[www.bearcreekbaptist.com](http://www.bearcreekbaptist.com)

### Reverend Bruce Cannon

Sunday School 9:45 AM  
Worship Service 10:45 AM  
Discipleship 6:00 PM  
Evening Worship 6:45 PM  
Wednesday Worship 7:30 PM

"For God so loved the world, he gave his only Son..."

## Landis Orthodox Presbyterian Church

4975 US 221  
Marion NC 28972  
(828)-756-7470  
[www.landischurch.org](http://www.landischurch.org)

### Elder Mike Cloy

[opcmikecloy@gmail.com](mailto:opcmikecloy@gmail.com)

Sunday School 10:00 AM  
Worship Service 11:00 AM  
Fellowship Meal Following Worship  
Thursday Bible Study & Prayer 6:30pm

*Come Celebrate the Glory of God in Reverent  
Worship Ps. 96:3; John 17:1*

## Berry Chapel Baptist Church

280 Chapel St.  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
828-765-6590  
[www.berrychapelbaptist.com](http://www.berrychapelbaptist.com)

### Pastor - Steve Williams

Sunday School 9:45 AM  
Worship Service 11:00 AM  
Sunday Evening Care Meal/  
Ministry - 5:30 PM  
Wednesday Evening  
Service 7:00 PM

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And Jesus Christ is Lord!

## The Rock Church

4806 US 64  
Morganton, NC 28655  
Phone: 828-334-3193  
[www.trcmorganton.com](http://www.trcmorganton.com)

### Pastor - Billy Chapman

Sunday Morning - 10 AM  
Sunday Night - 6 PM  
Tuesday Night - 7 PM

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## Grassy Creek Baptist Church

793 Old NC 226 Hwy  
Spruce Pine, NC  
828-765-4620  
[www.grassycreekbc.org](http://www.grassycreekbc.org)

Sunday School 10:00am  
Morning Worship 11:00am  
Sunday evening 6:30pm  
Wednesday:  
J.A.M. (Jesus and Me) 6:30pm  
Mid-week worship 7:00pm  
*"That Mitchell County  
may know Christ"*

## Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church

2187 Jamestown Road  
Morganton, NC  
828-584-8212

### Pastor Steve Beitz

Sabbath (Saturday)  
Bible Study - 9:30 am  
Sabbath Worship - 11:00 am  
Vegetarian Buffet after church  
Wednesday  
Praise, Prayer & Proclaim -  
7:00 pm  
[www.morgantonsda.org](http://www.morgantonsda.org)

## Altapass Baptist Church

3631 Altapass Hwy  
Spruce Pine, NC  
828-765-0660  
[altapassbaptistchurch@ccvn.com](mailto:altapassbaptistchurch@ccvn.com)  
[www.altapassbaptistchurch.org](http://www.altapassbaptistchurch.org)

### Dr. Marcus R. Benfield

Sunday School - 10:00am  
Worship - 11:00am  
Sunday Evening - 7:00pm  
Sunday Youth Program - 7:00pm  
1st & 3rd Sunday  
(Conductors for Christ ages 5-11)  
2nd & 4th Sunday  
(Teen Discovery ages 12-18)  
Wednesday - 7:00pm

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## Plumtree Presbyterian Church

4527 Hwy 19E  
Plumtree, NC 28664  
828-765-6919  
[www.plumtreechurch.com](http://www.plumtreechurch.com)

### Pastor Ryan Bridgeo

[pastor@plumtreechurch.com](mailto:pastor@plumtreechurch.com)

Sunday School 9:45 am  
Worship Service 11:00 am  
Life Groups Tuesday-Thursday evenings, 7:00 pm  
Fusion Youth Wednesday's, 6:30 pm  
Healing Services 2nd Sunday of each month, 6:30 pm

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you  
and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that  
will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you  
ask in my name.

## Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

2396 Enola Road  
Morganton, NC 28655  
(828) 437-4082

[www.pleasanthillbc.church](http://www.pleasanthillbc.church)

### Senior Pastor Dr. Jack Hodges

Sunday School: 9:30 am  
Sunday Worship: 10:30 am  
Sunday Evening: 6:00 pm  
Wednesday Evening 6:00 pm

*"Love All, Reach All, Teach All, Send All"*

## Newland Christian Church

2800 Millers Gap Highway  
Newland, NC 28657  
Phone (828) 260-1404  
[www.newlandchristianchurch.com](http://www.newlandchristianchurch.com)

### Pastor - Phillip Greene

Sunday School: 9:45 am  
Sunday Worship: 11 am  
Sunday Evening Bible Study: 6 pm  
Wednesday Evening Prayer Meeting: 7 pm

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## Burkemont Baptist Church

4668 Burkemont Rd.  
Morganton, NC 28655  
828-437-2357

For more information,  
please visit  
[www.burkemontbaptist.org](http://www.burkemontbaptist.org)

### Dr. Luke A. Lane

8:30am - Early Worship  
9:45am - Sunday School  
11:00am - Worship  
6:00pm - Evening Worship

## Mount Carmel Baptist Church

195 Gouges Creek Rd.  
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## First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine

125 Tappan Street  
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828-765-9411  
[www.sprucepinefbc.com](http://www.sprucepinefbc.com)  
[www.spfbc.blogspot.com](http://www.spfbc.blogspot.com)

### Dr. Rocky Branch Senior Pastor

Sunday School - 9:30 am  
Sunday Worship - 10:45 am  
Sunday Evening - 6:00 pm  
Wednesday Evening - 6:30 pm

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## Pine Branch Baptist Church

48 Church Road  
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### Reverend Bobby Joe Greene

Sunday School • 9:45-10:40am  
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## Marion Seventh-day Adventist Church

188 Ward Dr.  
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### Pastor Tim Sheridan

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Bible Study - 9:15 am  
Sabbath Worship - 10:50 am  
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## Spruce Pine United Methodist Church

11090 Hwy. 226 South  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
[www.sprucepineumc.org](http://www.sprucepineumc.org)  
[spumc3@bellsouth.net](mailto:spumc3@bellsouth.net)  
828-765-7446

### Pastor Richard Schilling

Sunday School - 10:00am  
Sunday Worship - 11:00am  
Choir Wednesday - 7:00pm

The mission of Spruce Pine United  
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# Iron Sharpeneth Iron Proverbs 27:17

## The Collapsing Global Supply Chain

By Britt Gillette

*"For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus."* Revelation 19:10 (NLT)

On November 11, a record 111 container ships were anchored off the coast of two California ports. This broke the previous record set just 20 days earlier. In response, Joe Biden promised to strengthen the resiliency of the supply chain by moving to 24/7 operations at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. The Biden administration is concerned about the Christmas shopping season and public opinion in an era of product shortages and rising inflation. But this is about more than just making sure shelves are fully stocked for Christmas. The problems involving bottlenecks in these ports are a symptom of a much larger systemic breakdown – a breakdown that threatens to collapse the entire global economic system

### A Broken Supply Chain

Despite the optimistic forecasts of politicians, the broken supply chain won't repair itself any time soon. Its problems will carry on well into 2022 and beyond. President Biden can push for 24/7 port operations, but he knows this won't fix the problem. These promises are nothing but a public relations campaign to make voters think he's "doing something." Containers cover every square inch of these ports. Before new containers can be offloaded from ships, trucks, and trains need to move the existing containers to new locations. The nationwide shortage of truck drivers makes that a tall order. And the problem isn't confined to California ports alone. Supply chain problems and shortages plague almost every industry and factory in the world, covering a wide range of products such as bacon, semiconductors, toilet paper, aluminum, pet food, juice boxes, and a host of other items. Why is this? And what does it mean going forward?

### COVID Shock

When COVID first struck in early 2020, the global economy came to an abrupt halt. We're now experiencing the trauma from that high-speed crash – and the damage is massive. The sudden collapse in global demand led to negative oil futures prices in April 2020. This caused energy producers around the world to cap production. Now that demand is returning, producers can't simply increase production overnight. So demand has increased much faster than supply. Fast forward to late 2021, and we're facing the consequences.

Natural gas prices in the United Kingdom are triple what they were just five months ago. Meanwhile, Vladimir Putin is holding much of Europe hostage as they've allowed themselves to become dependent on his energy supplies. In China, coal generates 50% of the nation's electricity, and coal is becoming harder and harder to a source. All this means one thing – higher energy prices, and higher costs for businesses and consumers. It also means energy shortages and rolling blackouts. These energy disruptions result in additional production shutdowns and manufacturing bottlenecks, further compounding global supply chain problems.

### The Whole System Could Break Down

The constant disruptions from COVID shutdowns, energy disruptions, and shortages of key manufacturing inputs create a vicious feedback loop that only makes the problem worse. For example, let's take the following example: Widget A + Widget B = Widget C

What happens when an electricity blackout at an overseas factory leads to a shortage of Widget A? The answer is clear. Widget C can't be made. Since Widget A is a key component necessary to make Widget C, no one can make Widget C. Now the world has a shortage of both Widget A and Widget C. And this too makes the problem worse.

Imagine this scenario:

Widget C + Widget D = Widget E (the key component in manufacturing Widget A)

In this case, Widget E is absolutely necessary to make Widget A, and the world is experiencing a shortage of Widget A. The obvious solution is to produce more Widget A's. However, since Widget A is necessary to make Widget C, and Widget C is necessary to make Widget E, Widget E can't be made.

Can you see how the current supply chain disruptions could morph into a catastrophic failure? This type of destabilization could result in widespread shortages of everything, including food. This will lead to massive social unrest. As the old adage says, "Fear not the angry man, but the hungry man." Hungry people launch revolutions. Because of this, they're a threat to those in power. So what's the best way for politicians and heads of state to distract from such problems? History says it's war. War is often the result of trade disruptions, shortages, and/or resource scarcity. This means we live in extremely dangerous times.

### The End Times Approach

For the moment, these supply chain issues may seem like minor inconveniences in your day-to-day life. But they illustrate just how fragile our global economic system is. Just-in-time delivery provides an efficient, cost-effective global supply chain system when everything works the way it's supposed to. But when unexpected events take place, the whole system falls apart.

What happens when grocery stores experience more than just a sporadic shortage of specific products? What happens when food itself is in short supply? When that happens, we'll also find out how fragile society itself is. Imagine if New York City (or any large urban area) ran out of food. How do you think people will react? What do you think politicians will do to divert attention from such a crisis?

The world is already on the verge of a major military conflict. Right now, Russia is gathering troops on the border of Ukraine. China is running daily combat exercises to prepare for an invasion of Taiwan. Israel regularly bombs targets in Syria – a nation where Russia, Turkey, and Iran all have an active military presence.

While people long for a return to "normal," it won't happen. We're in the last waning days of a dying world order. Soon, we'll have a catastrophic breakdown of the current global system. The world will erupt into war just like Europe did in 1914. When the dust settles from World War III, a new world order will emerge. What will it look like? I believe it will look like the one outlined in Chapters 6 thru 13 of the Book of Revelation.

Why? Because Jesus said so. He said when you see all the signs He and the prophets said to look for, you should look up (Luke 21:28). We see those signs now. Their convergence tells us His return is close at hand. Some of those signs are:

- Israel Back in the Land (Jeremiah 23:7-8; Ezekiel 39:28; Isaiah 11:12; Psalm 107:3; Ezekiel 20:34; Isaiah 11:11-12)
- The Jewish People in Control of Jerusalem (Luke 21:24-28)
- The Gospel Preached Throughout the World (Matthew 24:14)
- An Increase in Travel and Knowledge (Daniel 12:4)
- The arrival of the Exponential Curve (Matthew 24:3-8)
- Israel Surrounded by Enemies (Psalm 83:4; Psalm 83:12; Ezekiel 11:14-17; Ezekiel 35:10)
- Israel's Exceedingly Great Army (Ezekiel 37:10; Zechariah 12:6; Zechariah 12:8)
- The Rise of a United Europe (Daniel 2, Daniel 7, Revelation 17)
- The Rise of a Global Government (Revelation 13:7-17)
- The State of Mankind (2 Timothy 3:1-4)
- Denial of the Signs (2 Peter 3:3-4)
- And many more...

So what does this mean? It means now is the time to point out these signs to others and warn them of what's coming. If you've been waiting to share the Gospel with someone, don't wait any longer. Jesus is coming, and He's coming soon. The signs are all around us.

What do you think? Will the current supply chain problems will get worse before they get better? What will the ultimate outcome be?  
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# The Orchard at Altapass

## Renovation Begins at the Orchard at Altapass

By Kate Groff  
Mitchell County



The renovation has begun on the Olin Hefner Pavilion at the Orchard at Altapass. The first part of our “Bringing Back the Music” project is the construction of a ramp connecting the side walkway of the red barn to the pavilion. This will eliminate walking into the N.C. state road to get from one building to the other. Also, at a width of 5', the ramp will provide smooth wheelchair accessibility between the two venues. Kameron Combs and It’SawGood Renovation, LLC from Marion are working on this first portion of the Phase I construction.

The entire project, a two-year plan to enclose the now roofed only area and add a 10' deck on the field side, got a slow start this past year, as construction costs skyrocketed and availabilities slowed. A grant from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina offset the cost of the new walkway. A matching grant from the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area will allow us to begin work on the deck addition later this season. When fully completed, the pavilion will be enclosed, feature a deck across the back that will showcase the spectacular orchard views, and be connected to the red barn by the walkway.



Beth Hilton, the Orchard’s executive director, said, “The restrictions brought about by the pandemic forced us to focus our energies on our mission, to protect, preserve, and educate. The “Bringing Back the Music” project opens the red barn for more educational exhibits and activities for the entire family. It will provide a dedicated space for heritage music and other cultural events pivotal in the history of this region.”

The Orchard at Altapass, 1025 Orchard Road near Spruce Pine at mm 328.3 on the Blue Ridge Parkway, is a not-for-profit working small batch heirloom apple orchard, educational, and music venue. We reopen May 2022. For information about Orchard programs and opportunities, visit [www.altapassorchard.org](http://www.altapassorchard.org).

*Kate Groff is the Programs Coordinator for the Toe River Arts Council.*



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By Joe Sturz  
Shenandoah, Virginia

God's people are under increasing pressure today (II Cor. 4:7-13) as the Lord works to prepare their character (Romans 5:2-5; James 1:3-4) for the next great revival and renewal. (Joel 2:28-29; Habakkuk 2:1-4; 3:17-19; Acts 3:19-21).

For us to be renewed we need to pray and:

- look for guidance through His Word as we ask, seek, and knock (Proverbs 3:5-6; Luke 11:9-10; II Timothy 3:16-17),
- go deeper in repentance (II Chronicles 7:14-15; Psalm 51:1-12),
- seek the empowering of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; Romans 8:11-14; Eph. 5:18-20) for increased gifts and graces (Romans 12:6-10; I Cor. 12:3-13; Galatians 5:22-26).

So let us commit our way to the Lord and cast all our anxieties on Him then wait in faith as the Lord works everything out (Psalm 37:1-11; I Peter 5:7) for our good and His glory (Romans 8:28; I Cor. 10:31). Let us deepen our commitment to see the Lord bring a great renewal to our land as we pray His promises and act on His guidance to be part of the means of bringing it about (II Peter 1:10).

Brother Joe "praying and doing" Sturz (Wed., November 17. A true believer is one who accepts and acts on the Good News of the Gospel, which is: Jesus Christ the innocent one, suffered and died on the cross to satisfy the Holy God's just punishment for the sins of His people ( John 10:14-18; I Peter 1:18-23). With His justice satisfied by punishing His Son instead of sinners He could justly grant sinners mercy and forgiveness and so secure a heavenly inheritance for those that believe and follow Him (I Cor. 15:1-4; Eph. 1:10-14).

When you repent of your sin, you receive His forgiveness (I John 1:9). Then you must trust in Christ alone for salvation (Romans 10:9-10) and live for Him out of gratitude for saving you (Acts 1:8; Philippians 3:13-14). Hear or read the Bible daily (Acts 17:11). Be baptized and attend a local Bible-believing church. (Acts 2:38-41, 47). While attending church you will be equipped to share your faith with others and apply God's Law word in every area of your life (Acts 2:46-47; Ephesians 4:12-16). Thereby becoming one of Christ's kingdom builders. (Matthew 6:30-34).

If you have already received Christ but are not living for Him as you should then now is the time to truly repent of your sin of backsliding, rededicate your life to Him, change your ways and become active in a local church again. (Hebrews 10:25).

Joe Sturz, a Christian counselor at Sturz Christian Counseling Service now living in Page County, [www.sturzchristiancounseling.com](http://www.sturzchristiancounseling.com) ministering to people with problems and sharing what the Lord has taught me through: His Word, my mistakes, failures and successes and 47+ years as a Biblical counselor applying all of the Bible to all of life in daily messages on Facebook and email.


For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11




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Dreaming of a Right Christmas

By Steve Williams  
Mitchell County

Are you desiring a Right Christmas this year? Many people say they want a Right Christmas just like they say they want a Right Relationship With God but it seems they really don't because of what they do. We want Christmas white and bright. We want the tree, the decorations, the lights, the eggnog, and the presents. We want everyone to be happy. We want to be able to get and give plenty. We want peace and joy to abound. In reality, Christmas often turns into a real hassle. You are rushed and pushed for time. You spend money you don't have for people you don't even like to acquire things they don't even want or need. Christmas is filled with many Distractions. Between the Personalities, the Presents and the Practices, it is easy to forget the real reason for this day. In fact, many of the things we do and love so are nothing more than ancient pagan rituals and symbols hijacked by the Christian church.

In our struggle to get it right, we often get it dead wrong and end up making ourselves and others miserable. I truly believe God wants us to get it right. I believe that He is not so interested in our having a WHITE Christmas as He is interested in our having a RIGHT Christmas. So, how can we have a right Christmas? What do we need to understand and change in our lives that will allow Christmas to be a time of blessing and wonder instead of being a time of stress and tension?

So Just How Can We Have A Right Christmas this year. 1st Remember Just Who's Birthday We Are Celebrating. Jesus Christ the Son of God and the Savior of sinners. The one who was born to make a way to heaven for all people that will believe in Him and accept Him to be their personal Savior. 2nd Remember the Gift that has been given. We spend much time searching for just the right gift and God the Father has given to us His only Son Jesus Christ to be that perfect gift that lives within our heart and lives forever. 3rd Remember He's the Gift that Keeps on Giving all year long. See The Spirit of God that lives within us is there to Convict us when we are doing, acting or thinking, or living wrong. Comfort us when Hurts and Sorrows come into our lives and is Calling us to share with others what He has done for us and showing others His Love for them. 4th Remember to Worship Him for who He is. He is your Wonderful Counselor. You can be sure God has never had and never will give you the wrong Counsel. You worship Him because He's your Mighty God. See we face things every day that only a mighty God can handle. You Worship Him because He's your Everlasting Father, who has always been and will always be there for us no matter what. You Worship Him because He is The Prince of Peace. He can Give Peace in the Middle of a Storm, "At the brink of a Disaster" " In The Darkest Hour" "When everything is falling apart" "When there seems to be no Hope. He will give you a Peace that passes all understanding. The Peace that God gives is not the absence of trouble but is rather the confidence that He is there with you in the midst of trouble. So if you dreaming of a Right Christmas put Christ where He belongs this Christmas Season.

- Words of Wisdom:
- God is in the details of Christmas. N/A
  - Don't let the past steal your present. This is the message of Christmas: We are never alone. Taylor Caldwell
  - Christmas is the day that holds all time together. Alexander Smith
  - God never gives someone a gift they are not capable of receiving. If he gives us the gift of Christmas, it is because we all have the ability to understand and receive it. N/A
- Words of Humor:
- Thanks for the electric guitar you gave me for Christmas," little Chris Cody said to his uncle the first time he saw him after the holidays. "It's the best present I ever got." "That's great," said his uncle. "Do you know how to play it?" "Oh, I don't play it," the little fellow said. "My mom gives me a dollar a day not to play it during the day and my dad gives me five dollars a week not to play it at night."

Steve Williams is the Pastor of Berry Chapel Baptist Church in Spruce Pine.

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# High County Prison Ministry

By Jody Griffin  
Avery and Mitchell Counties



*“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14)*

In this most significant of all combined “We’re Expecting” Notifications and “Gender Reveal Parties” there is Truth for those who struggle to believe that God could love them because of things they have done.

This prophetic promise might be described as one that is ‘pregnant’ with possibilities...(See what we did there?) It represents a look forward for the one receiving the promise, towards a miracle of God that will literally change everything! For upon the arrival of this promised child, God would be forever present with humanity.

Immanuel, literally “God with us” is the fulfillment of the Promise of God for all people. In the context of those who are incarcerated, it means that there is no barrier caused by one’s actions that fall beyond the reach of God who can redeem. (Thanks Be To God!) Might not seem like much to some (though it most definitely IS!) but the reality of God’s Presence with us in all situations means that we are never alone.

Living in this Truth brings us the potential to evaluate our present reality with fresh understanding. If God is with us when we are faced with temptation, then we have everything we need to resist it. If God is with us when we fall, then we have the Love and Grace of God personified in Jesus Christ to deliver us from our sins and set us free. If God is with us when we strive to live as those who reflect God’s Presence, then we will be known by the fruit of God’s Spirit within us.



Luke’s description of the events immediately following this child’s ‘arrival’ make it clear that the response for those who would receive and believe was pure JOY! And it was JOY that could not be contained! It was JOY that simply had to be shared with everyone!

Of course, there is also evidence of some who received such wonderful news, not with JOY. Rather, the news of the arrival of the Promise of God was received as a threat. The evil that would be visited upon innocent babies under two years old and their parents upon the sudden loss of their sons would be the result of the backlash from powers of darkness. This backlash of fear-driven by the selfish desire to preserve power and control would challenge the JOY, but it could never, would never, WILL NEVER overtake the JOY that comes in knowing Jesus as the Savior of the world!

It is the privilege of the Chaplain to remind the incarcerated and their loved ones, as well as the staff who serve the correctional institution and their families, the contract workers and volunteers, and everyone else the Chaplain can possibly find, that there is a reason for us all to rejoice and sing, “JOY to the World! The Lord is come!” Because nothing can separate us from His Love!

Thank you for praying that the JOY of Christmas can be found behind the walls and within the gates this year. And thank you so very much for your faithful support that allows a Community Funded Chaplain to be there sharing the JOY that Jesus brings! Merry Christmas!

*Jody Griffin is pastor of Central Baptist Church in Spruce Pine and Community Funded Chaplain at Avery-Mitchell Correctional Institution.*

*And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Luke 2:12*



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Life Lessons

By Doug Harrell  
Mitchell County

As I write this Life Lessons my mind is on the coming Christmas Season and all that goes with that, but especially the impact of all that goes with it. The birth of Jesus and the impact that has had upon the world. There has never been an event that had such a lasting effect on mankind as the birth of the Christ Child.

As we go into Christmas 2021 I think about how it was at Christmas in 1950, I was seven years old and while I don't recall specifics, I do remember the excitement that surrounded the occasion. I remember mother making cookies and leaving them out for Santa to eat when he came down the chimney with the gifts he would be bringing. I remember the many times I had looked at the Sears Catalog, as I sat in the outhouse that was our toilet at that time and dreaming about the fancy things in that big dream book. There was no such thing as Black Friday back then! Our only outing was to go to Johnson City for a little shopping trip and to have lunch at one of my Dad's cousin's restaurants. This was truly once a year occasion. The road to Johnson City at that time was still a gravel road across the Iron Mountain and I still remember that the car we drove had a gear shift in the floor with a red knob on the shifter. Why that was such a big deal, I don't know except that I have always had a love for anything with wheels!

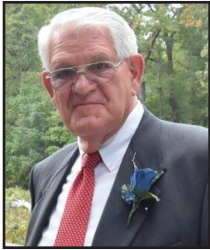
I remember going out with Dad and getting a jack pine Christmas tree from up in the hollow across from the barn and bringing that tree in. We nailed a wooden plank on the bottom of it so it would stand up and mother made popcorn which we strung on with needle and thread to make popcorn roping that we put on the tree along with a few ornaments that she made by hand. The highlight of decorating was to put on a pack of tinsel that she had purchased. Things sure have changed over the years but the one constant is the reason for the season.

Yes, we had Santa Clause, and we had a stocking, in fact, I still have that stocking that mother made me many, many years ago. Our stocking would have a few pieces of candy, maybe an orange and some nuts, but that was a big deal. There would be a gift under the tree when we got up. We had a dairy farm so we always got up early anyway but on Christmas day it was because we children wanted to get up, not because that was just time to get up, excitement filled the air, to say the least.

One of the biggest blessings of my life has been the fact that even though we had Santa, mother made sure that we knew the real reason for the season. We went to church to see the Christmas Play, sang Christmas Carols and there was no such thing as happy holidays, it was Merry Christmas to all. I remember the Christmas Plays at school and the singing of carols there as well. It was a true season of rejoicing to say the least.

As we go into this Christmas 2021 I pray that each of you will truly remember the reason for the season, that you will take time to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, and that you will teach these things to your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. There is nothing wrong with getting and giving gifts, remember the greatest gift ever given to mankind. The birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, the new covenant that His blood created for each of us that we may have our sins washed away by the blood He was willing to shed on the cross for each of us. May your Christmas be blessed and your life an example for all those you come in contact with at the celebrations you attend. May your life be like the Christmas Lights you will be seeing, may you be a light that lets others see Jesus in you.

Doug Harrell is a life-long resident of Mitchell County, Owner of Harrell Hill Farms, Inc, a member of Bear Creek Baptist Church.



The Inspiring Word

By Terry Cheek Th.D.  
McDowell County

The thesis of Psalm 50 can be called "The Acceptable Sacrifice" and it is written to proclaim the coming incarnate birth, life, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. We began our look into this amazing Psalm last month and we will continue until we cover the final word of the final verse. For December let's look at just a couple of verses, Psalm 50:7-8, read with me.

"Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me."

The Lord speaks plainly as He proclaims shama' which translates in English is to hear. Yet shama' means much more than to simply listen. Shama' means to listen with the intention to obey. The Lord tells us to listen and obey Him. He proclaims this not to a general audience, but to His people. In the text, He speaks to Israel. In context, the Lord speaks to all His people, including His adopted, who believe in Christ by Grace and through Faith. He tells us if we listen and obey, He will speak. The Lord will converse with us. How long has it been since you took time to hear the Lord, obey the Lord and have a conversation with the Lord? It is simple. Open your Bible, pray for understanding, allow it to speak to your heart, and listen to it. Next obey it. Then take time to reach up to the Lord through prayer, repent, renew, revive, and seek restoration. Every saint of God needs these daily. I know this because of the next few words. God tells us "I will testify against thee". If we listen to and hear God speak he will tell us our faults and failures. Every one of God's people has faults. Remember Isaiah 64:6 "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags; we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." Yet, in this condition God doesn't disown us, He says He is "even thy God." Folks you're not going to find a better Christmas present this holiday season. A proper relationship with God through His son Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is a relationship that has a guarantee to never go wrong. But we're not finished.

The Lord not only shows Grace but Mercy also. Israel spent a long time going through the motions of worship while their heart was far from God. He tells them He will not hold this false worship against them. Let's be honest for a moment. How often do we go through the motions of worship? We bow for prayer, we open the hymnal and sing along, we open our Bible and follow along with the pastor or preacher, while our heart and mind are somewhere else. I'm not trying to beat up anyone but if we all are honest, we will say that's me, Lord. That is false worship in God's eyes. As much as God hates false worship, He has mercy on His people.

Wow, Grace and Mercy are two gifts our God has for us this Christmas. As we think about the incarnate birth of Christ we can also think about the Grace and Mercy that is offered despite our sinfulness.

Until we meet again, in person or print, may God keep you firmly in His grip!

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Terry Cheek is the Executive Director and broadcaster of The Inspiring Word media ministry. You can contact Terry by email at theinspiringword@gmail.com Or by visiting www.theinspiringword.org





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# First Baptist of Marshall

## Humor

By Buddy Freeman  
Madison County



A minister gave an unusual sermon one day using a peanut to make several important points about the wisdom of God in nature. One of the members greeted him at the door and said, “Very interesting, Reverend. We learned a lot today from a nut.”

Church pews never skid into a ditch, smash against a telephone pole, or get tagged for speeding. They are a safe place to be on Sunday!

Mother: Aunt Mathilda won’t kiss you with that dirty face. Boy: That’s what I figured.

“Dear Dad: Let me hear from you more often, even if it's only a five or ten.”

Father: Well, son, what did you learn in school today? Son: I learned to say, “Yes sir,” and “No sir,” and “Yes, ma’am,” and “No, ma’am.” Father: Really? Son: Yeah!

Nowadays you’ll find almost everything in the average American home.... except the family.

- Cowboy 10 Commandments:
1. Just one God.
  2. Put nothin’ before God.
  3. Watch yur mouth.
  4. Git yerself to Sunday meetin,
  5. Honor yer Ma & Pa.
  6. No killin.
  7. No follin’ around with another feller’s gal.
  8. Don’t take what ain’t yers.
  9. No tellin’ tales or gossipin’,
  10. Don’t be hankerin’ fer yer buddy’s stuff.

Dr Buddy Freeman is the former pastor of the First Baptist Church of Marshall, NC.

*And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew 2:11*

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# New Writer

## Go, See, Do!!!

By Alex Cummings  
Burke County



Go, see, do was our theme in motorsports to take on an adventure. We were traveling months on end and seeing the backroads of America and on off days, we would always pursue an adventure. When your hundreds, if not thousands of miles from home and you have an off day, what are you going to do? Lay around in a hotel room?

This same motto has now trickled over into my everyday life 10 years later but in a much different context. Instead of traveling the country on my next adventure, I’m spreading the word of Jesus on every avenue. After traveling the country for nearly a decade, I have come to realize the US is not the powerhouse Christian nation it once was and I feel it’s our calling to change that, TODAY!

“Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too”. (Philippians 2:4)

### The US is No Longer a Christian Nation

In a 2019 Pew Research study, 65% of adults said they were Christian whereas 26% said they were unaffiliated. When you look back at the same study but from 2009, you see that 77% of American’s identified as Christian and only 17% unaffiliated.

Some may read that and say “WOW”, 65% is still a large number but let’s also consider the false pretense that many people consider themselves Christians but are not practicing it daily. One can simply open their eyes and see how people are treated, manipulated, used, and so on to see that America is not what it says it is.

If you have children, the scariest thought is the future of Christianity in America. In 2019, a Gallup poll found that 33% of 20-year-olds in the US identified as nonreligious which is drastically up from 13% in 2002. At the same time, Gallup also found that weekly church attendance is dramatically down by 22-year-olds with 39% attendance in 2002 and now only 26% in 2019. This trend of Church attendance actually goes down with only 19% of 24-year-olds attending weekly Church in 2019 before it starts to upward trend again.

### Luke and the Lost Sheep

Luke 15:1-7 is a parable in which Jesus tells us of a lost sheep to express how the Kingdom of God is accessible to all, even those who stray away from God’s path. In this parable, God is a shepherd who has 100 sheep but one goes astray. In Luke 15:4 Jesus asks “*What will he do? Won’t he leave the 99 others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it?*”

Then in Luke 15:5-6 Jesus states “*and when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’*”

In the same way, God will rejoice when a sinner returns to him. It is our duty, fellow brothers and sisters, as Christians to obey His word and do the same. It is our duty, to share the word of God with others who may have strayed away or were never introduced to His word in the first place.

### The US is our NEW Mission Field

Jesus when teaching, typically used parables to help teach people as much as He could. One that stands out the most right now is the parable of the growing seed, Mark 4:26-29.

In this parable, Mark 4:26, Jesus says “*The Kingdom of God is like a farmer who scatters seed on the ground*”. Seeds grow silently night and day; God works relentlessly to prepare people to be transformed by His grace. Even though we can’t physically see this transition, we must know that God is working diligently to bring them to a place where they realize their need for Him.

Just as a farmer casts out seeds to grow their garden, we as Christians need to do the same with the word of God to grow our ministries. The more seeds we cast, the more roots that are developed, the more harvest God can reap. He has the power to grant new life and spiritual growth.

With the statistics pointed out earlier, the new mission field has changed from international missions to domestic missions. Before we can change the world, we need to change right here at home.

### A Glimmer of Hope

On September 23, 2021, the Baptist Press published an article titled “‘Fill the Tanks’ Brings in 1,600 Baptisms in North Carolina”. 700 NC Baptist Churches committed to ‘Fill the Tank’ from the coast to the mountains to celebrate new life in Christ.

Hopefully, this is just the beginning and together, we can bring Christianity back to not just NC but the entire US. So, the next time you're out, make it a mission to spread the word of God to just one person, if you do this every day for an entire year, you will have touched 365 people and if just 100 of us do this, we’ll touch 36,500 people in one year. So go out into your community, see those who may need to hear about Jesus, and do by spreading the word of God as He intended!

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Alex Cummings is an NC transplant from the northern woods of Upstate NY and has lived in NC for the last 13 years with the love of his life Krista and two beautiful daughters. The Cummings Clan resides in beautiful Morganton, NC, and attends Pleasant Hill Baptist Church. Alex is the marketing manager for a SaaS technology company - HPA, A Cognizant Company.



# First Baptist Nebo

Poem  
God's Healing Love  
By Jackie Denton  
McDowell County

*Jesus how I love you,  
From the depth of my heart, I do.  
And, oh, how much I thank you,  
For all, you've brought me through.*

*You've always been there for me,  
This now, God, I know.  
I just didn't fully realize  
How far your blood would flow.*

*It reached me at a time  
When I was deep in sin.  
You opened up your arms  
And said that I could enter in.*

*But God, you owe me nothing!  
It is I who owe you all!  
Just when you think you're stand-  
ing,  
You see how far you can fall.*

*He said I had to change my heart,  
From black to purest white.  
I must turn away from the past,  
And live for Him each day and  
night.*

*Unworthy as I knew I was,  
I took His word into my heart.  
I accepted Jesus as my Savior,  
Now in Heaven no more to part.*

*Will you take Him as your Savior?  
He wants to save your soul.  
To be with you in Glory,  
Away from Satan and his hold.*

*He's coming back to get us.  
To take us up above.  
There we'll be with our loved ones,  
And live in God's eternal love.*

Jackie Denton is a member of Nebo First Baptist Church. I have 3 daughters, (two living..one deceased), 4 grandchildren. I recently made a solo car trip to Washington state and back to see my first great-grandchild!! As we deal with all the things going on in the world ... just remember...God is in control.



# Foundation Forward - Founding Fathers and other Influencing Citizens

How They Served Our Country—Abraham Clark  
By David Streater, Ph.D.  
Burke County



This is an American history educational moment of those who made a difference during the Revolutionary War era and how they served our Country.

Abraham Clark was born into a modest farming family on February 15, 1726. As a youth in poor health, he was not able to perform farm work. Even though Abraham had a limited education due to his parent's meager income, he excelled in math, leading him to be a surveyor. Later, he became an attorney and took pride in representing the indigent. During the mid-1700s, Clark served as a New Jersey legislator. Afterward, he was a high sheriff for the English Crown.

Abraham replaced an incumbent congressional delegate who was against independence. Even though Clark was a patriot, he opposed the United States Constitution until the Bill of Rights was included. Regarding the Declaration of Independence and the Revolutionary War, Clark wrote, "We can die but once. It is gone so far that we must now be a free independent State or a conquered Country".

During the Revolutionary War, the British retaliated against Clark for signing the Declaration of Independence. As revenge, his two sons were incarcerated as prisoners of war in deplorable conditions while being tortured. After the War, Clark resumed practicing law and politics.

As a Congressman, Abraham recommended the word "Liberty" be on United States coins. Other legislators were in favor of having presidential pictures. As a tribute to Clark, Congress approved his idea, and to this day all United States coins have "Liberty" printed on them.

In 1794, at the age of 68, Abraham Clark died at his birthplace of Roselle, New Jersey, from a sunstroke. Because of his love for America, Clark's epitaph reads, "He loved his country, and adhered to her cause, in the darkest hours of her struggles against oppression".

Please visit your Charters of Freedom setting in most western North Carolina counties. A Charters of Freedom setting consists of the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. They are on permanent display analogous to the Charters of Freedom in the National Archives, Washington, DC. Please visit our website (ChartersofFreedom.com) to learn more about our existing settings.

All teachers are encouraged to contact Dr. Streater for information and complementary student education materials to enhance experiential field trips to a Charter of Freedom settings. Everyone is welcome and urged to obtain a personalized engraved legacy paver for placement at their local Charters of Freedom setting. Please contact Dr. Streater (david.streater@gmail.com) for engraved legacy paver information and complementary educational materials.

Dr. David Streater is the director of education for Foundation Forward. He is a retired college instructor and administrator; and a retired probation and parole officer/administrator. David is a criminologist who has an acute history interest, served in the Navy, and is a resident of Burke County, NC.



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-H.O. Hirt, ERIE Founder*



## Bear Creek Baptist Church

By Bruce Cannon  
Mitchell County



*"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." (Isaiah 9:2)*

Merry Christmas everyone! I absolutely love everything about Christmas! I love the music at Christmas! I love the trees with all of their lights because they speak to me of the light of the world. I love the giving of gifts because that reminds me of the greatest gift ever given. I love the goodwill among people! I love the special services in the Churches! And all of this is because of a Baby being born 2000 years ago. How profound of an effect He had, and still has, upon people!

The Lord's gift to us makes me think of what I would give to others if I could and what I want others to have.

- Peace. I wish for all of my friends and family peace...peace with each other and more importantly peace with our Lord. I wish for everyone a personal relationship with Christ because He is our peace. It is a fruit generated within by the Holy Spirit as we follow His leadership for our life. Jesus said in John 14:27, *"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."* I pray that when problems arise we can hear the voice of the Savior saying, "I'm here! I will see you through!"

- Joy. I wish for all of my friends and family joy. There is so much hurt, anger, and frustration in the world. Families fighting with each other; neighbors who won't talk with each other; turmoil and hatred abound. I wish everyone could know joy! Joy is a fruit of the Spirit also. It comes as we see things from Christ's perspective, as we trust Him with the attitudes and actions of others and believe that He can fight our battles and work in our circumstances. Joy does not come in the abundance of things we possess but from the knowledge of knowing that God loved us so much that He gave His Son for our salvation; that the King of the world died for us. That should pick us up from whatever feeling of discouragement we may have and cause profound joy to well up in our hearts!

- Love. Most importantly, I wish for everyone to love...true Christian (agape) love. I wish everyone can know Christ's love for them and have true Christian love for each other. The love of which I speak is a forgiving love and a giving love. It is the kind of love that looks beyond others' faults and failings and seeks to restore them no matter what has taken place. It's that love that took Christ to the Cross.

As you go through the next weeks leading up to Christmas Day, think about these things. You are loved with an unbelievable, unfathomable love. If you have not accepted Christ as your Savior, let Him into your heart. He will make all the difference in the world in your life this Christmas. If you do know Him already, seek to make Christmas all about Him. Don't get caught up in all of the commercialism that will be so prevalent. Rather, meditate on all that the Lord did when He left Heaven's glory to come to earth. Think about the sacrifice He made when He traded a throne for a manger and the joys of Heaven for the hatred of men. Sense just how much love He has for you. See it in what He did to pay the price for our sins. Where sin brought to man, love brought the Savior! Remember, He resurrected from the grave and now sits on the right hand of the Father making intercession for you. Feel the love? Now, have a Merry Christmas knowing and thinking about these truths!

*Rev. Bruce Cannon currently serves as the Senior Pastor of Bear Creek Baptist Church in Bakersville. Formerly he served as Director of Missions for the Bladen Baptist Association and has served on the General Board of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.*

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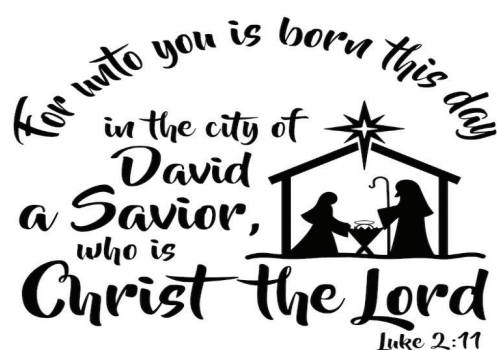
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# Snow Hill Baptist Church

## Religious Exemption Letter

By Dean Honeycutt  
Mitchell County



Several people have asked me about requesting religious exemption from the COVID vaccine. Here is an example of a letter that has been used for exemption. Be specific in your request.

To whom it may concern,

(your name and D.O.B.) is requesting an exemption from all coronavirus vaccines based on faith and religious convictions. I am requesting exemption from the vaccine just as one would request an exemption under NC G.S.130A-157. Religious exemption and the North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Act.

If the bona fide religious beliefs of an adult or the parent, guardian, or person in loco parentis of a child are contrary to the immunization requirements contained in this Part, the adult or the child shall be exempt from the requirements. Upon submission of a written statement of the bona fide religious beliefs and opposition to the immunization requirements, the person may attend the college, university, school, or facility without presenting a certificate of immunization.

Also Under the North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Act, employers are not authorized to mandate immunization for those who object to immunization on religious grounds, except where it is necessary for the protection of the health or safety of others.

(Individuals who are vaccinated can spread the virus to others and are not guaranteed protection from Covid 19. Therefore, the Covid vaccination could not guarantee the health or safety of others.)

(12) Nothing in this or any other provision of this Article shall be deemed to authorize or require a medical examination, immunization, or treatment for those who object thereto on religious grounds, except where such is necessary for the protection of the health or safety of others. (1973, c. 295, s. 5; 1991 (Reg. Sess., 1992), c. 1021, s. 2; 2011-366, s. 8.)

95-151. Discrimination.

No employer, employee, or any other person related to the administration of this Article shall be discriminated against in any work, procedure, or employment by reason of sex, race, ethnic origin, or by reason of religious affiliation. (1973, c. 295, s. 26.) (Article 16 Occupational Safety and Health Act North Carolina)

Please do not discriminate against me.

The Word of God instructs believers in all manner of life. The believer who has a conviction about this vaccine would and should refuse to take it just as they would any drug that is prohibited. Not only for their own safety but for the safety and wellbeing of their family. A Christian must have a conscience without reproach before God.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (KJV 1900)

*"19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."*

Acts 24:16 (KJV 1900)

*"16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."*

1 Corinthians 8:7 (KJV 1900)

*"7 Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled."*

Daniel 1:8 (KJV 1900)

*"8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself."*

XVII. Religious Liberty 9/1/2016 Southern Baptist Convention > The Baptist Faith and Message <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp> 5/5 God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it. Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others. Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render local obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. The state has no right to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind. The state has no right to impose taxes for the support of any form of religion. A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power. Genesis 1:27; 2:7; Matthew 6:6-7,24; 16:26; 22:21; John 8:36; Acts 4:19-20; Romans 6:1-2; 13:1-7; Galatians 5:1,13; Philippians 3:20; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; James 4:12; 1 Peter 2:12-17; 3:11-17; 4:12-19.

Please allow this exemption

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Pastor Dean Honeycutt shepherds Snow Hill Baptist Church in Bakersville, NC. He may be reached at 828-385-0213, [snowhillbaptist@gmail.com](mailto:snowhillbaptist@gmail.com) , or visit their website at [www.snowhillbaptist.com](http://www.snowhillbaptist.com).

***Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14***

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Crossword Solution

S	I	N	E	W		A	C	C	O		A	D	D	S
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Sudoku Solution

1	3	6	8	4	7	9	5	2
7	4	9	2	6	5	1	3	8
8	2	5	9	1	3	4	7	6
9	5	1	6	7	8	2	4	3
2	8	4	3	5	1	6	9	7
3	6	7	4	9	2	8	1	5
6	1	8	7	3	4	5	2	9
5	9	3	1	2	6	7	8	4
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Kids Corner

The Unwanted Pup

By Christy Lowman  
Burke County



By now you have probably noticed that I love animals and have a weak spot for those who do not have a home, are orphaned, hurt, or treated badly. In fact, most of the animals we’ve had for pets have been strays.

Even though we’ve had her since February, I haven’t told you about our last rescue, Brownie. We purchased Brownie to get her out of her current situation. She was underweight, and her fur was missing on her chest. The cartridge in her ears was damaged. She had never been wormed nor had any shots. She had spent almost all of her time in a crate that was too small. She even had to use the bathroom in there. So when we got her she was very stinky.

Brownie was pretty much crazy for the first three days we got her. She didn’t know how to act or what to do, being free from the cage. She ran nonstop and made friends instantly with Dug who was almost the same size and age. We threw her bedding away and put her crate in the basement. It has never been used again.

Within the first week, she gained 7 pounds and her ears repaired themselves. Now they stand straight up.

We wormed her, got her shots, and got her fixed.

Once her ears mended we realized that she was a Rat Pinscher, half Miniature Doberman, and half Rat Terrier.

Miniature Pinschers look like full-size Dobermans but smaller. They are known as the “King of Toy” (they are the largest dog recognized in the “Toy Group”). Another name for them is Min Pin. They are an old breed from Germany, used to hunt and kill rats.

Min Pins are hyper, good escape artists, and they love to gnaw on everything.

Sometimes, it feels like Brownie is a rodent instead of a dog because of all the things she has destroyed and chewed on. There is not a single piece of furniture or flower pot that does not have her teeth marks on it on our deck. Some of this is also because she is still in her puppy stage.

Rat Terriers are an American breed named by Theodore Roosevelt. They are working dogs used for hunting, killing rats, and even a watchdog.

These dogs are very smart problem solvers, escape artists, stubborn, and love to play with balls. Rat Terriers are very affectionate and love to hug you with their arms.

Brownie definitely has brought life to our home, from Brownie's kisses to the quirky little things she does that make us laugh.

I can’t help but think of Jesus when I think of Brownie’s story. King Herod wanted to kill Him, so his parents had to hide and run away from their family and home.

Jesus needed a place to be born. He was born in surroundings acceptable only for animals, not a king.

People didn’t accept Jesus throughout His life, but those who did were blessed to know Him.

When I look at Brownie, an unexpected addition, I see how much she has brought to our family, how much she needed us, and how much we needed her, even though we didn’t know it.

In the same way, we need Jesus. We don’t realize how much we need Him. Instead, we try to do things on our own. But in truth, I don’t know how I would make it in this crazy life without Him. He has helped me through so much and has answered so many prayers. He has performed many miracles in my life. Here are some examples.

- He saved me when I got caught outside in a tornado when I was a child.
- He saved my mother and brother when they were hit head-on by a drunk driver.
- Jesus kept my husband safe when he served in the Middle East.
- He saved my father when he had the “widowmaker heart attack” at age 50.
- He saved my dad again by making the tractor turn in another direction, when it ran over him, keeping it from running over his head.
- He saved my son who was born at 24 wks. and 5 days, weighing only 1lb 12 oz.
- I wasn’t supposed to be able to have any other children, but God blessed us with another son.

These are just a few miracles that Jesus has performed for me. If you don’t know Jesus, He is the perfect and necessary addition to your life.

God gave us authority over the animals to take care of them. In return, animals have helped us from the beginning; they’ve been used for clothing, companionship, and food. They provided a means of travel and escape so Jesus wouldn’t be killed by King Herod. They shared their home so Jesus would have a place to be born. Animals have had key roles since the beginning to carry out God’s plans. Who remembers the story of the talking donkey? Numbers 22:21-39.

So please remember that God put us in charge of the animals, to take care and treat them humanely, which is a huge responsibility. After all, they are God’s creations too.

Dear Lord, please help us to remember to keep Jesus first. Help us keep our eyes open so we see and realize the miracles and answered prayers You perform in our life. Help us give You the glory by telling the world about the things you do for us. Dear Lord, help us also remember to be kind to animals, even when they

*continued on page 34*





# Obedient Heart Fellowship

## Total Recall

By Jim Huskins  
*McDowell County*

During this season, the second chapter of Luke's Gospel is so popular that it's easy to forget about the first chapter. The opening of Luke is especially powerful when we consider the context of what preceded it.

The final words of the so-called old testament are found in Malachi 4:5-6, *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”* In Luke One, at the beginning of the Gospel account, we see this prophecy unfolding.

Every Bible character is portrayed against the backdrop of human fallibility. Abraham, Moses, David, and Elijah are heroes of our faith, but their failures are never sugarcoated. In Luke 1:5-7 we meet a couple who are described in astonishing terms, “*They were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.*” This glowing report introduces an elderly priest named Zachariah and his wife, Elizabeth.

Only descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother, could serve as priests. Zachariah's wife was also a descendant of Aaron. Despite their illustrious ancestry and blameless lives, Zachariah and Elizabeth were viewed with contempt by their community because they were childless. Deuteronomy 28:1-14 records an impressive list of blessings that accrue to those who *"faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments."* Verse 4 says, *"Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock."*

We do not grasp the significance of this blessing because we live in a culture that mostly views children as an expense, an inconvenience, and a barrier to self-actualization. This un-Godly attitude is so pervasive that we have legalized the wholesale slaughter of the unborn and the newborn. In First-Century Israel, infertility was seen as a curse. Zachariah and Elizabeth's neighbors were no doubt convinced that they were guilty of some secret sin. The Word of God says otherwise.

Zachariah was chosen by lot to burn incense inside the Temple. This was a once-in-a-lifetime privilege that many priests never experienced. Zachariah probably prayed for and thought about this moment from the time he became eligible for priestly duty at age thirty. Not in his wildest dreams, however, did his expectations include a visit by the Angel Gabriel.

The Golden Altar of Incense stood in the Holy Place of the Temple. It was next to the curtain that shielded the Holy of Holies. A priest offering incense was expected to pray for the nation while experiencing this most holy event in his life. During that prayer, Zachariah is terrified by the discovery that he is not alone.

Gabriel is one of the highest-ranking heavenly creatures. His mission was to announce one of the most significant events in history. His appearance was otherworldly. His message was inconceivable. *“You and Elizabeth will have a son,”* says Gabriel. *“He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”*

Four hundred years earlier, Malachi made this same prophecy. A message given to Adam, broadened through Abraham, clarified through Moses, and intensified through the prophets is finally nearing fulfillment. The one who will bear the mantle of Elijah and prepare the way for Messiah is about to be born. Zachariah's difficulty absorbing this experience provokes my heartfelt sympathy. Who among us could receive such a proclamation—even from such a source—without some incredulity?

After John is born and the time arrives for his circumcision, Zachariah regains his speech. His first utterance is one of the most profound prophecies in scripture. It clarifies the purpose of the incarnation. John 1:68-79 says that the “*Horn of Salvation*” from the “*house of David*” will fulfill the words spoken by the prophets of old. Those words were promises to save Israel from her enemies, show mercy as promised to the Patriarchs, remember the holy covenant sworn to Abraham, and enable God’s people to serve Him in holiness and righteousness.

This glorious prophecy goes on to specify the role of John the Immerser. He will be a prophet of the Most High, and he will prepare for Messiah's work of bringing salvation through the removal of sin. In the end, Messiah will bring light to those who sit in the darkness of death.

The clarity of Zachariah's pronouncement is astounding. Neither Messiah nor His messenger is charged with canceling the promises made to Israel from the beginning. Neither is sent to "replace" Israel with some other entity. Neither is charged with starting some new religion. Their combined mission is to fulfill all the covenant promises and make a way for sinful humans to once again stand in the presence of Holy God.

Most Christians insist that Jesus calls His followers to forget everything that came before Him. Zachariah—whose name means “God remembered”—says that Messiah calls us to remember and implement the terms of the covenant made with Abraham. Those terms are that we who are saved by grace are obligated to live in holiness and righteousness. The only way to know what that means is to read the first five books of the Bible.

Obedient Heart Fellowship believes that the entire Bible is both true and relevant. We accept salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, and we attempt to love and serve Him by keeping his commandments. See Revelation 14:12. lostranger@mindspring.com

*Jim & Beverly Huskins are members of Obedient Heart Fellowship.*



# Glenwood Baptist Church

# Christmas is CHRIST

By Dennis Love  
*McDowell County*

Have you stopped to think about the fact that when people start taking CHRIST out of Christmas, all you have left is a MAS? And the “M” in Mas without Christ stands for a MESS. The “A” in Mas without Christ stands for NO ACCESS to God. And the “S” in Mas without Christ stands for STRESS. So, without Christ in Christmas, all you have is a mess, no access to God, and a lot of stress. So, without Christ, there is no Christmas. The Bible plainly teaches us that before Joseph and Mary ever consummated their marriage, that Mary was a virgin and that the Holy Spirit came to her and planted a little tiny seed in her womb, and she became pregnant with the Lord Jesus. Now that was a supernatural event, and it cannot be explained, but I’m thankful I know a God and serve a God who is beyond human explanation. I’m thankful that He does things that mere humans cannot explain. Jesus was virgin born and that’s very, very important! It’s so important that I don’t believe you can be born-again unless you embrace this Biblical doctrine. So, before Mary was physically involved with her husband Joseph, she found out she was going to have a baby. It was a supernatural miracle from God. The Holy Spirit put the baby in the womb of Mary. I say this because that is what Christmas is all about. It’s not about Rudolph and Frosty even though you might enjoy watching them. It’s not about holiday parties and get-togethers even though it is good to be with others. Christmas is not a holiday, it’s a Holy Day. Thanksgiving is not a holiday. It too is a Holy Day when we as Christians stop and recognize just how blessed we are, and to give thanks to the One who has blessed us. So, this is not a season of holidays, it is a season of Holy Days. But some people would say, “Why do you Christians make such a big deal out of Christmas? It’s just another birthday!” Oh, but it’s not just another birthday. It’s a big deal because there was a woman who was a virgin that had never known a man, and the Holy Spirit of the living God came upon her and planted the Son of God in her womb, and she gave birth to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I think that’s a really big deal. So, let’s put out some lights! Let’s put up some trees! Let’s put out some decorations! Let’s sing! Let’s worship! And let us not say happy holidays. Let us not write Merry Xmas. Let us not say season’s greetings. But let us say with some joy and excitement in our voices, “Merry Christ-mas” the Christ who was virgin-born, the Christ who lived a sinless life, the Christ who died on an old rugged cross, the Christ who was buried in a tomb, the Christ who rose from the dead, and the Christ who is soon coming again to receive His church unto Himself, that’s what Christmas is all about. And without Christ, we would have no Christmas at all, because Christmas is Christ!

*Dr. Dennis Love is the Senior Pastor at Glenwood Baptist Church in Marion, NC. He and his wife Vicki have been married for 40 years, and they have lived in Marion for six years. They have two sons and four grandchildren and two step-grandchildren.*





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## Dust-Off the Bible and Read It

By Rev. Mark Creech



Knowing me to be a Minister, a friend recently asked me about the expression, "The Patience of Job." She said, "You know, some people will say that someone has the 'patience of Job.' Doesn't that phrase come from the Bible? What does it mean?"

I responded that it does come from the Bible, specifically the Bible book of Job. "It's a remarkable story about a man who essentially lost everything dearest to him," I said. "But with patience, he endured his trials faithfully and kept his faith. Someone with the 'patience of Job' demonstrates an extraordinary amount of endurance and forbearance."

She said, "I find that so interesting." I replied, "Well, I have a book in my library that lists numerous commonly used expressions drawn from the Bible. If you would like, I'll share it with you." A few days later, I delivered a book titled *I Didn't Know That Comes from the Bible*.

The book, written by Karlen Evins, is an easy read that explains the biblical origin and meaning of interesting everyday expressions such as:

Forbidden Fruit  
The Sweat of your Brow  
Raising Cain  
Old as Methuselah  
Mess o' Pottage  
'I've Been to the Mountaintop.'  
Apple of My Eye  
Hitting the Nail on the Head  
Bringing Down the House  
Man After My Own Heart  
A Painted Jezebel  
Old as the Hills  
Out of the Mouths of Babes  
At Their Wits End

These are just some of the phrases about which Evins writes in her book.

Evins said that she did the research and wrote the volume because she hoped "the words, phrases, and stories offered" would inspire people to dust off the Bible and read it.

One of the ironies of our time is that biblical illiteracy is extensive and increasing. Yet, so much of our culture has been amazingly influenced by Scripture, not just the little sayings and terms from the Bible that often make up our conversations, but also the profound impact on the much weightier aspects of civilization.

One of my favorite books was written by Dr. D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe. Its title asks a question of incredible significance, *What if the Bible Had Never Been Written?* The book is a well-documented and in-depth look at how the Bible has shaped morality, the law, politics, science, literature, exploration, art, education, and the founding of America.

As noted on the book's jacket: "From the Ten Commandments, which many of our laws and government are based upon, to the Golden Rule, a verse taken straight out of the New Testament, to many of today's most common phrases and expressions...there is no doubt as to the influence the Bible has on everyone, in some degree, every day."

Nowadays many people query whether the Bible offers real solutions to our pressing problems in ethics and politics. The late American Reformed theologian, R.C. Sproul, once beautifully addressed this concern. He wrote:

"We are faced with new ethical issues that make application of ongoing principles difficult in a new environment. For example, previous generations didn't have to worry about when to pull the plug of a life-support system on somebody dying in a hospital. You didn't have to worry about that ethical dilemma because you didn't have the sophisticated equipment that makes that dilemma a reality. In that sense, we have situations that previous generations did not have to struggle with ethically.

"However, the principles we draw from sacred Scripture about the sanctity of life and the dignity of death, for example, speak eloquently to those specific problems that come to us afresh in each generation. I believe that we find in Scripture not simply the insights and opinions of primitive seminomads...what we find in Scripture is transcendent truth—truth that comes to us from an eternal perspective. That means we get nothing less than the mind of the Creator, who knows and reveals to us principles of what is right, good, and beautiful, and these principles can be applied throughout the scope of human history. [T]o think that the Scriptures were no longer applicable to my society or that they were out of date and old-fashioned would be to think that God is out of date, old-fashioned, and irrelevant."

There is nothing that has affected the world for more good than the Bible, especially Western culture. It truly has no equal. It is the Word of God, without error, infallible, and always relevant. A return to faith in its sacred pages would solve many of our current difficulties of great consequence.

But even more important than the way the Bible has touched society is the way it can touch you—the way it can impact your life for good—the way it can turn everything around. If the Bible can have such a positive impact on the whole world, think of what it can do for your little world.

Perhaps it's time to dust off the Bible and read it.

Reverend Dr. Mark Creech is Executive Director of the NC Christian Action League. You may contact him at [rev.markcreech@christianactionleague.org](mailto:rev.markcreech@christianactionleague.org) or 919-787-0606



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# Walnut Grove Church

## Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem

By Kurt Bomer  
Avery County

Micah 5:2 tells us that the little city just 5 miles outside of Jerusalem would be the birthplace of the messiah.

The Wise Men spent upwards of a year traveling to arrive in Jerusalem. Then they sought directions to this place from the Jewish Scribes, who correctly identified it as the birthplace. Did you ever stop and wonder why the religious leaders didn't go themselves? To them, it was only 5 miles away. They knew the Scriptures but that wasn't enough. It isn't enough today.

My first point is this. We can easily be like them. We know the Word. We know what we should be doing, but we stop there. We know the greatest commandment...but are we loving our neighbor as ourselves?

But anyway the Wise Men got there and found Jesus. Because of that event, the city is a top destination spot for Christians around the world and has been for 2,000 years. What is the little town of Bethlehem like? Unfortunately, it's not like the words of the song.

Tourists flock to see this quaint little town but did you know that Bethlehem has made the top five list of "the most disappointing cities in the world". They go there expecting to see something special but are disillusioned because it's just another Middle Eastern town. They go into the church of the Nativity, assuming it will be awesome. But as they walk in, they see the church itself divided into three sections (Catholic, Eastern, and Russian Orthodox) because these three groups have been fighting for centuries over who should control the site. And objects are hanging from the ceiling that looks like Christmas tree ornaments in a garage sale. The scene is complete with hawkers trying to sell you cheap souvenirs. With church groups fighting and dusty relics hanging, no wonder Bethlehem appears to be disappointing.

But wait, it's perfect! He was born in a stable. I've been in them. They stink. There are cow patties everywhere which mean there are flies everywhere. But it had to be so.

This brings me to my second point. Jesus came to the real world as a real man to help real people. And Bethlehem mirrors reality today. This dirty little town is one of the best-known places in the world for one reason... Jesus was there!

And so too, with you and me, Jesus comes into little people like us--people who are somewhat dusty and smelly and not at all that impressive--and he makes us great, not because of who we are, but because of whose we are. We are His.

The disciples were a good picture of this. They started as a rag-tag group of n'er-do-wells and in one short generation, they changed the whole world. The interesting thing about their ministry is that the religious leaders were astounded at them and noted that though they were unschooled, they had been with Jesus.

Jesus has a plan for all of us. We may look like Bethlehem. We may be ignorant like the disciples, but if we will spend time with Jesus there is no limit to what he can do through us.

Do you want to have an impact on the world? Then don't just know the Word, spend some time with Jesus. It's all about him.

Merry Christmas

Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.



# Evangelism Explosion International

## Jesus Leads Us to Share

By Rev. John B. Sorensen



When Jesus commissioned us to go into the world and make disciples of all the nations, He didn't leave us without instruction as to how we might accomplish that. Jesus, Himself, modeled how we should follow.

During His life on earth, Jesus was our ultimate mentor. He demonstrated how we could live in union with the Father. He chose twelve disciples to follow Him and demonstrated how to live life, teach others, and bring hope to the lost. This included explaining the Gospel in a clear, loving way.

Jesus was committed to prayer. He knew the relationship with His Father was critical to life and ministry. Large crowds surrounded Him, but Jesus always found time to withdraw and pray. Before He appointed the disciples, He escaped to a mountaintop to pray. He even gave the disciples a model, teaching them how to pray.

Jesus didn't go it alone. Ministry happens in the community. He invited others to join Him. "He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14, NIV). Then He commissioned 72 others to go, two by two, ahead of Him from town to town to prepare the way. Jesus chose people who had caught His vision. They were His representatives. His instructions were clear: "whoever listens to you listens to Me; whoever rejects you rejects Me, but whoever rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me" (Luke 10:16, NIV).

Jesus modeled what to do. As the disciples walked with Jesus, He taught them by example. They watched Him teach the masses and perform miracles. He shared stories about the Kingdom of God and modeled how to share it with others. They learned how to minister to others by watching Him. Jesus often pulled them aside to teach them further. The people we disciple need authentic role models to follow, so they can learn by example how to put what they learn into practice.

Jesus told them to multiply. Learning how to walk this Christian life isn't the end result. Jesus took His disciples one step further. He commissioned them to go, take what they had learned, and disciple others the way He had disciplined them. The goal: train disciples in such a way that they could continue to share their faith and equip others to do the same. This was the last command Jesus gave them before leaving the earth to ensure that His work would continue. And it has to this day.

Jesus gave us a model for everything God calls us to do so that we can model it to others. As we study His life and grow in our Christian walk, we have an opportunity to model that to others and help them grow in their walk with Jesus. And as we share the Gospel, we can also model and equip others to share their faith as well.

Rev. John B. Sorensen, D.D. is the President/CEO of Evangelism Explosion International, headquartered in Arden, N.C. EE has been a leader in equipping Christians to share their faith for more than 50 years. For more free tips and resources, visit [evangelismexplosion.org](http://evangelismexplosion.org).



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One Christmas Closer To The Last

By Steve Bietz  
Burke County



Since 1966, The Grinch has been trying to stop Christmas from showing up. And since 1966, we have heard the song describing this Green Creature. "You're a mean one, Mr. Grinch, You really are a heel. You're as cuddly as a cactus, as charming as an eel, Mr. Grinch, You're a bad banana with a greasy black peel!" Indeed Dr. Seuss could write the most peculiar poetry. Of course, as he himself would come to admit, the Grinch did not stop Christmas from showing up.

King Herod and the Devil tried to keep Christmas from coming - because the coming of He who is King of Kings is a frightful thought for both of them. But Christmas came anyway. Satan couldn't stop God's plans, which have been established from the foundation of the world. Satan could not stop Jesus from being born. He couldn't stop Jesus from dying on the cross. He couldn't stop Jesus from rising from the dead. He couldn't stop Jesus from establishing His Church. He can't stop Jesus from saving us and taking us home if we place our trust in our Lord and Redeemer.

This Christmas Day, as we celebrate Christ's birth, we focus on why He came. And we also remember that another Christmas is coming. The Lord God is not finished coming just yet.

Despite what the naysayers say, Jesus is coming again. Despite what the doubters doubt, Jesus is coming again. Despite what the skeptics say, Christ will come again. As scripture tells us, "*Behold, He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see Him.*" (Rev.1:7, ESV)

Let us remember: Every Christmas is one Christmas closer to that last Christmas on this sinful planet. "*And the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout and with the voices of angels and the trumpets of God.*" (1 Thessalonians 4:16) If we think it was loud and glorious when the angels announced his birth to the shepherds, just wait until His second advent comes. For those who do not believe, the coming of Jesus will be frightful. But for those who trust in Christ, the Lord's coming is delightful.

We say Come Lord Jesus! No, I cannot name the date of His second coming but we need to be found faithful. This Christmas Day, we celebrate the miracle of the Incarnation. We can join the shepherds who hurried to see the babe in the manger, glorifying and praising God. We worship with the wise men who knelt before the Christ Child. We rejoice in the Good News of grace for which Jesus came, died, and rose again. We live in hope, and we remember that this Christmas is just one more Christmas closer to that last Christmas on this sinful planet. With everything we've got, we sing, COME LORD JESUS COME!

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.

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Southern Gospel in Minnesota

By Steve Carter  
Tupelo, Mississippi

During my early years of ministry, my primary skillset centered on music. Having never been confused with a singer, I utilized my skills as a drummer.

Despite all the negativity that inherently went with drums in church, such as “too loud,” at every opportunity I would be found rolling, dragging, or carrying drums down the center aisle of the host church. After setting my “tubs” up, I would climb behind them, pick up my sticks and proceed to set toes tapping and hands clapping.

Several years into my “quartet days,” I found myself riding on a 1952 vintage bus heading to Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota to put on a program in each city. Getting there involved heading north after work and driving 1,000 miles. By swapping drivers and keeping at least one person awake (whose job was to keep the driver awake), we made it without anything terrible happening.

We rolled up to the church in Minneapolis by mid-afternoon Saturday and lugged equipment from under the bus and into the sanctuary for setting up. The quartet was introduced and started belting out “Southern Gospel” at 7:00 pm. By 7:03 pm The Holy Spirit went to work, and blessings from “on high” commenced. Shouts of adulation, hand-clapping, arms lifted in praise and upturned faces filled the small church. The spiritual victory was in the air and everyone soon found themselves enjoying the “showers of blessings” pouring down from heaven!

After about two hours of anointed music, I didn’t think things could get any better. As happens more often than I like to admit, I am through before God is. Suddenly, over the steady din of the rejoicing congregation, I heard additional praises to the Lord being shouted to the rafters. I looked over my crash cymbal and caught a glimpse of a woman who had long since seen the better side of seventy, running down the center of the church. She sprinted toward the quartet, hung a left, went back up the far side of the pews to the rear of the congregation where she blended into the crowd. It had been a few years since I witnessed anyone caught up in the Spirit enough to “run the aisles,” and I found it to be beautiful, indeed.

At the program’s end, much handshaking, neck-hugging, and well wishes went on as the congregation filtered out. Knowing we had another program to put on the next morning, we quickly stowed our equipment back into the bus and located a motel to get some sleep.

The Sunday morning service was conducted in a more traditional church. While I believe the congregation enjoyed the quartet, assurance of His approval of our efforts had to be taken on faith.

Following a quick lunch, we pointed our old leaky bus south into the pouring rain. The windshield quickly fogged over and trying to keep it clear with paper towels proved futile. One of the guys had a hair blower so we taped it to the visor, pointed it forward, and put it on wide open. So, there we were, squishing every step we took in wet carpet, back to bunks while a blow dryer steadily screamed. But despite our travel arrangements, no one complained. We had seen God work in a mighty way, and any inconvenience we faced, paled in comparison.

Back at work, Monday morning found myself telling those interested about the trip. One man, whom I had been witnessing to for a couple of years, had remained skeptical about Christianity and quickly pointed out flaws in those trying to serve Jesus. He was flabbergasted we had driven “all the way up there for nothing.” I explained about the blessings the congregations had received and what a joy it was for us to be a part of it. Not being one to comprehend things of the Spirit, he couldn’t grasp the concept of us answering our calling with no monetary gain. After letting me know how stupid we were to do that for free, he walked away shaking his head.

I don’t know if he ever accepted Jesus before he died a short time later.....

Steve Carter is entering his 5th decade of Christian ministry. Steve had peddled across the continental United States twice. Mr. Carter's email is: Msroadkill@bellsouth.net



The Christmas Thief –  
Exodus 20:15 “Thou Shalt Not Steal.”

By Toby Crowder  
Mitchell County

No one likes a thief... that is one thing that most of us would agree on, but unfortunately, we still read headlines like the following from a local paper in Carlisle PA from a few years back: “Carlisle police are seeking the public’s help in locating a suspect who stole the baby Jesus from a nativity scene. It was sometime between Dec. 4 and Dec. 5 when the baby Jesus was taken from the victim’s home located along the 100 block of Garland Drive, police said. The nativity scene was made and hand-painted by the victim’s husband who recently passed away, according to police reports.”

Most of us would never consider stealing from a Nativity scene, or from a department store, or from a friend or family member, yet we are witness to a Christmas thief that is much more prevalent than we realize. This thief may be difficult to identify, for we are all vulnerable to his assault. This thief lives inside each of us and must be guarded against during this Holiday season. In the verse above, we see that steal is the Hebrew word – ganab and it means “To steal or carry away; To take away by theft or secretly.” In other words, it is to take something that belongs to somebody else, illegally or without the owner's permission. Are we guilty of being a Christmas thief? While we may not readily realize it, let us consider some things that are at risk of being stolen this season:

Consider the true meaning of Christmas; that God so loved this world that He sent to us a Savior! We become so entangled in secular Christmas stories and traditions that there is no time for the truths of Christmas. In our days of media hype and constant advertising, secular images take the main stage while the truth of the Christmas story gets neatly tucked away between the wrapping paper and the shopping bags. Let us resolve to be vigilant as we enter this season, that we do not get so immersed in traditions and legends, that we forget that God sent a Savior, our greatest need. Humanity did not need more information, they did not need more technology, or pleasure, or even earthly treasures or money. Humanity needed a way to salvation, and so God sent a Savior to the world, by way of a stable in Bethlehem, and this is what we celebrate at Christmas. To allow this great truth to be lost is to rob the world of the truth of the Christmas story!

Not only must we remember the truth of the season, but also to give this Savior the GLORY that is due Him. It is not just cliché that “JESUS IS THE REASON FOR THE SEASON!” According to our definition of stealing, to give glory to anyone or anything else is to rob that which belongs only to Christ. We read in Luke 2:13-14 “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.” This word glory is the Greek word “doxa” and it means “a thing belonging to God or Christ, majesty. A most glorious condition, an exalted state.” Friend, there is no one else on the planet or in the Heavens that is due this glory! It belongs to no one else except our Savior and Lord! The glory of Christmas is not in a mythical figure who brings gifts, nor is it found in holiday traditions, services, or gatherings. This glory that the angels sang about is only due to this child who was born to bring salvation to all mankind!

It seems at times that everywhere we look, Jesus is being taken away and Christ is being eliminated from Christmas... Would you join me in this simple prayer? “Lord help me not to be a Christmas thief and steal these things from others and from the Savior this Christmas. Would you help me to herald the truth of the Gospel and the true meaning of Christmas as I give glory to the God for His wonderful gift to me?”

(One final thought for the curious... according to Carlisle PA police, the baby Jesus that was stolen from the nativity scene was later safely returned to its owner... Merry Christmas!)



Toby Crowder serves as Pastor of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Spruce Pine. He and his wife, Leslie, have been married for 26 years and have two daughters, Emilee and Katy. He can be contacted via the church’s website MCfamily-forChrist.org or mtcarmelsprucepine@gmail.com



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# Roan Mountain Baptist Church

## Watch

By Russell McKinney  
Mitchell County



Back in the days before every boy and girl had a Smart-phone, kids used to wear watches. Watches with the logos of NFL teams were especially popular with young boys. One Christmas, a boy who was a huge Pittsburgh Steelers fan became obsessed with getting a certain Steelers watch as a present. He'd seen the watch in a sports store at the local mall.

Day after day leading up to Christmas, the young fellow wore his parents out with his request. A day didn't pass without him at some point reminding them, "I want that Steelers watch at the mall for Christmas." He even talked them into making a special trip to the mall just so he could show them exactly which watch he wanted. The parents, in true parent mode, never tipped their hand that they were actually going to buy the watch, and their silence caused the boy no end of worry.

Finally, the morning of Christmas Eve arrived and the boy could find no watch-sized package under the tree. (He didn't know that his mother had wrapped the watch in an oversized box to fool him.) So, at breakfast that morning the boy decided that he had to pull out all the stops if he was going to get his watch. As the family was enjoying their meal, the little fellow said, "Since Christmas is all about the birth of Jesus, I thought it would be nice this morning if I quoted something from Him." After almost passing out from shock, the father and mother finally stammered out the words, "Sure, son, go right ahead." The boy then stood up from the table and said, "These words come from Mark 13:37. Jesus says to His disciples, 'And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!'"

This cute little story reminds us that the same Jesus who was laid in a manger on that night so long ago has promised to return to walk this earth again. You see, Mark 13:37 serves as the closing verse to a prophetic chapter in which Jesus talks about His eventual Second Coming. For example, in Mark 13:26, He says, "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory." A few verses later, though, in Mark 13:32, He is quick to point out, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." So, since no one knows the day and hour when Jesus will return to the earth, His people should always be on "watch duty" for that return.

Okay, got it. But how do we remain on "watch duty" during the Christmas holiday? We do it by understanding that the babe in the manger grew into adulthood, began His public ministry at the age of 30, performed miracles to prove His divinity, gave profound teachings to enlighten mankind's way, never committed one sin, died on a cross as the sinless sacrifice for the sins of the human race, arose from the dead, ascended back to heaven, currently offers salvation to anyone who will place saving belief in Him, and has promised to one day return. We don't hear much about that Jesus at Christmastime, do we? And yet the babe in the manger and the returning King are one and the same. So tell me, are you watching?

*Russell McKinney lives in the English Woods area of Spruce Pine and serves as the pastor of Roan Mountain Baptist Church in Bakersville*



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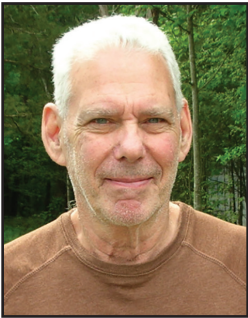
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Bible Briefs

The Glory of the LORD

By Robert Garner  
Rutherford County



An interesting heavenly event of the star that the wise men (the Magus, or a Magian) followed, which they saw in the east, went before them to find the location of the young child Jesus. On a clear night, if you observe the stars in the sky above they are a great distance away, millions appear in the heavens. The star must have been quite unusual, very low in the sky, because the star was over the house pinpointing where the young child Jesus was, Mathew 2:9-11. Also, The Glory of the LORD, the light of the star, and our gift-giving traditions at Christmas can be spiritually seen in these 3 verses.

Isaiah 9:6 is frequently quoted during the Christmas season. The beautiful Christmas account celebrating the glory and birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, is well known by Christians. We can read this Old Testament prophecy verse in the book of Isaiah; *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace”*. This single verse alone proves the spectacular truth of other prophesies recorded by Isaiah during his ministry and elsewhere in the Bible.

Hebrews 4:12 *“The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than two edged sword”*. Isaiah 49:2 *“and he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft, in his quiver hath he hid me.”*

Waiting on “The Glory of the LORD”, the child of God can only imagine being governed by flawless honor and reputation; perfect goodness with abundant riches in grace and truthfulness defines the word “glory”; that’s only a small part of “The Glory of the LORD”. *“Arise, shine; for the light is come [Christ], and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee;”* Isaiah 60:1.

The Glory of the LORD shone round about them and the shepherds were afraid. *“The angel of the Lord said fear not, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour; which is Christ the LORD;”* Luke 2:9-11.

*“For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea;”* Habakkuk 2:14. Sadly, the next verse is a woe dealing with anyone assisting with their neighbor’s [friend, companion] drunkenness; all forms of (spiritual/physical deception). *“Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power;”* 2 Thessalonians 1:9.

Absolute terror is experienced by Ezekiel, Joshua, and others at the brightness of the Lord’s Glory; as the brightness around a rainbow; drops them to the ground with their face in the dirt. Saul describes the Lord’s brightness from heaven “above the brightness of the sun”; that intensity of brightness forces him and his companions to the earth; Acts 26; 13, 14.

The first biblical record of the Glory of the Lord being seen by the children of Israel is after the Lord has brought them out from under the law of Egyptian slavery. *“And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord; for that he heareth your murmurings against the Lord: and what are we, [the LORD & Moses] that ye murmur against us?”* Exodus 16:6&7.

The Glory of the Lord appears to the congregation of Israel in a cloud covering mount Sanai for six days; *“And the sight of the Glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel; Exodus”* 24:17.

Moses, having received grace from the Lord, requests to see the glory of the Lord on mount Sanai before receiving the ten commandants. And Moses said, *“I beseech thee, show me thy glory”*. *And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift, [crevice] on a rock [Christ], and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by. And I will take away my hand, and thou shall see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen; for there shall no man see me, and live;”* Exodus 33:17-23. *“And when Aaron saw Moses after he came down from the mount, the skin of his face shined;”* Exodus 34:30.

Handel’s “Messiah” a musical masterpiece containing *“And the Glory of the Lord” is based on Isaiah 40:5;”* And the Glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.”

This is a fantastic Christmas song for all to hear, turn up the volume! \_\_\_\_ For God is the King of all the earth; sing ye praises with understanding; hear the song “The Glory of the LORD”.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xuog35ZBBfM>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUi0c-wsITg>  
(Structure of the Lyrics)

Verse 1, And the Glory of the Lord \_\_\_\_  
Verse 2, “Shall be revealed” \_\_\_\_  
Verse 3, “And all flesh shall see it together” \_\_\_\_  
Verse 4, “For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it” \_\_\_\_

May your face and heart shine like Moses (Exodus 34:29) when “The Glory of the LORD” is revealed from heaven.

Merry Christmas to all my Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus!

*My name is Robert W. Garner, my wife and I live in Union Mills, Rutherford County, NC. I’m a Christian Bible study researcher/writer/coach allied with other Biblical Scripture investigators unaffiliated with any church denominations. Our Scripture research spans 600 years of Christian Bible languages which include English, Hebrew, and Greek. As God Almighty commands in 1 Corinthians 2:13 we search the scriptures; “not in the words which man’s wisdom teaches, but what the Holy Ghost teaches; comparing spiritual with spiritual”; which is a scripture with scripture.*

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# Community Spotlight

## A Glimmer of Light for Veteran Depression

by Andrea Hillman  
Mitchell County

“I’ve seen ‘impossible’ happen so many times, it’s just common to me,” Robert Bailey, Jr. said as he showed me his most prized work: The Freedom Lantern. Robert’s dream is to see the U.S. government gift one of these meticulously crafted pieces to every U.S. veteran. The piece is meant to serve as a “thank you” for their service from a grateful nation and as a physical reminder that “someone cares.”

“You know, that’s why we work with these veterans. We really like veterans, and I got to watching this veteran suicide business. It’s disturbing. I’ve been there, and I’ve seen these folks. I dealt with one of them pretty close one time,” Robert shared....

This particular veteran and his sister visited the showroom at the Buck Stove manufacturing plant in Spruce Pine, NC. It didn’t take Robert long to realize the man had some struggles. He would only nod or grunt as a response to any communication and his sister acted as an intermediary between them. Robert soon noticed the man was attracted to a small, laser-cut flag.

After asking a few questions, Robert came to understand the gentleman and his sister were both veterans and the brother had recently attempted suicide. Robert picked up the small, metal flag and asked him, “Do you know what this is?” “Yes sir, I know what this is,” the brother responded, to Robert’s surprise. They were the first words he spoke since entering the showroom.

“You know, I’d really like for you to have this thing and take it home with you, and just know that somebody cares and we really appreciate your service,” Robert said. “And I’m telling you, he looked at me just as straight as he could, face to face, and started talking. He talked for about 45 minutes, and we talked about all kinds of things. The three of us just had a really good conversation.” Eventually, they said goodbye and Robert sent them away with the gift of a flag and a Freedom Lantern. “That lantern means we care,” Robert told them.

Two weeks later Robert received a letter from the sister: Everything had changed for the better since their meeting. Robert had made a difference in the life of a fellow veteran.

You may never have heard of Robert Bailey Jr. and left to him, he would keep it that way. As the youngest child of Robert Sr. and Dorothy Bailey, it is easy to understand where his devotion first developed. Robert Bailey Sr. gave his life in service to America during World War II, three months before Robert Jr. was born, and his body remains in France. Dorothy devoted the rest of her life to their children. Raising them in a God-honoring home was primary, and the church doors



hardly opened without her little ones found in the pews. Robert gave his heart to Christ at a church revival when he was 9 years old.

Robert Jr. nobly served our country as a young medic in Vietnam. Like so many other soldiers who survived that terrible time, the atrocities Robert witnessed could not be unseen. Unknowingly suffering from PTSD, his life took a dark turn and he struggled with a destructive depression for several years.

Sustained by the faithful love of his family, including “a very good girl” who became his bride, Robert made it through to a day that changed everything. Robert’s wife talked him into taking her to a Billy Graham film and afterward he re-dedicated his life to the Lord. “From that time on, it just changed. When I realized what kind of mess I was causing...I finally got my head on straight...and man has it been good ever since!” he said, smiling.

Robert has witnessed many “impossible” events happen in his life since that day. Four years after he and Alvin Barrier opened Minpro Supply, a humble, country store in Spruce Pine, NC, Mr. Carol Buckner walked into their business. After a couple of visits, Carol cut a deal with Robert and Alvin to sell an item he had recently developed, the Buck Stove. The rest is history. Today, these beautifully crafted stoves provide heat to over one million homes.

The impossibilities do not end there, however: Gloria Houston, the author of “The Year of the Perfect Christmas Tree,” asked Robert if his company could produce several lanterns made in the likeness of the one illustrated on her book cover. Robert agreed and the New Buck corporation soon began a venture in lantern manufacturing. The lanterns evolved into personalized lanterns for special occasions, and eventually The Freedom Lantern.

This led Robert to the ultimate expression of his life’s work: The development of the Freedom Lantern Project. His goal is to see a Freedom Lantern in the hands of every U.S. veteran as a gift from a grateful nation to honor their service. Many have purchased these lanterns and Robert has given many as a gift to veterans he has met. Many people would certainly support this endeavor on a funding platform, but Robert strongly believes our government is the appropriate entity to back this project. He scoffs at the word “impossible.”

Unfortunately, though the U.S. government is no stranger to wasting billions of tax-payer dollars on underwriting private corporations such as Solyndra and Tonopah Solar Energy, elected officials from both sides of the aisle have refused to support The Freedom Lantern Project. Robert has written letters to presidents and various government officials to no avail.

Don’t our servicemembers deserve an heirloom-quality lantern that says, “Thank you?” I believe so and I trust you do too, so our call to action is this: Reach out to every senator, representative, star, and influencer possible. It will only cost a few moments of your time to send letters, tweets, make phone calls, and social media posts. Tell them to back Robert Bailey Jr. and The Freedom Lantern Project. “Impossible” is a target to destroy.

Andrea Hillman is a contributing writer, journalist, and online editor for Blue Ridge Christian News, as well as creator and news aggregator for The Christian Persecution Report. She enjoys a wide variety of artistic endeavors, world travel, and recently discovered she has a green thumb. You can read more of her work at Blue Ridge Christian News online. Please reach out to her with questions and comments at thechristianpersecutionreport.com or on LinkedIn.



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A Name Above Every Name

By Dean Honeycutt  
Mitchell County

“There is a name I love to hear’ I love to sing its worth; It sounds as music in my ear the sweetest name on earth Oh how I love Jesus oh how I love Jesus.” (Oh, How I Love Jesus, Frederick Whitfield)

Your name has meaning, and your name is tied to who you are, your character, and your personality. We often hear a person’s name mentioned and we have thoughts about that person. The type of person they are and if we like them or do not like them. When we hear the name Kyle Rittenhouse, we immediately think about the teenage boy who shot and killed two men in self-defense in Kenosha, Wisconsin. His name was spoken across the nation in a high-profile case thousand, if not millions, of times. His name will not soon be forgotten. When we hear the name Martin Luther King jr. (1929-1968) we think of peaceful protest, a man that loved God, and equality. The name Joe Biden for some brings thoughts of praise while for others disdain. The same for Donald Trump. The mention of his name either brings contempt or adoration. If your name is mentioned in conversation what do people think of you?

November 17, 1918, a son was born to a dairy farmer in Charlotte, N.C... At the age of 15, he would commit his life to the Lord Jesus Christ. By the time of his departure from this life, he would preach the Gospel to over 215 million people, in 185 countries. He wrote 33 books, met with many U.S. presidents and world leaders, and would be listed as one of the top ten most admired men in the world for many years. You guessed it Billy Graham, and his name will live on for a long time.

Another name was given to a Son the name Jesus. For some, this name means everything, Savior, Friend, King, Lord, Master, Prince of Peace, and Almighty God. The Bible says at the “*name of Jesus every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*”. The Bible says that God the Father has given His Son a “*name that is above every name*”. How often do we mention the name Jesus, and what feelings or thoughts does He recall?

When sin entered the world through the deception of satan and the disobedience of Adam and Eve humanity was lost and without hope. Our sin and disobedience have separated us from a loving God whose desire is to redeem us and restore what sin has destroyed. The Bible says we are sinners, and our sin separates us from God, and we are dead in our sin. We can not save or rescue ourselves from death.

God the Father, in His great love for us makes a way for us to be saved and remove our sin. In a sense the Father asks the Son will you empty yourself and go to earth and humble yourself and sacrifice your life as a payment for sin? (Philippians 2: 6-8) And the Son says I will be obedient and take on human flesh as a servant and die on a cross. So, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lord’s leaves glory removes His kingly robe, takes off His crown, and replaces them with swaddling clothes. God is born in human flesh. This is Christmas and the Immaculate Conception of the virgin birth. The Son voluntarily restricts deity, leaves glory and is born in a stable. The Father gives his Son the name Jesus because He will save people from their sin.

I am in debt to Jesus because he saved me and gave me eternal life. God knows my name because I am saved. My name is written in the Lambs Book of Life. The Bible says, “*for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*”. The Bible says, “*whosoever shall upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*”

I praise God for Christmas; it is all about Jesus. Jesus, Jesus the sweetest name I know. Lift high the name of Jesus. When you put out lights, do it in the name of Jesus, when you give a gift, do it in the name of Jesus, when you serve a meal, do it in the name of Jesus, when you send a card, do it in the name of Jesus. The King of kings and the Lord of lords, His name will be glorified.

Merry Christmas from my family to yours.

Pastor Dean Honeycutt shepherds Snow Hill Baptist Church in Bakersville, NC. He may be reached at 828-385-0213, snowhillbaptist@gmail.com , or visit their website at www.snowhillbaptist.com.



The Word “God”

By Patricia Jackson  
McDowell County

The word “God” is found four thousand, four hundred and forty-six times in the King James Version Bible. This number could vary with other versions.

You might be surprised to learn that two books in the bible do not have the word “God” in them or mention God at all. These are the books of Esther and Song of Solomon.

What is the storyline of these two books? The Song of Solomon is categorized as a book of poetry. It features a celebration of love, beauty, anatomy, and marriage. The bride and groom sing back and forth to one another and their community. You will find a lot of poetic references to the human anatomy, but you won’t find any mention of God.

The book of Esther is a historical book about a young Jewish girl. After Queen Vashti displeases the King, he selects Esther for his Queen. Esther risks her life to prevent an act of genocide against the Jewish people. Esther is a story of human action, and the Song of Solomon focuses on human love.

Why are there no direct words from God in these two books? The other books of the Old Testament mention God or prophets who speak on God’s behalf. Neither of these two books includes any spokesperson for God. Also, there are no recorded miracles by God’s prophet. When God does something out of the ordinary, we read it in the bible.


Even though these two books don’t mention God specifically, we should read them in the context of God’s covenant with Israel. There is an important message and teaching to us in both books. In the book of Esther, we recognize faith throughout the book, and The Song of Solomon describes the bliss of married love. God sees his relationship to Israel as one of marriage, even though Israel is a terrible bride to Him.

Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea all use marriage to describe God’s covenant to Israel, usually portraying a picture of Israel’s sin. When we read the beginning of Ezekiel 16, we find the kind of generous, passionate love God has for Israel, and it sounds similar to what we see in the Song of Solomon. Even though these two books don’t mention God, they teach us a lot about God’s relationship with his people.

These two books would not be in the Bible unless God had some purpose in them. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine.*” Take time to read Esther and Song of Solomon as you receive a blessing from understanding God’s word.



Patricia Jackson is the Assistant Teacher for the Ladies Class at Redeemed Free Will Baptist Church, Glenwood, NC. She is a grant writer for non-profits, a published author and retired Nursing Home Administrator. She lives in Rutherford County with her husband. Contact information: email address: wyo2go@bellsouth.net.



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## Raspberries and Copper Coins

By Tracy Jessup



*“Then he called his disciples and said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.’” (Mark 12:43-44)*

The New England Holocaust Memorial was built to pay tribute to the six million killed and to honor the survivors. Located on Boston’s historic Freedom Trail, the memorial “is designed around six luminous glass towers, each reaching 54 feet high, and each lit internally from top to bottom. The number six has many meanings here: the millions of Jews killed in the Holocaust; the names of the six main death camps; a row of memorial candles; and the six years, 1939-1945, during which the infamous ‘Final Solution,’ the most deadly phase of the Holocaust, took place. In addition, millions of numbers are etched in the glass, representing the infamous tattoos inflicted on many of the victims’ arms.”

In each tower, superimposed on the troubling lists of numbers, are brief personal statements made by selected death camp survivors. One was from Gerda Weissman Klein who was deported from Germany as a teenager and later married the U.S. Army soldier who led the troops that rescued her. “Ilse, a childhood friend of mine, once found a raspberry in the camp and carried it in her pocket all day to present to me that night on a leaf. Imagine a world in which your entire possession is one raspberry and you give it to your friend.”

The context of today’s passage is that of a warning Jesus gives to “beware of the scribes” (v. 38a). Why this warning? Because of their desire to be noticed and held in high esteem (they “like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets!... and for the sake of appearance say long prayers”). The scribes also made it a practice to exploit others, particularly widows (“They devour widows’ houses...”).

Many commentators have noted that the widow, who in her poverty gave her all, may represent the many widows whose houses have been devoured. With this in mind, Jesus simply is continuing his condemnation of the scribes, who instead of caring for widows as the law directed them to do are taking advantage of them. While this most likely is an accurate observation, it must not be overlooked that Jesus does in fact commend the sacrificial action of the widow. “*For all of them [many rich people] have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had...*”

John Ortberg writes, “The Lord of the Gift is very wise. He knew exactly what he was doing when he created you. He is well-pleased that you exist. He has entrusted to you everything you need to fulfill the purpose for which you were created. At the end of the day, God will not ask... What did you do with what you didn’t have? Though, he will ask, What did you do with what you had? (If You Want to Walk on Water, You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat, p. 43).

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the generosity seen in raspberries and copper coins, and for the example of “*Jesus, who though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, so that by his poverty we might become rich*” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

*Dr. Tracy Jessup serves as vice president for Christian Life and Service and senior minister to the University. He is a graduate of Gardner-Webb with a B.A. in Music and earned his M. Div. degree at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School. He completed his Ph.D. at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He also teaches in the undergraduate department of religious studies and enjoys the opportunity to serve the local church through interim pastorates, pulpit supply, and preaching revival services. He and his wife, Teresa, have two children, Christian and Anna.*

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One Solitary Life

By Nancy Malik  
Avery County

An anonymous writing was given to us many years ago and it was titled One Solitary Life.

He was born in an obscure village and the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village where He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty years of age. Then for three years, He was an itinerant preacher. He never had a family or owned a house. He didn't go to college. He never visited a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles away from the place he was born. He did none of the things one usually associates with greatness. He had no credentials but Himself. He was 33 years old when the tide of public opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to His enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While He was dying His executioners gambled for His clothes, the only property He owned. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave out of the pity of a friend.

Nineteen (Twenty) centuries have come and gone and today. He is the central figure of the human race and the leader of mankind's progress. All the armies that ever marched, all the Navies that ever sailed, and all parliament that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, all these put together have not affected the life of a man on earth as much as this One Solitary Life! Amen.

Nancy Malik has lived in Avery County for five years. She attends the Ridge and Newland Christian Church. She has taught children Creation Science for over two decades. She has a radio program, Adventures in Creation, aired Monday-Friday at 8:10 am and 12:50 pm on Glory 1130/WECR AM Radio in Newland. Her cat, Midi, has many adventures, too.



*The Word*  
In Memory of Joy Baldwin  
Madison County

*The Word became flesh  
And so dwelt among man  
He enters the churches  
With the perfect plan.*

*He stands at the altar  
Although we can't see  
There awaits to caress us  
Oh so tenderly.*

*His robe of pure scarlet  
More lovely by far  
Than the brightest sunshine  
Or the purest star.*

*Go now and hold to him  
He meets every need  
He'll change you completely  
Oh try him, and see.*

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By Robby and Jenny McMakin  
Mitchell County

Tri County Pregnancy Center offers compassionate support and information to anyone facing an unexpected pregnancy or is wishing to prepare for childbirth and/or improve their parenting skills through the life-changing Good News of Jesus Christ.

Gather Together

Hebrews 10:25 *Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer.*

Holidays and special dates give a reason for sentimental hearts, reminiscent thoughts, and awakened senses. Precious moments of life shift our thinking from a routine daily cycle to thoughts of what and who really matter. Who do you purposefully hang out with, make time for, remember to follow up with, who do you love on well?

When I think of the word together, thoughts of where I belong and where I am welcome come to mind. WE, is a together word that goes beyond the definition of groups of people (family, friends, co-workers, classmates, etc.). WE the people of America are a united group only after WE the people of our community consider ourselves as one, together, we choose to take care of each other.

In this holiday season take time for yourself to consider:

How are you feeling?

What are you hoping the season will bring?

What do you or your family need?

Who are your support people - who encourage you?

Who are you most thankful for and how can you encourage them?

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Peace Like a River

By Dr. Sandy C. Gregory



Singing hymns has allowed me to express worship and provided a strong foundation for my faith. One such hymn is, “It Is Well with My Soul.” The lyrics speak of God’s help in troubling times.

When peace like a river attendeth my way  
When sorrows like sea billows roll  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

As I have aged, “peace like a river” has become more important to me. Some people call it “peace of mind” which means to have an overall sense of contentment or acceptance in certain situations. Words like still, calm, and satisfied can be used to describe feelings of peace. When a river flows, it goes either around or over obstacles. It flows without stopping. Peace like a river is a peace that flows in our lives despite troubles or turmoil.

Our culture today seems to be one of tribulation. Unrest causes stress and frustration. An aging adult recently told me: “The past year was tough. Sometimes I feel like giving up and want to feel and think nothing for a few minutes, to rest a bit.” In other words, “the sea billows roll” in this person’s life. The Bible portrays the sea as the source of storms. Storms in our lives cause us to feel restless and helpless.

Having “peace like a river” starts with knowing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. God’s Word is filled with verses that bring peace amid struggles. John 14:27 reads “My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

Peace is a gift from God; all we have to do is accept it. Finding peace like a river allows us to sing the refrain of this hymn over and over: “It is well, it is well with my soul.”

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Maintaining the Balance

By Dan Quorollo  
Burke County

As we approach this time of year, it is easy to allow our priorities to become improperly balanced. The busyness of the Christmas season and the many self-inflicted demands often create a sense of stress and pressure as we attempt to get everything done. Some of this is fueled by our culture and the emphasis that Christmas time brings; some of it is self-inflicted by our own desires and standards.

Busyness has a way of robbing from that which is most important, often without our even realizing it. Luke 10:38-41 describes an account of when Jesus was dining at the home of Martha and Mary. I can only imagine the sense of pressure that Martha must have felt. I believe her service to Jesus was not initially performed out of obligation; rather, I truly believe she wanted Jesus to experience the best because she loved him.

Her devotion and desire soon gave way to frustration as she observed her sister sitting idly by at the feet of Jesus. The Bible phrases it perfectly when it states that Martha “was cumbered about much serving.” She had allowed her service to become burdensome because she developed an improper perspective.

I have always marveled at the response of Jesus. Jesus instructed Martha that “one thing is needful.” To Martha, many things were needful; to Jesus, only one thing was needful.

As we approach a busy time of year, we do well to be reminded of that which is truly most important. Do not sacrifice that which is most important for that which is secondary, at best. Determine to maintain your walk with the Lord during this time of year. I assure you that Christmas will mean more to you if you do.

Pastor Dan Quorollo is pastor Morganton Baptist Church. Check us out on our website [www.morgantonbaptist.net](http://www.morgantonbaptist.net) or find us on Facebook and YouTube.



“He Will Save His People From Their Sins” (Matthew 1:21)

By Shawn Thomas  
Angleton, Texas



C.S. Lewis wrote of a funny experience his brother Warnie had while riding on an English double-decker bus one day during the Christmas season. The bus passed a church with a manger scene outside of it, and Warnie overheard a woman exclaim: “‘Lor’, they’re dragging religion into everything these days: look, they’re even dragging it into Christmas now!”

But celebrating Jesus is not “dragging” religion into Christmas; the true meaning of Christmas is what God did for us in Jesus Christ, the baby in that manger. What did He do? Matthew 1:21 gives us the answer, as the angel told Joseph: “*You shall call His name ‘Jesus’, for He will save His people from their sins.*”

What is the significance of this saying? The name “Jesus” (or “Yeshua”) means “Yahweh is salvation,” an indication that God was saving His people through Him. But the angel specifically said that He would save His people “from their sins.” What does this mean?

The basic meaning of the word “sins” in Matthew 1:21 is “to miss the mark” — but not in the way many of us would think of it: like an archer, who was trying to hit the right target, but just couldn’t do it. No, this word means “to miss the mark” of the standards God set for us regarding the way that we should live:

- God commanded us to love Him with all our hearts and souls, but we didn’t; we “missed the mark,” and chose to love other things in His place.
- God commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves, but instead we “missed the mark,” and chose to be selfish and self-centered in our decisions.

We could go down the list of all the commandments, and see that we have all continually fallen short of them. Romans 3:23 summarizes this when it says: “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*”

And because we have sinned, we must pay the penalty for our sins. One of the clearest, most consistent messages of the Bible is that there are consequences for our sins:

- God told Adam & Eve regarding the Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil, “*The day you eat from it, you shall surely die.*” (Genesis 2:17)
- “*the wages of sin is death,*” Romans 6:23 says.
- Ephesians 5:6, speaking of sins, says: “*because of these things, the wrath of God rightly comes upon the sons of disobedience.*”

But the Bible tells us here that Jesus came “to save His people from their sins.” The baby Jesus grew up to die on the cross as the sacrifice which paid the penalty for our

continued on page 34





# Mountain Time

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#MOUNTAINTIMEISTHEBESTTIME







BMC Senior Combines Love Of Dirt Bikes With Christmas Project For Kids

By Cheryl Shuffler  
Burke County



Burke Middle College senior Jackson Crump went outside the box to create a service project that combines his love of dirt bikes with a desire to help less fortunate children. Jackson spent two Saturdays in late October collecting boxes for Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child shoebox drive. He called his project "Dirt Bikes for Tikes."

Jackson said, "I am a competitive dirt bike rider and have learned to network with other people in this sport, so I decided this past summer that I wanted to organize an event that would combine my two passions. I came up with 'Dirt Bikes for Tikes,' a day where I would encourage others to pay kindness forward."

Jackson's first step was to provide 50 fellow dirt bike enthusiasts who visited a popular mountain trail with Samaritan's Purse shoeboxes. Jackson had filled the shoeboxes with chicken biscuits Chick-fil-A donated, as well as a granola bar, pack of crackers, chocolate chip cookies, water, and a soda. Also included was a flier explaining how the recipient could take the box of goodies for themselves and turn it into something good for others. The information asked the bikers to take their box, pack it with things such as crayons, coloring books, flip-flops, hygiene items, socks, and craft items and return it the next Saturday.

Jackson is well on his way to meeting his goal of collecting 50 boxes and delivering them to Samaritan's Purse later this month. In addition to the Chick-fil-A donation, he also received an anonymous donation of \$500 for his project, which will help pay the \$9 shipping fee for each box. He said, "My hope is that somehow this contribution will give some kid a sparkle of that Christmas joy."

Jackson said one particular Christmas morning when he was younger was the inspiration for his project. He wrote in an essay about the project, "Every kid feels that tingle of excitement Christmas morning. The smell of the tree. The twinkling lights. The aroma of cookies drifts through the house. And most importantly to any kid, the mountain of presents under the tree. Growing up, I felt all of those, too, until one morning when I didn't. As I looked at the presents, I felt an overwhelming sadness. A sadness for all of those kids in the world that did not have what I did on Christmas Day. I sat down and cried. I was seven years old. You see, my mother always taught us the importance of giving to others, especially when we have been blessed. Every year she took my sister and me to shop for kids like ourselves who didn't have the pile of presents or maybe even socks for their feet. Every year, my sister and I would fill the Samaritan Purse Shoeboxes with crayons, toothbrushes, Matchbox cars, pencils, and toys--hoping that our choices would bring that little bit of Christmas joy to another kid somewhere in the world."

Jackson is currently looking into colleges and is interested in the engineering schools at NC State University or UNC Charlotte and wants to be a mechanical engineer.

Cheryl Shuffler is the Public Relations Officer for the Burke County Public School System.



Sudoku

Solution on page 14

		6						2
			2	6	5			
8			9		3			
9		1						3
		4	3		1	6		
3						8		5
			7		4			9
			1	2	6			
4						3		

Are We Listening?

By Ken and Jan Merop  
Avery County



We are so accustomed to verbal communication, technology's beeps and trills, or voice mail, that we seldom think how we may need to listen in other ways. Sometimes listening with our physical ears is simply not enough.

In fact, tuning out all of the noise that drowns out peace and quiet may be necessary to help us tune in to listening with our hearts.

Recently, I gave a going away card to a young girl who would be moving into a different living situation. While mixed with sadness and hope for her, this card said in a whimsical sort of way that her angel would watch over her.

I thought that was appropriate but knew in my spirit that this was more than just wishful whimsy. I knew God's word spoke of this very thing. When I found the Scripture that says every child has an angel that is always in the presence of God the Father, I was elated.

I quickly typed it out and placed it with her card.

When she opened her gift and read the card, she thanked me and hugged me. But, when I showed her the verse explaining that this is God's word and is the truth that she could take with her, verbal communication was not necessary.

Her eyes lit up as she looked directly into mine and knowingly nodded her head with spiritual understanding and a countenance of peace and comfort. We communicated without words, heart to heart.

What might God be trying to communicate to us that we are too busy to hear? Are our voices simply too loud that we can't hear anything but our own cries or whining?

When Jesus willingly left his heavenly home to take on human form...coming as an innocent babe...what was he silently saying?

Perhaps the proclamation of the angel in Luke 2: 9, NLT will give us a clue. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior –yes, the Messiah, the Lord – has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!"

Good news. Joy. A Savior. The Messiah. Born in David's city.

Listen for his whisper on your heart to receive the good news and embrace the fact that God is with you, approachable. Then let joy radiate like God's glory that surrounded the shepherds. Celebrate the long-awaited Messiah, the Savior of your soul.

Now, as in those days, do you hear it beating a rhythm in your heart and soul? Selah

Melody of Love

An angel's sweet harp song  
amidst starlight's glow...  
Evergreens and pinecones  
whisper be still, be slow...

Listen...

the newborn Babe's rhythmic heartbeat  
sings His melody of love.

"For there is born to you this day...a Savior,  
who is Christ the Lord."

Luke 2: 11



Ken and Jan love residing in the mountains of Avery County. Visit Jan's new blog @pauseandconsider.net, Journeying with Jan. Ken's photos can be seen at kenmeropphotography.com.



# Marlene’s Meditations

## 3 Secrets to Finding Mary’s Treasures

By Marlene Houk  
Burke County

Luke 1:46-55  
“And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.”



When you lose a treasure, do you pray for its discovery? My friend and I dropped by her doctor for a visit, and, in the process, my right earring slipped from my ear and disappeared. I retraced my busy day, returning to the office and digging into their sofa, searching the fluff of my scarf, and scouring the car. Nothing. The copper earring with its brilliant chips circling the outside held importance as a Christmas gift from my husband the year before. I prayed, asking the Lord to show mercy by revealing the missing piece.

Several days passed. I repeated my prayer occasionally, having experienced amazing answers in the past to lost items. Five days later, my friend texted and I called her. She answered and a welcome voice warmed my chilly winter day with the news that a patient had found my earring in the parking lot and carried it to the office. What an unexpected pleasure to reunite the two earrings! My face lit with delight, and I enjoyed a rush of glee at finding my valued piece of jewelry.



My loss and recovery prompted me to reread Mary’s song in Luke 1:46-55. Her words glow with joy after Gabriel’s news that she would birth Emmanuel. She is in awe of God’s amazing favor, and, in her words, decodes an elusive message to finding the treasures of joy. I realized that recovering my earring reminded me of Mary’s story. And I found Mary’s three secrets to the riches of gratitude.

The first secret is to tell others, in detail, about your experience. I was impressed with the office staff for showing kindness. I told others the details, shared my happiness at their solicitude, and recalled their efforts to help me. Mary, the mother of Jesus, shared with others the joy and delight of her Son’s love and sacrifice. She magnified her Savior, bringing His divine might and power up close so that others could know Him. Like a magnifying glass, Mary pointed others to Jesus with her life, her love for Him, and her legacy. The details of His love and care for Mary clear up our confusion and grief, thousands of years later. Likewise, we, like Mary, revel in the luxuries of joy as we magnify Jesus so others see Him up close.

The second secret is allowing your life to lead others to the Lord. The office staff was simply there—doing their jobs, fulfilling their training and duties. And, in the course of their career, God used them to point me to Jesus’ abundant care for me, even in the little stuff. Mary knew God’s might in her life. She joined Esther in knowing that God would include her in His plan to rescue people from sin. She surrendered to His plan for her, and God’s might flowed through her like spiritual adrenaline. She focused on His might in Luke 2:49 and her spirit overflowed with joy. Like the surge of strength when others help push a car, Mary felt God work in her life as she lived, moved, and had her being in Him. (Acts 17:28) The third secret is showing compassion to others. The office staff busied themselves with their obligations, but they took time to listen and remember my needs. Mary experienced God’s mercy, and she spoke of His tender loving care, inviting us, through her divinely-told story, to experience His grace for ourselves. As a mother wraps her newborn babe in mercy, so we gently enclose others with compassion as we share Jesus’ gift of salvation.

I gifted the office staff with flowers and an Italian crème cake, small tokens of my gratitude for their thoughtfulness. And, like Mary, I discovered that to magnify the Lord, allow His might to flow through me, and show mercy to others would uncover a fountain of joy.



Marlene Houk is a regular contributor to Blue Ridge Christian News. Her passion is to delve deeply into the truths of Bible women and to discuss those in Bible Studies called Backstage Pass to Bible Women. She and her husband discover joy, nurture, and challenge in their church. Her contact is marlenehouk@bellsouth.net Learn more about women in the Bible at Marlene’s website: [www.MarleneHouk.com](http://www.MarleneHouk.com)




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# Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

## Can This Be Christmas?

Dr. Jack R. Hodges, Jr.  
Burke County

*"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."* (Luke 2:6-7)

It's the most wonderful time of the year...! So begins a popular Christmas song that is played each and every year at Christmas time. Surely, God's wonderful and greatest gift to mankind is something to be celebrated—for God came near and took on human flesh He come to live among us and then to die for us. He came so that we, God's precious creation, might be delivered from the penalty of sin and reconciled once again to Him.

M.R. DeHaan, the founder of the old Radio Bible Class, wrote this timely poem entitled, Can This Be Christmas? His poem draws our attention to the real object of our Christmas celebration:

What's all this hectic rush and worry'  
Where go these crowds who run and curry'  
Why all the lights—the Christmas trees'  
The jolly "fat man," tell me please!

Why, don't you know? This is the day  
For parties and for fun and play;



After 45 years of working at Peoples Furniture and owning the business since 2006, Ken and Trish are now retiring. Peoples would like to thank all their customers and employees for the support over the years. Peoples Furniture has been sold to a great couple that will strive to continue to give you excellent products, pricing, and customer service. We are proud to announce that Walton and Kayla Shepherd have purchased the buildings and they will be running a like business in the same location. We are proud to welcome L&L Furniture Company to Spruce Pine. L&L is named after their son Liam and their daughter Lillian. Kayla was born in Spruce Pine and graduated from Mitchell High School. She is the daughter of Jeff and Shirley Singleton of Spruce Pine. Walton was born and raised in Waynesville, NC and graduated from Tuscola High School. He is the son of Billy and Denise Shepherd, also of Waynesville, NC. They will continue to operate a locally owned business, with the same employees, and maintain excellent customer service. They have a staff that believes in "Real People, Real Service. They also believe that the continued success of any business is the continued support of loyal customers. Everyone is welcome to come by the store and look at the many things L&L Furniture has to offer and browse the upcoming website to see all the manufacturers websites that L&L Furniture represents. You can contact L&L at the same phone number. 828-765-5557

Ken, Trish, Don, and family are excited to keep a business in downtown Spruce Pine to serve the local communities. Again, we appreciate all the customers and friends that we have made over the years and we kindly thank you for your support. We are looking forward to spending time with our family and enjoying some time outdoors.

Congratulations,

Walton and Kayla. We will be praying for you and the employees daily.

- The Waldroups



## Why this is Christmas!

So this is Christmas, do you say'  
But where is Christ this Christmas day'  
Has He been lost among the throng'  
His voice drowned out by empty song'

No. He's not here—you'll find Him where  
Some humble soul now kneels in prayer,  
Who knows the Christ of Christmas.

But see the many aimless thousands  
Who gather on this Christmas Day,  
Whose hearts have never yet been opened,  
Or said to Him, "Come in to stay."

In countless homes the candles burning,  
In countless hearts expectant yearning  
For gifts and presents, food and fun,  
And laughter till the day is done.

But not a tear of grief or sorrow  
For Him so poor He had to borrow  
A crib, a colt, a boat, a bed  
Where He could lay His weary head.

I'm tired of all this empty celebration,  
Of feasting, drinking, recreation;  
I'll go instead to Calvary.

And there I'll kneel with those who know  
The meaning of that manger low,  
And find the Christ—this Christmas.

I leap by faith across the years  
To that great day when He appears  
The second time, to rule and reign,  
To end all sorrow, death, and pain.

In endless bliss we then shall dwell  
With Him who saved our souls from hell,  
And worship Christ—not Christmas!

What, then, is Christmas? Is it the pomp and circumstance? The tinsel and the garland? Is it the rush of consumerism or the hurry and scurry of last-minute shopping? Is it the Christmas cards, decorated trees, homes, and yards? Is it the bright lights and food? Is it snow or the warmth of a fire on a cold December day? Each of these may bring a feeling of happiness and excitement! But is that Christmas? The answer is, of course, no! What, then, is Christmas?

For each of us as Christians, Christmas is a time of spiritual reflection upon the important foundations of the Christian faith. It is a time of celebration! It's when we, as the recipients of the greatest gift that has ever been given to God's special creation, celebrate God's love gift for the world through the birth of the Christ child, Jesus.

Christmas is an attitude of devotion and worship, which translates to a daily lifestyle. That attitude and heart for God is not just a season or a day! It's a life lived each day recognizing and celebrating what God has done for us in Jesus. He, God Incarnate, was born in order to pay the price for our sin. Gracious and loving God sent his only Son to be the atonement for all our sins—so that we would be forgiven, reconciled, and adopted as spiritual sons and daughters; so that would not be separated from God; and so that we would experience true and deep fellowship with God, our Heavenly Father. That's why we celebrate Christmas!

*Dr. Jack R. Hodges, Jr. is the Senior Pastor at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Morganton, Burke County. He has served as a pastor, a biblical counselor and a International Mission Board missionary.*





Walking By Faith

By Dr. Tom Walker  
McDowell County



2 Corinthians 5:7 says, “*We walk by faith, not by sight.*” The Christian walk is one of faith and not of sight. Hebrews 11 contains quite a list of people who walked by faith. Several heroes of faith are mentioned in that interesting chapter. Faith never failed; it always worked in the lives of those who have possessed and exercised it.

The word for faith is the Greek word (pistis) comes from the word (pitho). The word “pitho” is translated several ways in the KJV. It is translated in other places as assure, believe, have confidence, or trust and in other ways as well. When we see how the word is used in other places in our King James Bibles it gives us a very good picture of what the word is meant to convey to us.

The only way to have a successful Christian walk is to put confidence in the Lord and believe, even when we do not see at times when things do not seem to be going well in life.

It is through faith we see our way through the dark, discouraging times of life and come out living in victory, even though we may face some of the worst times. What does faith do in our lives?

Faith Gets Us In

The Christian life begins with a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*” If a person could go to Heaven by living a good life, doing good deeds, or any other way but Christ, then our Lord would not have had to go to Calvary to shed His precious blood for our sins. Calvary would not have been necessary if that would have been the case.

Acts 16:31 tells us, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*” That word “believe” is translated in John 2:24 as “commit.” There the Bible says, “*Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men.*” The time had not yet come for Jesus to die, so He did not put confidence in or trust those men to whom He was speaking. Thus, to believe in someone is to commit yourself to them or to trust them.

Faith is more than an easy belief-ism or some brief emotional experience. It is a commitment of your life and your eternal destiny to the Lord Jesus Christ. In one moment of faith the believer is made a born-again child of God; he instantaneously has a guarantee of Heaven at the end of this earthly journey.

Faith Enables Us to Stand

We can stand against the wiles (deceit or trickery) of the Devil. The word “wiles” is (methodeia), from which we get our word methods. Satan approaches people in many different ways and through many different channels. Between him and his demon buddies, they know what your weaknesses are and will try to make an inroad to your life by exploring and taking advantage of them. If you give Satan an inch, he will take a mile. The Bible exhorts us to “*Neither give place to the devil*” (Ephesians 4:27). We need to make sure we do not give Satan any elbow room or a beachhead from which to operate in our lives.

Faith gives strength to our lives. No one can stand in a spiritual battle without divine strength. God promises to give us all the stamina we need to not give in to evil or give up in the fiercest of battles. In Isaiah 41:10 the Lord settles us by saying, “*Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*”

Faith Can Grow

Romans 10:17 tells us, “*Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” Your faith may be small but it can grow. The more time you spend in reading and taking in the Word of God, the stronger your faith will be. Don’t let the development of your faith slow down. Keep on reading the Bible daily because it will produce benefits that will add to and enhance your life. When you neglect your Bible, you are starving your faith. All of our faith is based upon what the Word of God says. Without it, we would have no reliable foundation for our faith.

Faith Shields Us

Ephesians 6:16 states, “*Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*” Faith acts as a shield; it is a means of protection. Ancient warriors often used shields to protect them from the arrows, spears, and swords of the enemy. Because we represent the Savior who they have rejected, they do not like what and who we stand for each day. This is a dangerous world and we have many foes, so be wise and take the weapons to which God has given us access. The Devil is relentless, he never gives up. However, Satan’s fiery darts are of no avail, they are ineffective if we hold up the shield of faith.

Faith Settles Us

Faith relieves fear and anxiety. Do you remember what Jesus said to the disciples on the stormy sea? Jesus said to those disciples, “*Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm*” (Matt. 8:26). When we put our faith and trust in the Lord tempestuous seas become calm waters. Life has many turbulent seas we must cross, so that is why we must have faith, and our confidence in God, to settle us as we sail through life. Faith says, “*I trust God to do what is right because He is all-wise, all-knowing, and all-powerful.*” Faith says, “*When I can not see the way, I will still trust God.*” Job of old said, “*Though God slay me, yet will I trust Him*” (Job 13:15). Job also said, “*And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.*” (Job 19:26)

Faith Commends Us

“*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world*” (Romans 1:8). The church in Rome had such a great faith that it was spoken of around the world. There is nothing that should commend you more than when your faith is so evident, that other people speak about the clear manifestation of it.

One commentator wrote, “The readiness with which the Romans had embraced the gospel, the firmness with which they held to it, was so remarkable that it was known and celebrated everywhere.”

Sometimes the word “world” has a limited scope in the Bible. Here it means the places throughout the Roman Empire where churches were established. Faith is something that makes itself known through human lives and human tongues.

Faith Pleases God

Hebrews 11:6 “*But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.*” That verse is very clear. If you do not have faith, then you absolutely cannot please God. Since faith gives pleasure to God, then I want to exert all of it that I possibly can. You can receive more good things from God when you please Him than when you are in a state of displeasing the Lord.

We all need to walk with the Lord in this life. Make sure you have saving faith in Christ and that you are practicing it and living it out in your daily life.

Tom Walker is President of Foothills Baptist Bible College and Pastor of Zion Hill Baptist Church in Marion, NC.



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# YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

## NC Senate District 47



Sen. Ralph Hise  
Ralph.Hise@ncleg.net  
919-733-3460

On November 18th, Gov. Roy Cooper signed the first state budget into law in nearly three years. North Carolina Republicans had spent months negotiating in good faith with the Governor. As a Senate budget chair, I am glad to see this budget was finally signed into law. For the past decade, Republicans in the General Assembly have enacted smart, fiscally conservative spending plans. It's our responsibility to spend North Carolinians' dollars wisely and this year's budget builds on that with sweeping tax cuts and major infrastructure improvements across the state.

In addition to the many capital projects we have funded this year, the budget also includes provisions to rein in the Governor's emergency powers. Specifically, we have revised the Emergency Management Act to require a vote of the Council of State for the Governor to extend a statewide emergency beyond 30 days. Gov. Cooper has kept North Carolina in a "state of emergency" for nearly two years. This cannot continue. I believe it is critical that no one person should have the power to unilaterally shut down the entire state. This provision ensures that going forward by requiring the Council of State to vote on a declared emergency within 30 days, and the legislature to vote on it within 60 days. With the Governor signing the budget into law, that provision will become effective Jan. 1, 2023.

The legislature has also taken action to prohibit the type of secretive settlement deal that Attorney General Josh Stein struck with politically allied lawyers to change election law. During the last election, Attorney General Stein secretly negotiated with the Democratic Party's top lawyer, Marc Elias, to change the rules of the 2020 election after voting had already begun. This type of action undermines confidence in our elections. As such, the budget prohibits the Attorney General from negotiating secret settlement deals with political allies ever again by requiring the General Assembly to sign off before any settlements are reached. I believe this is imperative to ensure North Carolinians can trust our electoral process.

I believe our budget will be transformative for the state of North Carolina, not just with the many investments we have made in critical infrastructure projects, but also from the perspective of limiting the overreach of government. You can be sure I will continue fighting in the North Carolina Senate to make sure your tax dollars are spent wisely, and your rights are not infringed.

As always, please share your thoughts with me on this or any other issue related to the state government by emailing me at [rhise@ncleg.gov](mailto:rhise@ncleg.gov) or calling me at 919-733-3460.

## NC Commissioner of Labor



NC Commissioner of Labor  
Josh Dobson  
1-800-625-2267

I hope your family enjoyed a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday. My family and I have much to be grateful for, and I try to remember that every day of the year – not just Thanksgiving Day.

The month of November flew by in the blink of an eye. With the successful and safe county fair season behind us, we turned our attention to the last few safety awards banquets. I visited Albemarle, Roxboro, and Creedmoor in November to present safety awards to businesses in those communities. In total, we presented more than 2,600 safety awards around the state between August and November. Congratulations again to all of our recipients! Be on the lookout for next year's safety awards letter and application, set to go out in a few weeks.

In early November, I attended the North Carolina Electric Cooperatives 17th Biennial Pole Top Rescue Competition at Nash Community College. The competition showcased the skills of linemen around the state who demonstrated their expertise in rescuing a fellow lineman from atop a utility pole. I was able to observe firsthand the importance of workplace safety for the women and men who work hard to keep the power on for our communities' electric cooperative members.

On Nov. 4, the Biden administration released its COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) vaccine or testing mandate for private employers with 100 or more employees. I immediately released a statement opposing the mandate for several reasons. First, this mandate would place an unnecessary burden on employers already facing an unprecedented worker shortage. Second, the Biden administration did not provide one additional dollar to my department to enforce this mandate. Our compliance officers are already overworked, and it is irresponsible to add this responsibility to our plates without adding any additional resources. Finally, I think it is fundamentally unfair to make a person choose between receiving a vaccine or keeping a job that provides for their family. Fortunately, as of today, the federal appeals court has temporarily ruled that the Biden administration cannot enforce the mandate. However, I believe that this matter will ultimately be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court. To be clear – I support vaccines, I received the COVID-19 vaccine and I encourage my family and employees to get the vaccine. But I do not believe the federal government should force this decision upon employers and employees.

Closing on a positive note, the North Carolina General Assembly adopted a biennial state budget last week, and Governor Cooper signed it shortly thereafter. For the first time in several years, the state finally has a new budget in place. I'm happy to report that the budget, while not perfect, includes many items that will ultimately benefit North Carolinians. All state employees will receive at least a five percent pay increase over the next two years, and my department received much-needed operational funding and support for two new positions.

May God bless you and your family during this season. Merry Christmas.

## NC Senate District 46



Sen. Warren Daniel  
Warren.Daniel@ncleg.net  
919-715-7823

Friends, I would like to offer Christmas greetings from my wife, Lydia, and me at the beginning of this wonderful holiday season. It has once again been my privilege to represent District 46 (Avery, Burke, and Caldwell Counties) in the NC General Assembly. The most significant accomplishment of this legislative session is our compromise 2021-2022 budget being passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in both chambers. Governor Cooper then signed it into law on November 17th. This budget continues the Republican-led legislature's decade-long commitment to low taxes and responsible spending. Because of that, we've seen healthy budget surpluses year after year. This year's budget builds on that by providing major tax relief to families and major infrastructure improvements, including \$128 million for our district. The state budget sets in motion a 10-year, \$16.1 billion cash infrastructure and capital plan. It includes a sweeping tax cut that reduces the personal income tax rate to 3.99% over six years and increases the zero-tax bracket to \$25,500 for married filers. It increases the child tax deduction by \$500 per child and eliminates the state income tax on military pensions. The state budget includes \$100 million in recurring funds for a new state-funded teacher salary supplement for lower-wealth counties to help them recruit and retain high-quality teachers. Avery, Burke, and Caldwell Counties are set to receive \$1,458, \$1,199, and \$1,269 respectively per teacher to supplement the counties' portion of the teacher's pay. The budget also includes a provision to rein in the executive branch's emergency powers and prohibits the type of secretive settlement deal that Attorney General Josh Stein struck with politically allied lawyers to change election law after voting began in 2020. Our team successfully advocated for funds for community colleges, Soil, and Water Districts, the North Carolina School of Science and Math-Morganton, trails, parks, and several other projects that are important to NC Senate District 46.

As we begin this holiday season, let us not forget to continue to look out for friends and others that may have had a difficult year. Christmas is a wonderful time to focus on the 2nd great commandment that Jesus gave, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Remember the reason for the season is God's greatest gift, Jesus Christ. May God bless you all during this most wonderful time of the year.



NC 11th Congressional District



Rep. Madison Cawthorn  
828-808-2148

Democrats' spending is out of control. Between the infrastructure bill and "Build Back Better" plan they are addicted to wasting your money on unnecessary, unAmerican, and illogical projects that will only serve to further their far-left agenda. Both of these bills will only go to make you pay more taxes, more for everyday goods, and more at the pump.

Congratulations to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians!

2021 COPS Office Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation (CTAS) Awards

State and Agency Name	Officers Funded (N)	Amount for Hiring Award	Amount for Equipment & Training Award	Total Amount of Awards
<b>Montana</b>				
Fort Peck Assiniboine & Sioux Tribes	—	—	\$899,960	\$899,960
<b>Nevada</b>				
Washoe Tribe of Nevada & California	2	\$397,641	\$302,359	\$700,000
<b>New Mexico</b>				
Jicarilla Apache Nation	—	—	\$184,032	\$184,032
Pueblo of Acoma, Inc.	—	—	\$696,637	\$696,637
<b>North Carolina</b>				
Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	—	—	\$482,534	\$482,534
<b>Oklahoma</b>				
Cherokee Nation	1	\$336,666	\$559,823	\$896,489
Chickasaw Nation	—	—	\$757,663	\$757,663
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma	—	—	\$827,679	\$827,679
Muscogee Creek Nation	2	\$600,359	\$288,413	\$888,772
Sac & Fox Nation	—	—	\$432,776	\$432,776

Congratulations to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians for receiving a \$482,534 grant from the Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services!

The funding can be used to hire or re-hire full-time career law enforcement officers and village public safety officers, as well as procure basic equipment and training, to assist in the initiation or enhancement of Tribal community policing efforts.

My office has been working with FEMA overtime to secure and distribute emergency funds to Western North Carolina since Tropical Storm Fred ripped through the district. Between Buncombe, Haywood, and Transylvania counties NC-11 has received over 16 million dollars in federal aid to assist with recovery after Tropical Storm Fred!

In Transylvania County:

- \$127,544 in FEMA grants went to homeowners and renters.
- \$947,643 in claims were paid to National Flood Insurance Program policyholders

In Haywood County:

- \$2,453,497 in FEMA grants went to homeowners and renters.
- \$9,246,331 in claims were paid to National Flood Insurance Program policyholders.
- \$2,270,800 in U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) low-interest disaster loans were approved for homeowners, renters, and businesses.

In Buncombe County:

- \$591,868 in FEMA grants went to homeowners and renters.
- \$1,667,217 in claims were paid to National Flood Insurance Program policyholders.
- \$646,600 in U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) low-interest disaster loans were approved for homeowners, renters, and businesses.

Residents in Buncombe, Haywood, and Transylvania counties who registered with FEMA can check the status of their applications, ask questions, and get information by visiting FEMA’s website at DisasterAssistance.gov, using the FEMA app for smartphones, or calling the FEMA Helpline at 800-621-3362 (800-462-7585 TTY).





get on our nerves and make us angry. In Jesus’s precious name I pray Amen.

Proverbs 12:10 “Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.”

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Christy Lowman is a Christian author and illustrator that lives in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains with her husband and two children. She enjoys writing and illustrating books for all ages. Some of her short stories are published with Guideposts and HCI.. Christy gives all the glory to God in everything she does. A portion of every book sold from the Small Bible Character Series will be donated to battle human trafficking. You can buy her books at https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp\_byline\_sr\_book\_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=Christy+Lowman&search-alias=books&text=Christy+Lowman&sort=relevancerank. You can reach her at https://www.facebook.com/authorChristyLowman/ or christysoaps@yahoo.com.



sins. I Peter 2:24 says "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross." Jesus paid the penalty for our sins so that we could be reconciled back to God.

A few years ago there was a judge in Great Britain, who had a homeless man before his court on a charge of stealing two Christmas cards. The man had clearly stolen them; he was guilty. The judge was compelled to be just and uphold the law. But he also felt compassion for the penniless, homeless man. So after finding the man guilty, the judge then reached into his own pocket, and took out the money that was required, and paid the man's fine for him.

This is what the God of the Universe has done for us. He is a just Judge, who could by no means just ignore our sins. But He also loved us and wanted to forgive our sins. So He made the only payment that would suffice to atone for them: a payment which only He could make, by dying on the cross for our sins. And when He did, He completely paid the penalty for our sins. When Jesus died on the cross, He cried out, “It is finished” — in the original Bible language a commercial expression which means that a debt was “paid in full.” Jesus was declaring that the penalty for our sins was paid in full by His death on the cross.

Many people think of religion as doing enough good religious deeds to make yourself right with God. The problem is, the Bible tells us we can never do enough good works to save ourselves. Instead, it teaches that salvation is a GIFT bought by Jesus for us on the cross. If you will repent of your sins and receive Jesus as your Lord & Savior, you can be made right with God – NOT because of the good deeds you have done, but by what HE did for you on the cross.

I was in a restaurant with my wife Cheryl one time, and when we were about to leave I looked around and didn't see a check, so I asked the waiter for it. He said it has already been taken care of. I asked, what do you mean? He said someone else has already paid the bill! So we could walk out of that restaurant -- fully justified in doing so – because the price had been paid for us. There was no need for me to pull out my wallet, and get some cash or a credit card, or to offer to do the dishes, or anything else.

That would have been totally unnecessary on my part because the price had already been paid.

This is how it is with us and God. You don’t have to try to perform a multitude of religious works to atone for all of your sins and make you right with God. Jesus has already paid the price. If you will repent of your sins, and receive His sacrifice, He will “save you from your sins” and make you right with God. Romans 8:1 says: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Jesus came to pay the penalty for our sins. If you will trust Him as your Lord & Savior, then you can say with the old hymn:

**“My sin, o the bliss of this glorious thought;  
my sin not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more!  
Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, O my soul!”**

This is what we celebrate this Christmas season: that Jesus came to “save His people from their sins”!

Shawn Thomas is a Southern Baptist pastor for almost 35 years, I currently serve as Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Angleton, Texas.



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# Mine Creek Baptist Church

## As Life Changes

By Chris Rathbone  
Mitchell County

If there is one constant, one thing in this life, that we can count on to remain the same year after year, it is this; life always changes. Now we know for sure that Jesus is the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). What I'm talking about is the fact that as time goes by, as we all grow older, life is constantly changing.

For the most part, a lot of us don't really like change. I've run across many folks over the years that get pretty upset when their routine, the things they are accustomed to, the way they have always done things; when anything changes from the norm they tend to get pretty upset or aggravated. Well I hate to tell you if you are one of those people, things are gonna change in your life and for the most part, there's nothing any of us can really do about it!

Let's go back to our childhood. Now there may be some of us that may have had a difficult childhood. We had those times in our family. But there were many times that all I was worried about was where we neighborhood kids were gonna play the next day. Or, was that gift that you really longed for gonna be under the Christmas tree. There was no worrying about a lot of the family struggles that were going on, such as bill paying, Dad and Mom took care of that worry.



How bout those teenage years when the slightest event made us feel like the world was crashing in around us! When we went from mostly carefree play to worry about being popular, accepted by peers, fitting in, what clothes we wore, the kind of car we drove to high school, what group we hung out with, etc. etc. Oh, and don't forget those teenage heartbreaks! How devastated we were because our hearts had been broken by someone we thought was the one!

Then we moved on to the college and career years. While some went off to further their education, others went into the workplace, while others struggled to figure out what direction to go. I was one of those! For the first time, we were on our own so to speak. We became responsible for making decisions about our future, about our finances, about how we were gonna pay the bills, where we were gonna live, etc. High school popularity doesn't seem to count for much in the real world. Suddenly, we are thrust into a world where we don't always have parents to bail us out (literally sometimes), and the decisions we make come with consequences we have to deal with ourselves. We look around at our peers and everyone's just trying to find their way and figure out the direction we want to go in life.

Along comes the years of marriage and kids for many. No longer is life just about us anymore. We become responsible to and for others. As a husband, I felt the responsibility of taking care of and providing for my wife. Then along came the boys. The burden and responsibility I felt because of the reality of knowing it was my duty to provide, protect, care for, and teach these babies about life was often quite overwhelming. Most important was the responsibility to point them to faith in Christ!

We are at the point in life now where we have one in college, most likely transferring next year to another college away from home. The other is getting ready to graduate high school this coming year. We will be empty nesters. Not sure if Michelle will like hanging out with just me all the time or not! The concern over our kids is never over and a lot of praying goes on that they will follow Jesus wherever this life takes them. Some of you are already in that place in life where the kids are gone from home. Then there are the grandkid years hopefully!

There are also changes in life that are very hard. Our health changes as we age and we can't do the things we once did and often want to do. Or possibly the diagnosis from the tests we had completely changed our future. Many will deal with the loss of a spouse to death or the loss of a child whether young or older. Our parents will age and making those difficult decisions to keep them safe and cared for becomes our responsibility. Family gatherings are never the same through all these changes that come in life. For the most part, the changes are things we can do nothing about. We don't like them but we have to go through them. That is a constant in life that we all have to accept, whether we want to or not!

Now through all life's changes, there is One we can count on that is always the same: Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! He has walked with me through all these things in life. While living through all these circumstances in life I have found Him faithful. Every time we go to Him when these changes come, He's always there and always the same. He understands every situation in which we find ourselves. He is there to guide, to help, to comfort, to help heal, and to give strength when needed. As you celebrate Christmas this year with all the changes you and your family have experienced in this life, remember the One who is always the same. He came to give us life and life abundantly. He came to this earth to make a way for us to be saved. Through Him, we can have eternal life and hope for the future. He lets us know that things aren't always gonna be this way. That baby that came in a manger will one day make all things new. Through Him, all broken hearts are gonna be mended and all will be healed. He gives us a lens that we can look through to help us see that this life is but a pilgrimage to eternity. As you celebrate this year, just remember, Jesus is always the same and Jesus is always there as life changes.

Preacher Chris Rathbone serves as Pastor at Mine Creek Baptist Church.

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*Trail of Lights*

Christmas lights display at the Trail of Faith  
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*Valdese Christmas Parade*

December 4th at 10am Main Street - Church St. to Morgan St.  
Applications available to participate at visitvaldese.com

*OCP presents - Elf, The Musical*

Old Rock School Auditorium - oldcolonyplayers.com  
December 10, 11, 16, 17, and 18 at 7:30pm  
& December 12 and 19 at 3pm

*Celebratory Tree Lighting*

December 10th at 6pm Old Rock School front steps -  
Hot chocolate & Santa visits!  
Carols by Old Colony Players cast from Elf the Musical

*Home Decorating Contest*

Applications to participate are available now!  
Homes will be judged December 8-10th  
Winners will be announced December 13  
1st Place \$100 | 2nd Place \$50 | 3rd Place \$25

*Movies at the Rock: Polar Express*

December 14th at the Old Rock School Auditorium  
Tickets \$2 per person - Photos with Santa  
Concessions will be available for purchase!  
Purchase online at visitvaldese.com

*Christmas Shop Hop*

December 13-18th - Visit participating shops for a stamp  
Get 15 stamps and be entered to Win!

Bikes, Scooters, Riding Toys for Children & Cash Prizes for Adults!

1st Place \$200 | 2nd Place \$100 | 3rd Place \$50

Winners will be announced on December 20th



*Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Matthew 2:1*

**Favored by God  
(A Christmas Devotional)**

By Caron Cline  
Burke County



Luke 1:26-38

Luke 1:30-31 *"And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus'".*

After nearly 400 years of silence, God sent his angel Gabriel to a priest named Zacharias. He and his wife Elizabeth were well past the age of child-bearing. However, this angel announced that not only would Elizabeth bear a son, but this child would be the forerunner to the long-awaited Messiah. Zacharias insulted Gabriel by questioning his prophetic word. This would result in 9 months of silence for this priest because he did not receive the word of the Lord by faith. Six months later, Gabriel found himself in the small village of Nazareth with another profound word from the Lord. The recipient was not a priest, but a young virgin named Mary who was engaged to a carpenter by the name of Joseph. Both were descendants of King David. Gabriel appeared before Mary and spoke these words: "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you". The word 'favored' is translated from the Greek word, 'karin' which could also be translated 'grace'. For a young Jewish woman, these words were beyond comprehension. The Presence of God resided at the Temple in the Holy of Holies, between the two seraphim. How could He be with her? What had she done to receive God's favor? Nothing could have prepared Mary for Gabriel's announcement and her demeanor must have testified to her shock and fear. Quickly, the angel eased her mind with these comforting words, *"Do not be afraid, Mary for you have found favor with God..."* Just as quickly, her confusion and wonder would have returned as he continued... *"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus"*. More details followed concerning the child she would bear. Despite this sudden interruption of news which made no sense in the natural, Mary asked only one simple question. "How can this be, since I am a virgin"? Unlike Zacharias, Mary seemed prepared to receive this seemingly impossible message, although she questioned the process. Zacharias had essentially doubted the word from the Lord by asking, 'How can I be sure your words are true, Gabriel'? Often, the disappointment of unanswered prayers, the loss of opportunities, or the oppression of the enemy can result in a spirit of hopelessness. Although Zacharias was a righteous man of God, he had experienced too many years of priestly service without a fresh word from the Lord. He and Elizabeth had prayed too many years for a child without an answer. Scholars agree that Mary was only 14-15 years of age, therefore, she lacked the many difficult life experiences which commonly weaken our faith. Her hope in the Lord was fresh and her heart pliable. Mary received the word of the Lord and opened her mouth in agreement: "Be it to me according to your word". The favor of God is upon His children and we must guard our hearts and minds against believing otherwise. Our faith is in the grace of our God. When the word of the Lord comes with a holy assignment, recognize and receive it, for nothing shall be impossible with God.

Psalms 84:11

*"For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly".*

Caron Cline is a follower of Jesus Christ who loves to teach the word of God. Her desire is to see every believer growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.



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Giving Forgiveness At Christmas

By Christopher L. Scott  
Moses Lake, Washington



“What do you think, Christopher?” a notoriously divisive family member asked me. I would not take the bait this time. I had been down this path with her in previous family gatherings. She’s nice and cordial in conversation, but when you share your contrary opinion with her, the boxing bell dings and she’s ready to fight.

Thus far, I had kept my mouth shut as she shared her thoughts on this subject. No topic was off-limits for her: politics, gender, world religion, race, family roles, etc. I had shared nothing with her, yet. But this time, she seemed sincerely interested in my opinion. She genuinely wanted to know what I thought about what she had shared.

So I shared my opinion, which was contrary to hers, most nicely and politely as possible. But I should have known better. Here came the hammer to crush my feelings and tell me I was wrong, super wrong.

My mom and dad were in the room when the conversation took a harsh turn. They knew what she said and how she said it was inappropriate and harsh. Later both tried to console me and encourage me it was okay.

To their surprise, I wasn’t shaken by the interaction. Why? Receiving Jesus’s forgiveness means I forgive others. Jesus came to earth and forgave my wrongs. What a gift!

Christmas time is the best time to give forgiveness. Christmas is the celebration of when Jesus came to earth—when God gave His Son to the world—to forgive all people of their sins.

Paul told us, *“In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than receive’”* (Acts 20:34, NRSV).

Paul’s short letter—Philemon—reminds me about forgiveness. In this letter, I see Paul living out what Jesus had said in Acts 20:34. Onesimus had wronged Philemon, but Paul asked Philemon to take Onesimus back and welcome him as if Philemon was welcoming Paul (v. 17).

Why such a plea for reconciliation? Why would Paul ask Philemon to welcome Onesimus back?

Because God did this first, *“through him [Jesus] God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven”* (Col 1:20, NRSV). Christ did it. He paid the ultimate price.

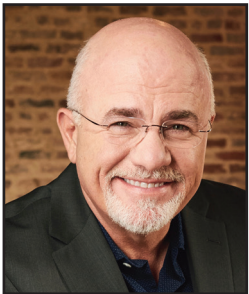
Last year I gave forgiveness to that family member for the harsh words spoken to me near Christmas. And this Christmas I will do the same for another family member. I do so from an abundance, *“It is more blessed to give than receive”* (Acts 20:34, NRSV). I have been forgiven by Christ, but I know it’s more blessed to give than receive. So this Christmas, I plan to give forgiveness to family members, again.

Christopher L. Scott, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, is a pastor and freelance writer. Learn more about his writing ministry at [ChristopherLynnScott.com](http://ChristopherLynnScott.com).



By Dave Ramsey

It’s always a we thing



Dear Dave,

My husband recently approached me with an idea for our money. He wants us to set up an account where we both put 10 percent of our income for discretionary spending. My husband makes more money than I do, and because of this, he says it is fair that he would be able to spend more than I would. How do you feel about this? Liz

Dear Liz,

I’m sure deep down he’s a decent guy and he loves you very much. But he’s looking at this all wrong. Right now, he’s being pretty immature and selfish about the whole situation. It’s a bad plan.

Let’s look at this from another angle. There are lots of families where only one person works outside the home and generates an income. Would it be fair, then, to say only the person making money is allowed a little cash to spend for fun once in a while? Of course, not.

When two people are married, they are pronounced “as one.” That means even if you only have one person with an income, it becomes our income. If you have kids, they become our kids. See where I’m going with this? Marriage is not a me thing, it’s a we thing. Always. — Dave

Before or after?

Dear Dave,

When it comes to paying off credit cards and getting out of debt, I’ve heard you talk about cutting up the cards and closing the accounts. Should I pay off the balances before or after I close the accounts? Adrian

Dear Adrian,

I like the idea of cutting up the cards and closing the accounts first. Sometimes credit card companies will respond to this by jacking up the interest rates or doing other shady things, but the point is to get them out of your life as quickly as possible and stop using the stupid things.

Personal finance is 80 percent behavior. Ridding yourself of credit cards, and getting credit card debt out of your life for good, is a great first step in learning to behave with your money. You don’t build wealth or save money by using credit cards, no matter what anyone says. If you’re naïve enough to think you’re going to play around with a multi-billion-dollar industry and beat them at their own game, you’re sadly mistaken.

The only way to win against credit card companies is by refusing to play their game! — Dave

Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. He has authored seven best-selling books, including *The Total Money Makeover*. The Dave Ramsey Show is heard by more than 14 million listeners each week on 600 radio stations and multiple digital platforms. Follow Dave on the web at [daveramsey.com](http://daveramsey.com) and on Twitter at [@DaveRamsey](https://twitter.com/DaveRamsey).

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# Crossword

Crossword 273

ACROSS

1 he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the \_\_\_\_ that shrank (Gen 32:32)

6 Nor did Asher drive out those living in \_\_\_\_ or Sidon (Judg 1:31)

10 The fear of the LORD \_\_\_\_ length to life (Prov 10:27)

14 As an \_\_\_\_ pleasing to the LORD (Num 29:2)

15 As \_\_\_\_ as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water (Matt 3:16)

16 Do not \_\_\_\_ because of evil men or be envious of the wicked (Prov 24:19)

17 In my Father's house are many \_\_\_\_ (John 14:2)

18 the tongue can no man \_\_\_\_; it is an unruly evil (James 3:8)

19 ninth letter of Greek alphabet

20 a prophetess, \_\_\_\_, the daughter of Phanue (Luke 2:36)

21 will not remain united, any more than iron \_\_\_\_ with clay (Dan 2:43)

22 But the word of the Lord endureth for \_\_\_\_ (1 Pet 1:25) KJV

23 Bring it \_\_\_\_ to me, and I will eat of my son's venison (Gen 27:25)

25 not only do they become \_\_\_\_, but also gossips (1 Tim 5:13)

27 reject (Job 10:3)

29 He \_\_\_\_ him Noah and said, "He will comfort us (Gen 5:29)

31 and \_\_\_\_ to be desired to make one wise (1,4) (Gen 3:6)

32 He had \_\_\_\_ his journey from Babylon on the first day of (Ezra 7:9)

33 a spider's trap (Isa 59:5)

36 Do not \_\_\_\_ up the words of the prophecy of this book (Rev 22:10)

37 His legs are pillars of marble set on \_\_\_\_ of pure gold (Song 5:15)

38 rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, \_\_\_\_, malice (Col 3:8)

39 David sent them to you to explore the city and \_\_\_\_ it out (2 Sam 10:3)

40 and the most important \_\_\_\_ in the synagogues (Matt 23:6)

41 a raised or projecting edge (Ezek 43:17)

42 He \_\_\_\_ down his hail like pebbles (Ps 147:17)

43 and your houses turned into \_\_\_\_ of rubble (Dan 2:5)

44 Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her \_\_\_\_? (Jer 2:32) KJV

47 I cast my \_\_\_\_ against them (Acts 26:10)

49 very expensive perfume, made of pure \_\_\_\_

(Mark 14:3)

50 However, I \_\_\_\_ that I worship the God of our fathers (Acts 24:14)

53 Am I \_\_\_\_, or a whale, that thou settest a watch (1,3) (Job 7:12) KJV

56 As \_\_\_\_ man who casteth firebrands (1,3) (Prov 26:18) KJV

57 They worship me in \_\_\_\_; their teachings are but rules taught (Matt 15:9)

58 the furnace heated seven times hotter than \_\_\_\_ (Dan 3:19)

59 Darius the \_\_\_\_ took over the kingdom (Dan 5:31)

60 Above all \_\_\_\_, guard your heart (Prov 4:23)

61 They are a nation without \_\_\_\_, there is no discernment (Deut 32:28)

62 a river went out of \_\_\_\_ to water the garden (Gen 2:10)

63 silver in two bags, with two \_\_\_\_ of clothing (2 Kings 5:23)

64 do not reap to the very \_\_\_\_ of your field (Lev 23:22)

DOWN

1 no longer to call her \_\_\_\_; her name will be Sarah (Gen 17:15)

2 the brass, the \_\_\_\_, the tin, and the lead (Num 31:22)

3 called on the name of Baal from morning even until \_\_\_\_ (1 King 18:26)

4 they shall call his name \_\_\_\_, which means, "God with us" (Matt 1:23) KJV

5 spoken by the Lord, and \_\_\_\_ confirmed unto us (Heb 2:3)

6 See how your enemies are \_\_\_\_, how your foes rear their heads (Ps 83:2)

7 persuade, urge (Judg 14:15)

8 For the Lord himself will \_\_\_\_ down from heaven (1 Thess 4:16)

9 He is coming with \_\_\_\_, our faithful and dear brother (Col 4:9)

10 this man purchased \_\_\_\_ with the reward of iniquity (1,5) (Acts 1:18) KJV

11 Jesus entered the temple area and \_\_\_\_ out all who were (Matt 21:12)

12 John tried to \_\_\_\_ him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you (Matt 3:14)

13 and the \_\_\_\_ in the sky fell to earth (Rev 6:13)

21 What \_\_\_\_ can live and not see death (Ps 89:48)

24 Sir, come down \_\_\_\_ my child die (John 4:49) KJV

26 He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his \_\_\_\_ (Ps 10:9) KJV

27 there is but a \_\_\_\_ between me and death (1 Sam 20:3)

28 Watch and \_\_\_\_ so that you will not fall into temptation (Mark 14:38)

29 Foxes have holes and birds

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of the air have \_\_\_\_ (Matt 8:20)

30 he has appeared once for all at the end of the \_\_\_\_ (Heb 9:26)

31 Biblical transportation vehicle (Matt.21:5) KJV

32 Tear down your father's altar to \_\_\_\_ (Judg 6:25)

33 bare your legs, and \_\_\_\_ through the streams (Isa 47:2)

34 They hatch the \_\_\_\_ of vipers and spin a spider's web (Isa 59:5)

35 stinging insect (Isa 7:18) KJV

37 deprives (Lam 1:20)

38 your brother Timothy has been \_\_\_\_ (Heb 13:23)

40 a third at the \_\_\_\_ Gate, and a third at the gate behind (2 Kings 11:6)

41 your lightning \_\_\_\_ up the world (Ps 77:18)

42 For there is nothing \_\_\_\_ that will not be disclosed (Luke 8:17)

43 the \_\_\_\_ is to be scourged and rinsed with water (Lev 6:28)

44 a people for himself, and to make \_\_\_\_ for himself (1,4) (2 Sam 7:23)

45 animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being \_\_\_\_ (James 3:7-8)

46 sailors came alongside to \_\_\_\_ for your wares (Ezek 27:9)

47 with wheat and barley, \_\_\_\_ and fig trees, (Deut 8:8)

48 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' \_\_\_\_ (1 Tim 4:7)

51 at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's \_\_\_\_ (Gen 14:17).KJV

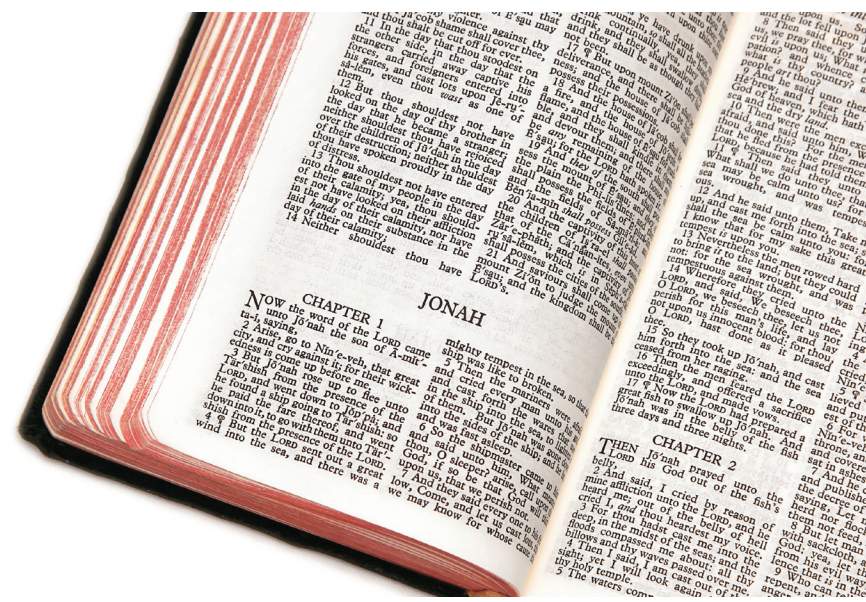
52 there went up a \_\_\_\_ from the earth (Gen 2:6)

54 this song will be \_\_\_\_ in the land of Judah (Isa 26:1)

55 Men at \_\_\_\_ have contempt for misfortune (Job 12:5)

58 the law is good, if a man \_\_\_\_ it lawfully (1 Tim 1:8)

Solution on page 14





A Precious Gift

By Tim Tron  
Burke County

*“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”* – Hebrews 11:6

The early supply chains in our country were once little more than ancient Native American paths turned into wagon roads. These became the trade routes where the frontiersman and trappers would traverse, hauling their precious cargo to divergent hubs or government forts. Those hunters and traders not only carried on commerce but provided the necessities to which the American family needed to survive. Today, like then, we rely on individuals that take hardship and danger into their daily lives as they continue the tradition of hauling goods and providing services across our country. This story shares a forgotten legacy of a past we cannot afford to forget. In the rush to deliver and provide, let us not forget the purpose behind what we do in this Holiday season. Christmas was not intended to be a time of hustle and bustle, but rather one to seek something greater than ourselves, the one true God - Jesus Christ.

Pause now for a moment and sip on a cup of your favorite hot beverage as you read the tale below. May your heart be blessed by the journey within.

The ominous clouds hung low over the mountains. To most, it was a warning, but to Arden, it was just another obstacle through which he must push. The dust from the Civil War had yet to settle. It was 1871, and there was still great poverty throughout the South. The roads which were little more than wagon ruts were filled with weary travelers seeking a better place. At night, the bandits preyed upon the weak. It was a bleak time.

Arden was finally heading home after another grueling trip to livestock trading posts in North Carolina. There, he had taken some of his family’s Quarter horse colts to sell. The Carolina markets paid much more than those on the edge of the frontier, so it was worth the dangerous journey. Besides, Arden Edwards wasn’t just a horse trader; he was the last of a dying breed – a frontiersman.

The farther west he traveled after turning off the Trading Path route toward the mountains, the darker the sky became. Finally, it was as if the heavens couldn’t withhold their bounty any longer. The snow began fluttering down in large goose-down-sized flakes. It was beautiful and foreboding at the same time. A chill ran across the seasoned trapper’s spine. There were many miles to travel before he could rest. Nothing felt right about this. Storm clouds only meant that his arduous journey would become even more difficult. The rugged mountains slowly being blanketed by a cover of whiteness depicted an eerie peace. Arden’s horse Jeb blew breaths of clouds of labor before him as they climbed the Eastern Divide. All around them, the sound was washed from the air as a calm flowed over Arden’s soul. Something made him pause, looking out over the vastness of the earth, slowly turning white. It was as if he was seeing a place to which he had never known, a distant place beyond the clouds. “Will I ever know something greater than this,” he thought to himself as he gritted his teeth against the biting cold. Flashes of the war coursed through his mind, and he winced at the scenes. Angrily, he nudged his spurs against Jeb’s side, and they pressed onward.

Arden was originally from Orange County, not far from what we know today as Chapel-Hill. But now, his home was in a tiny village in the southern Illinois territory, out on the edge of the prairie. It would someday be known as the village of Maunie. After the war, he headed west like so many survivors. He had met a young woman and settled down near her family on the banks of the Wabash River. There, Arden fell in love with a pretty young maiden; her name was Nellie Jane. They married, and he found himself working horses with her family. Before long, her family chose Arden to take the yearlings east for the market. It was only natural, seeing as he had connections back east and was familiar with the open road. So, with trepidation, he headed off in hopes of returning as quickly as possible. But most importantly, his young bride was with child, so there was an even greater urgency to make it back before Christmas.

As horse and rider pushed through the deepening snow, he thought of his mission. His pouch was full of valuable payment for the stock he had sold. These funds would support his and his wife’s family for many months. Yet, Arden knew that carrying such a rich purse meant he was an even greater target. Bandits and thieves were an ever-present danger, but he was no greenhorn to the perils of traveling the Trading Path trail. At one time in his life, he had carried bundles of hides to Raleigh to trade in some of the more affluent markets in his fur trading days.

That was before the war, before Nellie. It was as if an eternity had passed.

Arden’s horse, Jeb, was a hearty breed from good Quarter Horse stock, one that could make such a journey. His gun, a Colt army model .45 caliber, a relic from the war, was snuggled against his side just inside his thick fur coat. It had served him well through many battles, and he knew how to use it if needed. He realized that if he could just make it through the mountains the most challenging part of the journey would be behind him.

However, before Arden had cleared the deep passes of the Blue ridge, the gentle flakes had become a howling blizzard. Undeterred, he pressed onward. The warrior fought against the cold and hunger, fearing that he might risk freezing or being robbed if he stopped for the night. So, with unprecedented determination, he fought against all of his instincts to stop. Forging across the French Broad, his feet froze to the stirrups, but still, he pushed onward. By the time he reached the Kentucky territory, his body had lost all feeling. The temperatures continued to plummet. Soon the blinding whiteness consumed man and horse.

Once more, the peace, an unearthly calm, passed over his being, one like never



before.

There, only five miles from his new home, they found him and his horse, Jeb. They had fallen into a deep ravine. Arden was trapped beneath the weight of steed. His feet were still locked into the stirrups, still frozen in place. Jeb had died – frozen stiff. But buried beneath his horse, somehow barely breathing, Arden was still alive. They later surmised that the body heat of the dying horse sustained him long enough for them to find him. They took Arden home and nursed him back from the edge of death.

When he finally awoke from his ordeal, he was at last able to see his beloved Nellie once more – his journey complete. Arden was there when his son was born a week later. But, as happy as the story may sound, there was still a price to pay.

As was often the case in those days, because of the exposure, Arden came down with pneumonia. The rattle in his lungs that lingered after his son’s birth became a haunting reminder of his near-death experience. Soon, the cough became a fever that sucked the energy from his very being. Slowly, the hardened frontiersman found himself bedridden. Nellie and her family tried all they could to save him, but there was a distance in Arden’s eyes. He no longer had the fire within but instead seemed to be looking at a distant place beyond the walls of their meager cabin. Nellie sat on the edge of the bed, cradling their newborn son in one arm while reading scripture to Arden as he listened with eyes closed.

In her prayers, Nellie begged God to open her beloved’s eyes, to save his soul before it was too late. Time was not on their side.

The family all whispered the inevitable out of reach of Nellie’s hearing. Deep inside, everyone knew it wouldn’t be long.

But there, confined to his bed, Arden began to realize something that before had only been a distant notion. God had been with him all along. Through those dangerous trading trails, through all of the bloody battles, and even through the freezing blizzard, He had been there. Arden had never stopped long enough to really seek Him. But now, as Nellie would read the Bible, he found himself yearning to know Christ more than ever before. From one struggle to the next, all through his life he had pushed his body, not thinking of the soul within. He had never slowed down long enough to think about eternity – not until now as he stood on the edge of life and faced it. Here, now in this time that God had allowed, he was given one more chance to realize what he had never sought but had been there all along for his taking.

Then one evening, before the sunset on the distant horizon, Arden knew he had finally found Jesus. Like the last rays of daylight, his life was almost gone; he had found Him before the darkness came. The scene from his recent journey returned to his mind. There standing on the precipice in the mountains, he looked out upon the vastness of creation. There before him were no more storms, nor more scenes of horrific battles, but a sea of gentle calmness. Arden’s mind could finally see the world with eyes made new, and he silently whispered to himself, “There was much more to this life.” In Christ’s arms, he could now rest, knowing that his family would be in God’s hands, not his.

Arden continued to fight the sickness in his lungs, but his life had become like water, slipping through his fingers. With each passing day, he faded away a little further. Nellie could see him struggling with each breath, and her heart panged to watch him suffer, but there was nothing left to do – nothing but to pray for comfort. Then one night, as the full moon crossed over the river, like a spirit coming to beckon him home, he passed away, lying in the arms of his beloved Nellie Jane.

Arden’s journey was finally complete.

They buried Arden Thomas Edwards on Christmas Eve, in the year of our Lord, 1871.

As the last hymn was sung at the graveside, the snow began to fall once more. There in the anguish of death, Nellie felt a warmth, like a comforting arm wrapping around her. The snowflakes fell onto her eyelashes as her tears melted them into the heartache within. Before her, the casket was soon covered with a blanket of white, as if God had come to tuck Arden into bed for his final rest. Yet, she knew he was long departed of this world, and for a moment, realized that she was not alone. Arden was with the Lord, and the Lord was with her.

As the entourage of mourning departed, the snowflakes continued to fall, and silently, as tender as a feather upon the cheek, all the sound was once more washed from the world – and there was peace on earth.

Whatever obstacles you face this Christmas, don’t let them hinder you from seeking the most important thing in this life – God. For without him, we strive for all the wrong things. As Arden found, he had lived his life only trying to make ends meet. It wasn’t until he was forced to face eternity that he realized there had always been so much more, if only he had just taken time to notice.

In all things, no matter what gifts you did or did not receive this Christmas, realize that the gift of life in eternity with God is the most precious gift of all.

Thanks be to God.

This tale was based on a true story, one taken from my maternal family ancestry. While the dates and names were slightly altered, the account of Arden dying after returning from North Carolina to trade horses was true.





# Anne Ministries

By Chastity Ogburn  
Avery County

Hello friends! We have tasted and seen the goodness of God over the past several weeks. I just want to take the time to praise Him and give an update on all that God is doing in our community. We have witnessed His goodness at the Mount Victory Revival, with many souls saved and relationships restored. The revival is now moving into our churches. It's exciting to see God answering prayers and saving lives that once were lost. God's goodness is running after us... We have seen this with Anne Ministries. God provided a location for the ministry at 305 West Mitchell Street in Newland, NC.

The month of August was spent getting things ready with paint, repairs, and furnishings. We want to thank everyone that helped and spent hours of their time to get us ready for opening day. We appreciate and thank God for each of you. September 1st was opening day. Anne Ministries is now open to serve those in our community and surrounding communities on Tuesdays and Thursdays 2-6 PM and Wednesdays 2-5 PM. We are available other days and times by appointment. Anne Ministries is a ministry extending God's grace to those in need, offering pregnancy support and recovery services. We want to be His hands and feet as God leads us in this ministry.

Anne Ministries held its dedication ceremony and open house on September 4th. It was a blessed day, many came out to support the ministry and pray. On September 16th we had a time of prayer with our Prayer Partners lifting up the needs for the ministry. The ministry held its first training for volunteers on September 18th. We were blessed to have 12 volunteers in attendance with Helen Rogers as our speaker. Helen is the director of Agape Pregnancy Services in Fayetteville, NC. She has been involved in Pregnancy Services for more than 30 years. Helen has been such a blessing and help to Anne Ministries.

We have been praying for the needs of the ministry and earlier this year we began praying for an ultrasound machine and everything needed to offer this service when the time came. We had no idea when this would happen. The call was to trust God and His timing. God supplied the room to offer this service at our new location. On the day of the training, Ms. Helen said she had an ultrasound machine and table that God wanted us to have. She shared how she had had the machine a couple of years and now knew why ..... God had it set aside for Anne Ministries. I am in awe of God's goodness! I am reminded we are called to trust Him and He will supply and equip us for what is needed to do His work. He goes before us and prepares the way.

The ministry began in October offering support groups. A post-abortion support group will meet as needed and a pregnancy loss support group will meet on the third Monday of each month at 7:00 PM. Please help us pray for these group meetings and for God to do a work of healing in the lives of those that will attend. On September 25th the ministry had a table at the town fall festival, we were able to give out information and share about the ministry. We sold enough baked goods to offset some of the costs of our literature. God is so good!

We have been blessed with clothing donations, diapers, and other baby items. We have fall and winter clothes for newborns up to 5T. If you know of someone in need please send them our way. The ministry is still in its beginning stages of building financial support. Anne Ministries accepts donations from individuals, churches, and businesses. If you would like to help support this ministry, you can donate Anne Ministries P.O. Box 369 Newland, NC 28657, or you can donate on-line at anneministries.com. We also take donations for baby items newborn-5T or donations that can be used for mothers in need. We appreciate so much and thank God for our prayer partners, financial supporters, and volunteers that help support Anne Ministries. I am excited about all that God is doing and going to do! Please join us as we continue to trust God with all that He has for the ministry. May God bless each of you!

*In 2018, the Lord put on my heart the calling to reach out to those hurting from loss. Anne Ministries began in September of 2018. Anne means "grace" and that is what this ministry is about, extending God's grace and allowing Him to heal your deepest hurt. This ministry reaches out to those hurting from abortion, miscarriage, stillbirth, and infant loss. The ministry expanded in 2021 offering pregnancy support services to those facing an unplanned pregnancy. Chastity and her family attend Emmanuel Baptist Church in Newland, NC*





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