

LOOK FOR HIM IN YOUR WORLD

Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?" (Luke 7:19 NASB).

The most amazing event in human history took place in an ordinary animal shelter. Planned before the cosmos was spoken into existence, Jesus, the Expected One, came to us.

He still comes to us. Consider your own life. When have you experienced His coming? Here are a few from my world:

Jesus came to a child, revealing Himself with simple and profound insight, "God is like the moon, He shines in a dark place."

Jesus came to a student seeking His wisdom and guidance during the uncertain post-graduation season, bringing hope, presence, trust and a path to walk.

Jesus came to a young parent suffering profound anxiety, troubled, filled with questions, and brought peace, quiet confidence and opportunity in the presence of still-to-be-answered questions.

Jesus came to a troubled heart through the Scripture, answering the pain and sorrow with profound simplicity.

Jesus came to a broken one, fallen into a besetting sin, with forgiveness, cleansing and restoration.

Jesus came to a follower with gentle firmness, exposing pride and spiritual immaturity, opening a pathway from regret to the beginning of a journey toward humility.

Look for Him in your world. Where do you see Him? What unexpected gifts has the Expected One brought with Him?

Karen Koehn is a wife, mother of three adult children, is learning time/energy management, and is anticipating the presence of the Expected One with power and grace for daily living.

AND THE SHEPHERDS WENT BACK TO THEIR FLOCKS

The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen (Luke 2:20 NLT).

Like the shepherds, we, too, must return to our routines after the excitement of Christmas. After the sparkling Christmas lights have dimmed, when the ringing bells have been silenced and the heartfelt harmony of carolers is no longer lifted high, will we go back to work and to school like the shepherds returned to their flocks singing, "*Glory to God in the Highest*"? Will there be a refreshed glow about us that makes our coworkers, classmates, students and teachers want to know the reason for the difference? Or will we take off our Christmas spirit and pack it away with the decorations in a spiritual box to be stored in the closet until next year?

If the Holy Spirit has truly been born into our lives, let us pray for Him to be evident to the people who read our behaviors instead of their Bibles. Like Mary's baby, the Spirit must also be "born" into the world in order to accomplish His mission. Let us adore Him every day!

Father, grant us the desire to take the good news of Your gift of Your Son into our work places, homes and schools so that others will ask us to share the source of our peace and joy with them.

Paul Lashbrook, an Asbury alum ('62), is a retired attorney and an active antique and racing automobile enthusiast.

FOR UNTO US IS BORN THIS DAY...

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, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6 KJV).

Our only child died four days after she was born one June. As December approached, I had no interest in Christmas. Christmas is, after all, all about children, isn't it? All of the *wonder* of Christmas is directed at the children. All of the *awe* of Christmas is about children. *Children, children, children.* How my heart ached with emptiness. But I tried to go through the motions of "doing Christmas" for the sake of the others. Sitting in church on Christmas Eve, I heard the real meaning of Christmas differently that year. The pastor was reading the scripture, "For unto us a child is born" The word *us* embedded itself into my brain and the Lord filled me with the knowledge that He was *sharing* His baby son with *us*. "For unto *us* a child is born,..." *We* did have a baby! We had the baby Jesus. No, I wasn't the mommy, but I was part of the family of God who should have been anticipating the birth of the baby and I should have been excited that this One was born *for* me, but not *to* me. And isn't there *wonder* and *awe* in knowing that? Christmas is not about *children*, but about *the* child!

Thank you, Jesus, for leaving the splendor of Heaven to enter our hurting, broken lives in a way that we can understand and accept you.

Bonnie Lashbrook, an Asbury alumna ('64), has retired from a career in secondary education and teen crisis intervention. She is currently a part-time teaching adjunct and clinical supervisor in the School of Education at Asbury University.

Scripture: John 15:1

December 4, 2013

ABIDING IN THE TRUE VINE

“I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener” (John 15:1).

In John 15:1-10 Jesus calls himself the “True Vine” and in doing so uses an analogy that was very much a part of the Jewish nation’s religious heritage. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel is pictured as God’s vine. I believe through this analogy, Jesus is sending a message to the Jews, to his disciples, and to all future believers.

Jesus wants the Jews to know, “I am the true vine, and salvation comes only to those who abide in me.” He is also speaking to all disciples, that nothing other than abiding in the “True Vine” can give us a righteous relationship with God. We are saved by abiding and staying in the “True Vine,” not by works or group membership.

In this analogy Jesus points to five facts concerning the “branches,” those of us in His church.

1. Some branches will be useless. Are you fruitful, surrendering to God’s will daily?
2. Fruit bearing brings glory to the Father, not to the branches. If you are serving, what are your motives for service?
3. Some branches are pruned to become more fruitful. Is God pruning you? Are hardships making you more fruitful?
4. Some branches are cut out and cast away. Keep praying for family or friends who may be at risk.
5. The branches must abide (remain) in the Vine to be fruitful. Are you abiding in Him?

John Bullock taught and coached in the Illinois public schools for 30 years before retiring in 1993. He served as a United Methodist pastor for 22 years until 2012. He and his wife, Ellen, live in Wilmore November-May and in DuBois, PA June-October.

Scripture: Genesis 16:13 CEB

December 25, 2013

Christmas Day

OUR GOD IS STILL “EL ROI”

Hagar named the LORD who spoke to her, “You are El Roi” because she said, “Can I still see after he saw me?” (Genesis 16:13 CEB).

As I was reading over the names of God to prepare for this devotional I kept coming back to the name “El Roi,” the God who sees. I remembered one of my most difficult Advent seasons. It was 1973 and my dad, whom I adored, had just lost his battle with cancer. My family, who usually looked forward to Christmas, now dreaded it. The Christmas tree that my mom bought sat propped up in the corner because none of us wanted to do “Dad’s job” of putting it in the stand and stringing the lights on it. On Sunday morning I would go to church, paste on a smile and pretend everything was fine. I didn’t want anyone to know how angry I was at God, how hurt I felt and how lonely I was. But even though I could hide my feelings from others, I could not hide from God.

The name “El Roi” is only used once in the Bible. In the scripture above, Hagar is also hurting. But God saw her as she fled from Sarai and tried to hide. Our situations may be different but our God is the same.

Are you facing this Advent season without one of your loved ones? Or do you know someone who is? Remember that we serve *El Roi*, the God who sees us. He sees us, knows us, and loves us. That makes this Advent season something to look forward to. I know that because I have accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior, and so did my dad, I will see him again someday and be able to spend eternity with him.

Arlene Allen and her husband, Curtis, moved to Wilmore 16 years ago for Curt to attend Asbury Theological Seminary. They have been married 34 years and have 3 children and 4 grandchildren.

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:19

December 24, 2013
Christmas Eve

THE BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR

And we have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Peter 1:19).

As the shepherds of our scripture kept track of time at night by watching the stars, it was certain stars that had special meaning. The Morning Stars were known as the “Heralds of the Sun.” It is this “heralding” that gives it a special significance for me. It speaks of a transition, a change of dramatic proportions from the darkness of night to the brightness of the day. Is it not a dramatic change of much greater proportion that history has recorded of the coming of the Son of God into the world?

With this in mind, then was it a special Morning Star that the prophets spoke of recorded in scripture that rises in the hearts of all those who truly believe? Are we not the ones who walk in the light of His life and teaching who are forever changed? It was the very purpose of His coming that He would die that we may truly live.

Curtis Allen is pastor of First Christian Church of Millersburg Disciples of Christ. He and his wife, Arlene, are members of Wilmore Free Methodist Church.

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6

December 5, 2013

PUTTING THE GOVERNMENT ON HIS SHOULDERS

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called...(Isaiah 9:6a).

Many years ago we received a Christmas greeting from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. It included a word of encouragement that impacted me so much I cut it out and carried it around in my wallet for decades. I remember very well its message: “As we place the government of our lives on our Lord’s shoulders, of our peace there shall be no end.”

The episodes when I have tried to govern my own life have almost always ended badly, or at least in an unwanted detour. On one occasion I recall struggling with a particularly difficult choice that would affect my whole future. Thankfully, Dr. Dennis Kinlaw, founder of the Francis Asbury Society, gave me some inspired counsel: “Ellen, do the right thing.” I didn’t actually want to do what I knew was right, but I did. The name of Jesus became to me on that occasion Wonderful Counselor...Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

I’ve never forgotten that initial crisis of the surrender of my will, and the peace that flooded my soul. Today there are still small crises that come and I’m faced with the question again: shall I let the government of my life continue to rest on the Lord’s shoulders? Invariably I remember the choice I made so many years ago, and the certainty of that Christmas message. As we continue to place the government of our lives on His shoulders and let it rest there, truly of our peace there is no end.

Ellen Bullock has served as a United Methodist church pastor in western Pennsylvania with her husband, John. She now serves as an evangelist and Bible teacher with Francis Asbury Society.

THE WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace (Isaiah9:6b KJV).

Isaiah's words can flood our minds with the majestic music of Handel's *Messiah* in the chorus "For Unto Us a Child is Born." Isaiah had prophesied of the glorious arrival of the Messiah, who would one day come to earth as a child and herald a time of great gladness and rejoicing—a time now called Christmas.

One of the names of Jesus listed in this verse is "Counselor," a dimension of Jesus that is not often highlighted. There are multiple means by which Jesus can be a Counselor for Christians today. (1) Jesus uses the Bible, His written word, to guide His children in life principles that can lead to a holy life and service to others. (2) Jesus can use the educational process to provide guidance, with resources including books, teachers, and seminars. These can give a breadth of knowledge and wisdom so people can be equipped to handle difficult life situations. (3) Jesus can use the counsel of the Holy Spirit to direct our lives. The Holy Spirit can be a divine, unseen presence to tell us, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isaiah 30:21). (4) Jesus can use other Christians to provide counsel to us. Proverbs 15:22 explains that a person can have success in life with a multitude of counselors, such as close Christian friends or even a professional Christian counselor.

Jesus was given the name Counselor thousands of years ago, and today He can help a person emerge victorious over the uncertainty of complex dilemmas with His multi-faceted guidance. Jesus truly is a wonderful Counselor!

Douglas and Carol Matthews moved from central Ohio to Kentucky so that Doug can serve in the administration at Asbury Theological Seminary.

NO BACKING OUT

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14a RSV).

John's declaration is one of the most cherished lines in Scripture: that the Father's co-eternal Son took upon Himself human flesh.

Visualize the Incarnation as if it were a cosmic-sized letter "V." The downward stroke of the letter signifies the downward movement of the Incarnation itself; the bottom point signifies the lowest part of the saga (Jesus in the tomb). The upward stroke signifies the grand upward movement of Jesus into heaven by way of resurrection and ascension.

As helpful as this visualization may be, it can easily lead to the wrong conclusion. It is easy to imagine (falsely) that everything the Son experienced in the downward journey was simply reversed in His upward journey, as if this down-then-up trip brought the Son right back to where He started as if nothing had changed, as if He could look back on it all and say, "Whew! Glad that's over with! Mission accomplished!"

But the Bible never says that the Incarnation has been undone. Though Jesus now sits in glory at the Father's right hand, He remains embodied, bearing His wounds of love and a human face forever! He "became flesh," and hasn't "un-become flesh."

The love of permanent identity with humanity is inestimably deeper than a love that would have motivated only a temporary mission. And that's part of the stunning message of Christmas! Jesus has never "backed out."

Joseph Dongell is married to Regina, lives in Wilmore and teaches at Asbury Theological Seminary. He is an ordained minister in the Wesleyan Church.

Scripture: Luke 1:45

December 22, 2013

BELIEVING, A LEAP OF FAITH

“Blessed is she who has believed ...” (Luke 1:45).

Most of us grew up in the church and have heard the Christmas story since childhood. We can't remember a time when we didn't *believe* the story. But that will not likely be true for children born in America today.

What was it like for those who lived the Christmas story, and for those who hear it today for the first time? How absolutely unbelievable it sounds...what a leap of faith it takes...yet what a difference *believing* it makes.

What must it have been like for Mary to hear that she would bear a child without a man? That had never happened before in all of human history, but she *believed*. So, forever Mary has the highest honor of being the mother of Jesus. Do we, and will the next generation, believe the truths of scripture?

Joseph saw an angel in a dream. That's pretty unbelievable in itself. More incredible, he *believed* when the angel said that Mary's child "was conceived by the Holy Spirit." Who would buy that? He did, obeyed, and had the privilege of raising God's Son.

The shepherds *believed* what the angels told them and got to see Jesus. Simeon believed God and got to see the Christ. If we truly believe, we, too, can see His salvation.

Do you really *believe*? What difference does it make? Some (even in America) haven't heard this strange, wonderful story. Will you share it so they can *believe* and be blessed?

Regina Dongell, wife of Joseph Dongell, works from home as an accountant, is director of the Friendship International ministry, and is the privileged recipient of cardiac care by the Great Physician, in answer to your many gracious prayers.

Scripture: Matthew 1:23

December 7, 2013

HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED IMMANUEL

“The virgin will conceive and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

In the story of the Israelites there were many times of crisis when they sought the help of God. His answer to their cry was always, *“I will be with you.”* Though they didn't know what God would do to help them, they knew all they needed to know, He was with them. (See, e.g. Deuteronomy 20:1, Joshua 1:9, Judges 6:16.)

Yet Matthew was speaking of a new way that God would be with us. When an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream telling him of the coming of Mary's baby, he quoted Isaiah's prophecy, *“They will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”*

What an astonishing idea that God would come down and live with us! He lived for 33 years in a human body among us and now dwells within us in the form of the Holy Spirit. He lives in us and enables us to love God and others, and live pleasing to Him. What a discouraging struggle it must have been to keep all of the law and try so hard to please God before Christ came. Now we are not alone; God is with us! We have His transforming grace, His guiding presence, His comfort, love and counsel at all times. We are truly blessed! We can rest in Jesus' final statement before He ascended into heaven, *“And surely I am with you always, ...”* (Matthew 28:20). Immanuel!

Patricia (Patti) Fiskeaux is a wife, mother, grandmother, leader of the church's senior adult group and co-teacher of the membership class with her husband, Charles.

Scripture: John 1:14

December 8, 2013

HIS DWELLING AMONG US

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

After one year of furlough in the States, it took me more than two months to adjust when we returned to Central Asia last summer, even though we had lived in the same city for eight years prior to our home assignment.

With no Wal-Marts or McDonalds or horses grazing on bluegrass like the ones in Kentucky, I realized that I'm living in someone else's culture and someone else's land. That takes extra energy and effort.

That understanding made me deeply appreciate what Jesus did for me. He, as Word, became flesh among us. What a dramatic change of living! Jesus had to endure and overcome life's challenges. Jesus, the Glory of the One and Only, left His glorious throne and was willing to embrace all the inconveniences and hurts.

Several apple trees are in our yard. My favorite produces juicy, crunchy fruit, the best apples in town (in my opinion). I don't water or fertilize the tree. The apples are simply God's gift. Whenever I gather them, I am reminded of God's free gift of eternal life.

As Advent approaches, let's consider God's grace to us. He made a humble dwelling among us, so we all can be saved and transformed. I hope we will newly experience this life-giving gift this year. As Jesus wants to make His dwelling among us, let's open wide our hearts and welcome him.

Sarah Kappler attends WFMC when she is in Wilmore. She works with orphans in Central Asia. She is married to Kris and together they have three children: Hannah, Elizabeth and John.

Scripture: Hebrews 3:7-8 NLT

December 21, 2013

THE INFLUENCE OF OBEDIENCE

That is why the Holy Spirit says, "Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled, when they tested me in the wilderness" (Hebrews 3:7-8 NLT).

To send or not to send a Christmas card? Uncertain? The phrase, "When you hear his voice," from Hebrews 3, spoke to me about obedience, even in little things. While considering this question and contemplating Christmas activities, I thought of these real-life stories.¹

Our favorite Christmas DVD is "The Christmas Card," a wartime love story about two strangers brought together by words of love in a holiday Christmas greeting. The Christmas card, sent by a young lady with the promise of the church's prayers, sustained a young officer when his close buddy was killed. This card never left his side. It gave him strength and hope, sending him on a mission to find the young lady who obeyed the Spirit's promptings.

The second story is of a woman who was a patient in a state mental hospital. She carried the card a friend sent her in a little draw-string bag during the entire Christmas season. She would stop people and say, "Look at my Christmas card. The lady I worked for sent it to me. I'm not forgotten." Later, it appeared that card, the only one she received, was the beginning of her recovery.

Spiritual growth doesn't come from hearing the word alone. But practicing the promptings of the Spirit brings results that surprise!

Karolyn Yvonne (Kay) Bickert says she is the "loving wife of Robert and mother of our four children."

1. Adapted from *The Greatest Christmas Ever: A Treasury of Inspirational Ideas and Insights for an Unforgettable Christmas* (Tulsa: Honor Books, 1995), 77, 79.

Scripture: John 3:16, 17 NLT

December 20, 2013

GIVING! PHILIPPINE CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3: 16-17 NLT).

While living in the Philippines, Kay and I became part of our community. One year our neighbor asked us to go with her to midnight mass in the Roman Catholic cathedral in the town plaza. “Yes, of course!” we said. This would be our first experience for such an event. With anticipation and wonder, we joined the throng of families crowding through the old, well-weathered doors. Huge lighted stars and other symbols hung on lines across the church. There was a nativity scene with sheep and donkeys. The robed choir singing a medley of Christmas carols meaningfully expressed the story. A priest, robed in white, read Luke’s birth of Christ followed by a message about God’s greatest gift, His Son. We watched in awe and wonder as the worshippers slowly shuffled forward to receive communion .

After returning home, close neighbors began dropping by with gifts: decorated dishes of specially prepared meats, tarts, rice cake and candies. The early morning hours were filled with exchanges throughout the neighborhood. Our concept of Christmas took on a deeper meaning. Giving reflects our Father’s nature, love, being more concerned about others than self. This year as we give our cards and gifts, let us reflect our Father’s heart. Give from a heart of love, spreading the joyous Christmas message. Remember Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35NLT). Generosity truly inspires a “Merry Christmas!”

Robert A Bickert is married to Kay and is a retired missionary educator and church planter.

Scripture: Luke 2:29-32

December 9, 2013

GRANDFATHERLY BLESSING

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32).

After Jesus’ birth, Mary and Joseph took Him to the Temple to dedicate Him to God. It was there that the old saint, Simeon, held Him in his grandfatherly arms and blessed Him. What a moment that must have been for Simeon! That day he experienced a grandfather’s joy of blessing the next generation. At the same time he relished the victory of answered prayer. I wonder how long Simeon waited for that fulfillment of God’s promise to him. Was it ten years, or more? However long it was, he simply exchanged holding onto the promise with holding the fulfillment of that promise in his arms.

The season of advent is a guided tour of fulfilled promises about Jesus. Simeon wasn’t the only one seeing the fulfillment of what God had earlier promised. All who witnessed Christ’s birth were able to testify that God “acts on behalf of those who wait for him” (Isaiah 64:4b). These days and weeks that lead up to Christmas inspire us to hold onto God’s great promises in the Bible. If you have discovered a promise that pertains to your life, or if God has directly revealed a promise that He will fulfill to you, hold onto it. Don’t let it go. You will relish the victory of answered prayer.

Kris Kappler teaches English in Central Asia. He will receive his D.Miss. degree from Asbury Theological Seminary in December 2013, having just passed the dissertation defense. He is married to Sarah.

Scripture: Hebrews 1:3

December 10, 2013

THE LIGHT THAT TRANSFORMS

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word (Hebrews 1:3).

As the days grow short, we are reminded how dark our world is without the hope of Christ. We hang colored lights on our trees and houses to bring warmth and cheer to our hearts. We need the radiance of God.

Light is an amazing thing. I am especially cognizant of this as a painter. Light is what defines objects and brings them into focus. When you look at a painting, your eye automatically goes to the area of the greatest light and dark contrasts. Jesus reflects God's glory—His splendor, His presence, His goodness and holiness—which reveals truth. God's light reveals our sin and His goodness. Because Jesus is the "radiance," we are led to God.

Light also makes beautiful. Referring to art, Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Light is the first of painters. There is no object so foul that intense light will not make it beautiful." One of my favorite local artists even made Spam look beautiful in his painting. God's glory can make the foulest sinner clean.

Lastly, light changes and transforms. When we encounter God's glory and holiness, we cannot remain the same. I believe that one of the thrills of heaven will be seeing the depth of God's glory. Until then, we have a picture in Jesus who is the exact representation. Let us praise God!

Debra (Debbie) Loyd is the pastor's wife at Astoria Christian Church in Oregon. She is a mental health counselor and is very involved in music and watercolor painting.

Scripture: Luke 2:6, 7

December 19, 2013

DO YOU RECALL PLACIDE CAPPEAU?

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

Is the name Placide Cappeau de Roquemaure familiar? It so happened that in the year 1847 Cappeau's parish priest in the little town of Roquemaure, France, asked him to write a poem for Christmas. Cappeau asked his friend, Adolphe Charles Adams, who happened to be Jewish, to set his poem to music—the music of my most beloved song, "O, Holy Night." The American writer John Sullivan Dwight translated the words and introduced the song to America.

On Christmas Eve, 1906, it became the first music ever transmitted through the air over radio waves. Radio operators and wireless owners on ships and in offices, who had never heard anything but code on "the wireless," sat in shock as they listened.

I distinctly remember learning the words to this beautiful song many years ago when I was in grade school rehearsing for a Christmas program. I had never heard it before but the feelings that it brought have never left me. The words and the extraordinary music still express to me the wonder and the joy of that night in Bethlehem so long ago. The night that changed the world.

"Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!

O night divine, O night when Christ was born!"

Can you hear it now? I know I can.

Sallie Wells and her husband, Claude, moved to Wilmore from Atlanta last November and joined WFMC the following May. Their daughter and her family are close by. They are overjoyed to be spending time with their grandson now.

Scripture: Zechariah 9:10

December 18, 2013

PRINCE OF PEACE

I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth (Zechariah 9:10).

Unfortunately, for many of us, “peace” is one of the last words that comes to mind when we think of Christmas. Instead, in the midst of the bustle of shopping, or preparing the perfect Christmas meal, Christmastime often feels extremely chaotic.

The prophet Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would be called the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). Zechariah 9:9-12 shows that the Messiah was expected to come in peace, to end warfare and to proclaim peace throughout the land. Rather, what we often see is war, economic unrest, political turmoil, and flat out evil.

And in the midst of this type of world, imperfect human beings attempt to bring peace through their own efforts—whether through militaristic action on a global scale or self-help practices on a personal level. The problem: true peace does not exist apart from the true Messiah, Jesus Christ.

But we still wait with expectation—the expectation expressed in the great hymns “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus” and “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” We look forward to that day when Christ will come again and fully establish His reign on earth—when all swords will be beaten into plowshares, there will be no more death, and every tear will be wiped away. This Christmas, let’s pray for God’s peace to reign both in our hearts and in our world.

Andy Bentz is the pastor at Calvary Free Methodist Church in Lexington, KY. He and his wife Ashley attended WFMC while he studied at Asbury Theological Seminary. They live in Lexington.

Scripture: Matthew 3:17 NRSV

December 11, 2013

HIS NAME WILL BE CALLED...BELOVED SON

And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17 NRSV).

Not a usual text quoted around Jesus’ birth, but nevertheless relevant. It makes explicit publicly what had been told to Joseph privately: “... for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”...“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name Him Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us” (Matthew 1:20, 23).

“Beloved Son.” Jesus feasted on those words as He stood in Jordon’s cool baptismal waters. The public announcement of His identity from birth was part of the “bread” that sustained Jesus when He was hungered and tempted by Satan. Wouldn’t you drink those words in and feast on their richness if they’d been spoken to you?

That is a large part of what Christmas is about. Jesus came so that you and I could be adopted into God’s family, and hear Him say to us, “You are My beloved son/daughter.” In the cross and resurrection, God demonstrates and vindicates His love. In the waters of *our* baptism, we hear His words of acknowledgement and approval. Can’t you feast on them, too? No wonder angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased” (Luke 2:14, NASB).

Frank Loyd is minister of the Astoria Christian Church at the mouth of the Columbia River in Oregon. He is married to Debbie, and they have three children and three grandchildren.

WHERE IS HE?

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23 NASB).

As a mother of four very young children, I have found myself in the school of child-like faith. My girls teach me daily and their instruction often carries great conviction.

My four-year-old Lucy has consistently prayed the Lord’s prayer beginning, “Our Father, Who aren’t in Heaven...” I thought it was cute at first and then as months passed and she continued, I thought it time to correct the misspoken quotation. When I questioned her about the negation of His presence in heaven, she said confidently, “He’s not in heaven, mom! He’s in my heart!”

He is our Father...yet He is WITH us. He is Immanuel. He IS!

Clearly, confidently, child-like faith convicts again! May His Spirit lead and guide us this season to live, not as if we are celebrating merely an historical event, but with the confident reality that we are not alone! He is not a distant God in heaven; Jesus is the living One involved in the daily relating of our hearts.

Joanna Coppedge is married to Billy and lives in Uganda where she and her family serve as missionaries with World Gospel Mission. She is the mother of four daughters, ages 5, 4 and twin 2 year olds. She loves Jesus with all her heart. She and her family have attended WFMC when they have been in Wilmore.

THE WHOLE HEART

Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:1, 2).

“Mommy, Daddy, I love you with my whole heart,” say the little children with a *de rigueur* that is genuine. (Is genuine *de rigueur* an oxymoron?) Their heart is the expression of their love. This comes from God the Father. God is love and the heart is the symbol of love.

Jesus Christ came into this world to show us the deep, high and wide love of God, so that everyone will know. The Father knew the love of Jesus would be the visage of His own eternal love. As He looked upon the heart of His only Son, He knew that His heart would be big enough to contain the whole world. Everyone. Saints and sinners. Every man, woman and child.

Just as there is no limit to His love, there can be no limit to ours. We are to have a yearning of our hearts to love the way Jesus wants us to love, a desire for His compassionate love. We should know in practice what Jesus means when He says, “Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

We need the Holy Spirit, for the great work of the Holy Spirit is in the depths of the human heart. With a certain *je ne sais quoi* [I do not know how], He melts the heart, transforms it and pours into it the love of Jesus.

Brian Faul is husband to Cheryl, father to Janie and Marlee. He loves “all things cookery, and an occasional *belles lettres*,” literature as a fine art. The Faul family has attended WFMC for more than 10 years.

Scripture: John 1:1, 3-4

December 16, 2013

WHO ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

In the beginning was the Word, ... Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind (John 1:1, 3-4).

While the little baby Jesus was lying in a humble manger, the shepherds were looking for a little baby, a Messiah. The wise men were looking for a little baby, the King of the Jews, someone worthy of that star. A king was looking to kill a little baby, a ruler, someone who presented a political and social threat. Others were looking, too.

During these challenging times, we continue to search so desperately for worldly possessions, important people, and influential political leaders to solve our problems or make us happy.

During this advent season it would serve us well to remember that we have already received the gifts we search for in the birth of a little baby, Jesus.

Take time to reflect and give thanks for all we have received from that Baby. Reflecting on His names helps us remember the gifts we have received. To His mother, Mary, the promise was Jesus, the Son of the Most High, the Son of God (Luke 1:31, 32, 35). To the shepherds He came as Savior, Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11). To Joseph He was announced as Jesus the Savior (Matthew 1:21). The wise men and King Herod saw Him as King of the Jews, the Christ (Matthew 2:2, 4). To you and me He comes as everything: the Word, Creator, Life (John 1:1-4).

Dale Kierstead has been a university professor, CPA, and church/district auditor. He was born in South Africa, descended from three generations of Wesleyan Church missionaries. He is married to Melanie and they have four children. They have attended WFMC for 13 years.

Scripture: Genesis 1:1

December 13, 2013

IN THE BEGINNING

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

The Bible begins with this familiar phrase regarding “the beginning.” We are all aware familiar phrases, though, can often be overlooked. It is worth asking, “How do we define ‘beginning?’” A beginning is neither the end nor the middle of something but the introduction, the start. The beginning of Genesis 1:1 is not the exceptional beginning. This is the prototype “beginning” in which all other beginnings find their origin. God is creating something. But what is the immediate result? Darkness and shapelessness (Genesis 1). Yet who is present within the darkness, actively moving? It is God Himself. And then into the darkness comes what? The Spoken Word of God (Genesis 1:2, 3).

Is there not even a hint of Jesus’ coming in this original beginning? Jesus comes as the Word of God into every one of our new beginnings. Advent and New Year’s are all about new beginnings. The question God asks of us afresh this Advent season: Do we trust God is actually at work in whatever new beginning faces us? Even if all we see now is the darkness and seeming shapelessness, are we listening this Advent season afresh for His voice in our new beginning?

William (Billy) Coppedge lives in Uganda with his family, where he and his wife, Joanna, serve as missionaries with World Gospel Mission. He is the “father of four wonderful daughters.” When visiting Wilmore, their family has attended WFMC.

JESUS TEACHES LOVE 101

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8 NKJV).

When the freshman class arrived on campus at Vanderbilt University this year, levels of self-consciousness skyrocketed. Young men and women began courting fraternities and sororities. Making friends was a question of wearing the right clothes to the right event and showing up with the right people. I couldn't help but notice discouragement and fear in many young faces.

Shortly after the semester started, I met a girl named Ann. There was something different in her from what I'd been seeing all around me since arriving on campus. She was friends with everyone, not just the ones who looked like her. She walked to class with new students, ate lunch with those who were alone, and laughed with whoever was telling a joke.

This past week Ann gave her junior cello recital. The music was really remarkable, but far more remarkable to me was what was happening off-stage. The recital hall was practically full of students from every class, instrument type, and major. After the recital, they were all there, cheering. Many waited a long time just to congratulate Ann. Each one loved Ann because she had loved them without qualification.

In the Vanderbilt social scene, Jesus came with the wrong criteria for friendship: swaddling clothes, in a dirty stable, with Bethlehem's outcasts in attendance. But everyone at that recital could tell you that friendship with Ann was more valuable than any of the friendships offered by the fraternities. And I don't have to tell you Who taught Ann to love the way she does.

Matthew Liversedge is a freshman at Vanderbilt University. He is pursuing degrees in Cello Performance and English.

TITLES OF THE MESSIAH

"You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, ... Instead, I have called you friends" (John 15:14, 15).

Isaiah says that this Savior would be called, "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father," indicating Jesus' unique nature as wholly God and wholly human—an early nod to what we understand today as the Trinity (Isaiah 9:6).

Pages could be written on any of the provocative, soaring titles that Jesus holds.

Yet, as I considered these, I realized that the title of Jesus that has meant the most to me through the years is the title, "Friend," and specifically, "Friend of Daryl Diddle." Now there's a title that's not very lofty at all; much beneath the dignity of the Son of God. Yet that's what He says that He is...that we are...friends. And what a Friend He's been. He's there when I need Him, always ready to listen. He loves me, even when I'm rather unlovable. He forgives my mistakes. He works with me and in me to make me a better person. He puts up with my immaturity and stubbornness. He gives and gives some more, even when I'm given out.

I don't deserve such a friend. Still He's there, offering me every day that which I could never deserve or afford—friendship with the God who created me and knows me and loves me.

"Jesus! what a Friend for sinners! Jesus! Lover of my soul; Friends may fail me, foes assail me, He, my Savior, makes me whole. Hallelujah! what a Savior! Hallelujah! what a friend! Saving, helping, keeping, loving, He is with me to the end." (J. Wilbur Chapman, "Our Great Savior," stanza 1).

Daryl Diddle is senior pastor of WFMC. This devotional thought was written originally for use in the 2013 Advent Devotional Guide of the Astoria [Oregon] Christian Church.