



A LIGHT HAS DAWNED

2012 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

A LIGHT HAS DAWNED

The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the
shadow of death
a light has dawned.

Isaiah 9:2



WATER FROM THE ROCK

...strike the rock, and water will come out of it (Exodus 17:6 NASB); they were drinking from a spiritual rock...the rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4 NASB); cf. Ps 78:15-20.

After the Exodus, the Israelites faced several hardships in the wilderness. The dry weather caused the thirsty Israelites to crave life-giving water. Then why did God not always lead them into places of abundant water? God desired to teach them how to depend on Him. Remember, the Israelites had been slaves of the Egyptians for 400 years. A servile spirit of dependence upon their Egyptian masters was deeply rooted into every part of their life and identity. Thus, God wanted to transform these Israelite slaves into His covenant people who would solely depend on Him as their Provider, Protector, and Savior. If they used to draw water at the rivers in Egypt, they can now find gushing water out of a rock; that which seems impossible is made possible through God.

Likewise, God wants to transform us by His divine way. We who were once slaves to the sinful flesh are given new life through Jesus Christ. The logically impossible virgin birth of Christ is made possible with God. Through this Rock, Jesus Christ, God provided us with spiritual living water. "...whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst...[it] shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life" (John 4:14 NASB). During this time of Advent, I pray that we will all be filled with Christ's living water and let that water gush out from our lives.

So-Young Chen is an adjunct faculty member at Asbury Theological Seminary and a professor of Christian Education at Holy Light Theological Seminary in Taiwan.

CELEBRATING LOVE

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son... (John 3:16).

We celebrate the Father's gift of Christ each year at Christmas. He came as an innocent babe loved and cherished by His parents. He was the older brother to His siblings, sharing and giving His love. He grew up in a town surrounded by family and friends learning everyday things, just like you. Yet, He was the Son of God. He was a gift.

Through Christ, God gave us the greatest gift of love, He gave us hope. During this season let's share this immeasurable gift. Let unconditional love, a reflection of Christ, flow from our inner being to our families and outward to the world.

We are told by Paul in Ephesians 3:18b "...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ."

It is an amazing thing to ponder the love the Father has for us in Christ.

How can you celebrate God's amazing love this Advent Season? Writing Love Notes to Jesus?

My heart sings praises to Your name, O Lord. I can hardly contain my joy. I must speak of Your love and wonder to whoever will listen. My heart bursts with the joy of knowing You, Lord. I must give You honor by sharing with others the wonderful mercies You have shown to me. My heart grips Your deep abiding love and never wants to let it go. I love You, Jesus. My Lord, My Love, My Master. **Merry Christmas!**

Emily Fitch is the wife of Leonard Fitch and a graduate of Asbury University with an art major. "I love the beauty in all of creation and marvel at the wisdom of God. My hobbies: anything creative."

PSALM FOR A RESCUE MOUNTAINEER

When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue and honor them (Psalm 91:15 NRSV).

The trickle from a falling tear flickers light on mountaineer.
He packs and hoists heavy gear to hike the trail, he will not veer.

Rising up, the cliffs are sheer; his search is keen, front and rear.
Breezes blow, strafe the ear, piercing through the atmosphere.

Who is the man, the mountaineer? Can he assume he can mirror
God who rescues man so dear, trapped, ensnared in danger drear?

Friends below are hit by fear, hope with God and mountaineer.
On jagged rocks, rough frontier, the lost is found, wounds severe.

He lifts to bear his weary peer, a chosen charge of mountaineer.
Rays of hope and weather clear, halfway down, they gather near.

Spirits soar, voices cheer, upon the flats, faint words we hear.
Arm in arm, their looks austere, the rescued, lost, at last appear.

Respect, revere the mountaineer, honor those who shine sincere.
Grit for life, the rescue here shows God-like traits of mountaineer!

Wes Folsom, a retired teacher and coach, married to Susan for 40 years, now focuses on writing. Susan, specializes in knitting and nursing.

BE BORN IN US TODAY

“Where is the new-born king of the Jews?” (Matthew 2:2 NLT).

“Where shall the new-born King be found?”
Inquired worn traveling band.
“Is He not in Jerusalem,
Your royal city grand?”

Disturbed, King Herod called in scribes:
“How reads prophetic word?
Has any city been foretold
As birthplace of a lord?”

“In Bethlehem,” the scribes announced,
“A Ruler shall be born.”
With eagerness the sages turned,
Led by the Star of Morn.

In Bethlehem God’s Miracle—
His Jewel of Love—was given!
Like ancient town of prophet’s lore,
Like ante-room of Heaven,

May You, O Lord, display in me
Heaven’s most transcendent Gem!
Though I be counted little—least—
Make me Your Bethlehem!

Virginia Swauger Dongell says she is “A daughter of the King, widow of a sage, mother of four, grandmother of seven, and grateful resident of Wesley Village, Wilmore, KY.”

THE JOY OF ADVENT

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!... Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything (Philippians 4:4, 6 NLT).

At this time of year, there is great happiness and joy. What is the difference? Or are they the same?

Happiness, it seems, is more dependent on circumstances, whereas joy is more durable and lasting. Consequently, a person can be incapacitated for a long time and not be happy about those circumstances, but never lose the joy of the Lord.

We do not have any direct command in the Bible to always be happy. What we do have is the promise of joy. True joy is found only in God, as Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:4.

Happiness on the other hand is the great feeling you get when everything is going smoothly. Joy is what God gives you in the midst of trouble when you put that trouble in God's hands.

Paul calls joy one of the fruits of the spirit because we can't have true joy until we have begun to develop a spiritual life. We can have happiness without spiritual development—as long as the conditions in our lives are favorable. But, we cannot have joy. Joy comes as a result of a complete trust in the love of God and a deep desire for the will of God to be done in our lives, no matter what the cost might be to ourselves.

At this time of Advent, we reflect again on the true meaning of joy. Christ is our joy!

Don't let anyone or anything keep you from that joy!

Jay Dargan was employed at Asbury University and Asbury Seminary for over 35 years. He has been married to Margaret for 50 years. They have been members of WFMC for over 40 years.

COME INTO MY HEART, LORD JESUS

For to us a child is born... (Isaiah 9:6).

My daughter was teaching in Vacation Bible School. It was a new curriculum. Rather than issuing the invitation to salvation on the final day, it was presented on the third day. My daughter, concerned that many of the children had little church background, wondered if they would understand the invitation. When asked to invite Jesus into their hearts, several children eagerly responded.

Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart Lord Jesus.

We learned this song as children. In response, we asked Jesus to come into our hearts. Unfortunately grownups are seldom issued this simple invitation. For them it becomes complicated. It is important to remember what Jesus said:

"I praise you, Father,...because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children"
(Matthew 11:25).

"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"
(Matthew 18:3).

Many say Christmas is for children. It is truer to say Christmas is for those who are children at heart. Advent is a wonderful time for some to celebrate His abiding presence in their hearts and a perfect time for others to ask him into their hearts.

"O Come to my heart, Lord Jesus, There is room in my heart for Thee!" (Emily Elliott)

Marcia Burgess asked Jesus to come into her heart to stay over sixty years ago.

Scripture: Isaiah 9:2

December 5, 2012

BEAR YOUR CROSS OR USE YOUR CROSS?

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light... (Isaiah 9:2).

In September 2011, traveling through Siberia and Central Asia, I was deeply moved by the ministry of Dorothy Murphy in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Over the years this missionary from New Zealand developed an increasing concern for her neighborhood's homeless alcoholics. In winter some of them congregated around rubbish bin fires, while others descended manholes to sleep amid hot water lines. In 2001 Dorothy Murphy brought into her apartment a drunk who was in danger of freezing. When her new charge fell asleep at her kitchen table, she laid a mat on the floor where he slept the night. Looking back, she says this was the beginning of her outreach to alcoholics that now includes three rehabilitation centers.

The lives Dorothy has helped save are miracles, but so are the creative ways this dynamic, diminutive missionary has found to support her *El Rapha Nash* (God Our Helper) rehab centers. This modest, self-effacing grandmother and school teacher underwrites her ministry from her faculty salary and profits from Kiwi House, her guest house. Dorothy also oversees a dizzying array of fund-raising projects that employ her recovering alcoholics. They do everything from tending kitchen gardens that feed rehab residents, to making and selling bricks.

In his book, *Abundant Living*, E. Stanley Jones says it is not enough to bear our cross; we must also find a way to use it. Dorothy Murphy, whose husband was an alcoholic, with the Lord's leading, has found a way to use her cross.

Mark (Skip) Elliott is a retired professor of Russian and European history at Asbury University and editor of the *East-West Church and Ministry Report* (www.eastwestreport.org).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:14

December 22, 2012

THE LEGEND OF CHRISTMAS

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Each year, as Christmas nears, bookstores begin to display a huge variety of books with a Christmas theme. They range from the sublime to the ridiculous to the blasphemous. It is amazing how a world so opposed to a Messiah is so enamored with the season of His birth that they create innumerable movies, books and the like with Christmas at the center. Even before the multiple media options that we have today were around, oral traditions abounded with stories of "Christmas stuff."

In the arena of children's books, a particular interest of mine, there is no end to the Christmas books available for our youngsters' entertainment. I have noticed that two running themes are always there in the books for our little ones: mystery and legends. There is the legend of the poinsettia, the legend of the candy cane, etc. And then we have books such as *The Night the Animals Talked* and *The Little Fir Tree* where magical and mysterious things happen in the natural world in and around the time of Christmas.

This tells me that our world sees that there is something otherworldly about Christmas. About Christ. So, the world goes about inventing stories and legends so that it becomes a "magical time of year." Which it is...but only because of the birth of the Messiah. Only because of Jesus.

Amy Cooper and her husband, Peter, are grateful members of WFMC and parents to "three terrific grown sons and a wonderful daughter-in-law."

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

“And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sin” (Matthew 1:21 NLT).

The name Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua. It was Joshua, as you remember, the successor to Moses, who finally led the people of Israel into the promised land.

When the angel gave the name of Jesus to Joseph to call the son of Mary, the woman he was committed to marry, he also gave the reason. Here is where a world of theology shows up in one single sentence. A sentence so powerful that history rises and falls, ends and begins, at this event. The name Jesus, meaning “God is salvation,” has in it the very reason of His birth and the reason He is given that name. So His mission is in His name and His name is in His mission. Listen how personal the message becomes that the angel gave. For He will save *His* people from their sins. *His* people!

Joseph certainly grasped the impact of these words enough to change his plan of secretly putting Mary away and embraced the miracle of the son she was going to have. This was so much bigger than his own dreams, his own tradition, and his own name.

Can you imagine the impact Joseph felt when he realized that giving this son the name Jesus, as the angel had instructed, would bring connection and salvation to the world.

Say the name of Jesus when you doubt, say the name of Jesus when you fear, say the name of Jesus when you are tempted, say the name of Jesus when you are misunderstood, mistreated, and mistaken. There is power in His name, power to save just as the angel had told. Christmas is Jesus.

Glen Ellwood, married to Nancy, share the joy together of their three children, Rebecca, Jason, and Lindsay, a daughter-in-law, Sarah, and Silas, a grandson who steals their hearts every day.

LOOK BEYOND THE BAUBLES AT CHRISTMAS

Therefore...stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord...” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

We used to live in a house with a huge window in the living room. At Christmas time, my husband, Harold, always set up our Christmas tree in that window. The year our youngest daughter, Betsy, who grew up to be an artist and art teacher, was learning to walk, she was attracted by the shiny Christmas decorations that covered the tree. A “climber” almost from birth, Betsy made a toddler’s best effort and succeeded in climbing far enough up the Christmas tree to topple it over, Christmas balls and all. She was unhurt.

Not to be outdone, Betsy’s engineer father fashioned a triangular brace that held the tree unmovable. After that change, Betsy quickly realized that she no longer got much bang for her buck when she attempted to climb the tree with the interesting things hanging on it. She left it alone. Well, almost.

I think there is a lesson for us in this. At Christmas the child in all of us is attracted by the glitter of Christmas. There is nothing wrong with that. Bells and balls, tinsel and mistletoe add to our joy. After all, it is Somebody’s birthday. However, there is a firm triangular brace under all of the glitter. Let us not forget Father, Son, Holy Spirit under whose love and unchanging grace His children all safely live and move and have our being. Christmas is fun. But undergirding it all is the matter of our salvation.

Mary Jane Behm and her husband, who died in 2012, have three daughters, Judi, Karen, and Betsy. A native of Ohio, Mary Jane now lives in Wesley Village and is a member of WFMC.

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:3-4

December 7, 2012

PRAISE

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade— kept in heaven for you . . . (1 Peter 1:3-4).

Peace, joy and love are words common to Advent. We hear these words and express them ourselves in prayers, greeting cards, and songs of the season. While these are certainly fitting words—great words that have become the standard by which we measure the condition of our hearts as we approach and celebrate Christmas—I would like to add one more to our lexicon, one that I especially believe is appropriate during Advent—*PRAISE*. Our praises to God are acts of our will expressing in even fuller form the attitude of our heart and our relationship to Him. After all, we were created to praise Him and He is worthy of our praise. Regardless of the circumstances that surround us during Advent, rendering a grateful reverence to our Creator through praise takes the focus off of ourselves and redirects our attention to the character of God and all that we have for which to praise Him—including the birth of His Son and our Savior.

I like the word “praise” because it denotes action— a proper action on our part toward a deserving God for the peace, joy, love and so much more He offers us. Praise God during this Advent. The Scripture tells us: “As you draw near to the Father in praise, He will draw near to you” (James 4:8, paraphrased). Can you imagine anything better this Christmas than a closer relationship with God?

Royce and Susie Bourne live in Lexington and attend WFMC. They are blessed with two married daughters, sons-in-law and two precious grandchildren.

Scripture: Romans 2:6

December 20, 2012

UNUSED GIFTS

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it... (Romans 12:6).

My grandmother grew up in abject poverty. Her father was a Confederate soldier who lost everything in the Civil War. He moved to Nashville and tried to make a living as a house painter, but he became an alcoholic and squandered everything he earned. Grandmother and her siblings scratched and scabbled just to stay alive. She eventually married John L. Welch, and together they served the Cofer’s Chapel Free Will Baptist Church for 54 years.

When Grandmother died, my parents helped Grandfather decide what to do with her belongings. To their shock and dismay, they discovered every gift Grandmother had ever received stacked neatly in the attic—still in their original wrappings: a pair of warm slippers, a set of dishes Grandfather had scrimped and saved to buy for her, nice towel sets and tablecloths, and many more. Each one was neatly labeled: “From Jean, Christmas, 1953,” “From John, birthday, 1957,” “From the Jean’s kids when we retired.” Grandfather could only say, “She thought all those things were too good for her to use.”

What a tragedy! And yet, how many of the good gifts God has given us lie idle and unused, perhaps because we think they are too precious for us to put to the work of serving the church. At this Christmas season, let’s be thankful for the gifts God has given and determine to put them into practice.

Mike Henderson is Executive Director of Heart of Africa. He and his wife, Martha, attended both Asbury University (then Asbury College) and Asbury Theological Seminary, as did their parents.

Scripture: John 1:14 NIV1984

December 19, 2012

I KNOW WHY I'M HERE

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 NIV1984)

Several long flights—with stops in Barcelona and Ankara—were more than worth it. Now we were sitting in our pastor's apartment in Amman, Jordan, riveted by the testimony of young Stephen. It was far more than the story of his father's kidnapping in Bagdad, his eventual release, and their escape to Jordan. Rather, it was the story of God's grace active in his life, through the worst of times and the hardest of circumstances. Stephen described his new relationship with Christ with these words. "I believed and it was the biggest day of my life." He added, "My question had been, 'Why am I here?' Now I know."

What if Christ had not come? That's not a thought we want even to consider. Yet, it's one that helps put everything in perspective. Because Christ came into our world and "the Word became flesh," Stephen now knows Jesus and why he is here on planet earth.

Yes, Christ came down at Christmas, and because of that historical fact anyone anywhere who turns to Him can know new life.

Arthur Brown and his wife, Sylvia, recently moved back to Wilmore. He has served as executive director of Free Methodist World Missions and pastored several churches including the Wilmore Free Methodist.

Scripture: Luke 2:18 NLT

December 8, 2012

A TRADITION OF WONDER

All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished...(Luke 2:18 NLT).

As a child, I went to boarding school in Kenya. The three terms of the school year were called Christmas term, Easter term, and Trinity term. At the end of Christmas term each year the students and staff presented a Christmas carols and lessons service for the parents. The wooden chapel was carefully decorated with greens and candles and the carols, practiced for months, were beautiful and powerful. I remember these services as solemnly exciting and deeply worshipful, even for a child.

We always longed for end of term, or "endo" in our boarding school language of abbreviations. No "endo" was more anticipated than Christmas term's, with not only its promise of a month at home but the coming Christmas day that the carol service foretold.

Christmas was full of traditions. We would help Mom decorate sugar cookies, and Dad would help us wrap gifts, some of them made at school. A week or so before Christmas we all helped put up the tree, with copious amounts of tinsel. The whole month at home was accompanied by Christmas songs from our record player. Then the thrill of Christmas Eve—hanging the stockings and the extravagance of our traditional oyster stew.

Christmas when we are children is a time of wonder. The traditions, born in truth and nurtured by thoughtful repetition, help us *feel* and not just understand. For adults, this wonder is often elusive. I find I must steep myself again in the truths behind the traditions so that Christmas can happen in my heart and not just my head. God became man! People and angels were amazed. Let's decide this year to be astonished again.

Andy Bowen is married to Lizet and they have three sons: Lucas (7), Timothy (6), and Joseph (19 months). They live in Escobar, Paraguay, where they help missionaries learn Guarani, the national language.

Scripture: John 1:9-13

December 9, 2012

CHILDREN BORN OF GOD

The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (John 1:9-13).

Is there anything more exciting than being one of God's children? Have you ever really thought about that? Do you know what that means? Because God loved us so much He was willing to come to us through Christ that we might be His forever. We have been born a second time into the family of God who has given us the right to call Him Father. This year as Christmas approaches and we start thinking about gifts for others, let us always remember God's Gift to us. May the love of Jesus find you again and again, wherever you are, wherever you go. May his Spirit keep you and reveal all the wonders that are yours as a child of God.

Richard Apgar recently moved to Wilmore with his wife, Sarah, and their daughter Abigail. He has just begun his first semester at Asbury Theological Seminary where he is enrolled in the M.Div. program.

Scripture: John 1:14, 17 KJV

December 18, 2012

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us...John 1:14 KJV).

For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17 KJV).

When Jesus was born of Mary in Bethlehem, He came to show us the way to eternal life. This event provided us with a new relationship with our Creator.

There is a vast difference in having a religion of laws and practices and in having an intimate relationship. The latter opens up for us:

- I – interaction with a Loving Father
- N – new life in Him
- T – truth of His Holy Word
- I – insight from His Holy Spirit
- M – meditating on Jesus' redemptive work
- A – adoration and praise of the Godhead
- C – communion with our Lord
- Y – yearning to enjoy His Presence

Let each of us ask ourselves, "Am I growing in my relationship with the Lord?"

But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18 KJV).

Fran Ditto and her husband, Tom, are residents of Wesley Village and have worshipped at WFMC for six years.

FOLLOWING GOD'S GPS

...And there it was—the star they had seen in the east! It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was (Matthew 2:9 HCSB).

I love to use our GPS when we travel. It is so simple to just enter the address of our destination and then let some pleasant voice guide us on our journey. There is no need to read a map or worry about stopping to ask for directions. While this technology can direct us, it cannot, however, actually transport us to our goal. I still have to drive and still must attend to the hazards of the road, reckless drivers, and remain alert at all times.

Searching for the Christ Child 2,000 years ago, the wise men, too, had a GPS to provide them guidance. The Star of Bethlehem shone forth a light that directed them to the exact location they were seeking; all they had to do was to pay attention and follow. They still had to navigate their journey and attend to the hazards and toils of camel-travel, but they did not have to wonder if they were headed in the right direction.

I often find that following Jesus is very similar to using a GPS or star to guide me. I can know where I should go without having a clear notion of how I am going to get there. All I have to do is place my eyes on the Star and walk in obedience to His commands. I still must deal with the matters of the world and attend to hazards that abound, but I know that if I follow where He leads I will arrive precisely where I should be.

This Christmas season may the light from the Star guide you, so that you may travel confidently amid the toils and hazards of this world, knowing that your direction is assured.

Paul Hamann is a life-long resident of Wilmore and recently retired after 39 years in public education. He and his wife Sue have three married children and two grandchildren.

QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

I love you, O Lord... (Psalm 18:1)

...[F]ind out what pleases the Lord (Ephesians 5:10).

If you are an average American, you will spend over \$700 celebrating Christmas in 2012, according to people who specialize in merchandising statistics. BIG business.

So probably you will hear this stupid question more than once: “Are you ready for Christmas?” What does that mean? All your gifts made or purchased? Then just as you’re almost there, comes an awful doubt—maybe you’ve forgotten somebody who may be getting something for you! And how much did they spend?

Then the standard greeting after Dec. 25 is another stupid question: “Did you have a good Christmas?” So what’s “a good Christmas”? Nice gifts, of course, and the satisfaction that you remembered everyone on your list, even if you had to max out your credit cards.

Now for one good question: “Have I asked the One I say is all the world to me how He would like to celebrate His birthday?” (When you’re in love, you try hard to learn what your beloved likes.) Here are some clues He gave us:

1. “I was a stranger and you invited me in.”
2. “I needed clothes and you clothed me.”
3. “I was sick and you looked after me” (Matthew 25:36).
4. “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done” (Proverbs 19:17).

Esther James has been a member of WFMC since 1966. She is the widow of Gilbert James, distinguished professor at Asbury Theological Seminary. Since 2005 she has been caretaker for her invalid daughter in Albuquerque, NM.

GOD AS STRANGER

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him (John 1:10-11 NASB).

I recently began reflecting on how my family and I will spend our first Christmas away from home, in a foreign land where we are considered to be “strangers.” Of course, if we were at home in Barbados, we could expect to enjoy the customary benefits and comforts that citizenship provides. But, in a foreign land, in spite of how settled we may try to be, we find ourselves viewing life through the lens of *sojourner*, which often means: (1) being caught between two worlds; (2) not setting down permanent roots; (3) living at society’s outer boundary; and (4) being vulnerable to its hostile elements.

But, as I examine more closely our current social status as “stranger,” I am realizing how God must have felt when He came into a world that He made, and He was treated like a stranger.

Nevertheless, we know that God loves and favors the stranger (Deuteronomy 10:18, among others), and that by welcoming the stranger, Christians participate in God’s plan to reconcile this broken world—its customs, norms, and values—to himself (Matthew 25:31-46). It is a process, in which the church must actively demonstrate God’s love to the stranger and to society’s other vulnerable persons. However, the stranger too plays an active role in the restoration act, by modeling and reminding the church that all Christians are strangers in this present world, and we must be willing to be treated, like God, as a stranger.

Oh, that every Christian “citizen” would make it a priority to reach out and invite a “stranger,” to God’s table of fellowship, where His holiness and justice are served.

Lindsay Arthur is a Biblical Studies student at Asbury Theological Seminary. He temporarily resides in Wilmore, KY with his wife, Margaret, and their infant daughter, Naomi.

HOME FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

“But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:32).

As a husband and a parent, I sometimes have found the Christmas season to be a time of fear. I have experienced this season in many ways—with my parents (along with congregations), with friends’ or teachers’ families, and alone. Christmas used to be my favorite season, while I was living with my parents. Despite all the chaos in the season, there were moments of calmness during the candle light service, caroling, and our family rituals including opening gifts. Because our house was a church, none of these moments were long lasting. They were rather like the eye of a typhoon. Yet, this was where I belonged.

Going home with friends or teachers to their families, during my high school years, was not comfortable, for it reassured me that I didn’t belong there. I was not part of their family. Thus during my college years, I chose to be alone. I thought being alone was a better alternative than being with many unknown people and their families; however, the years in college were most miserable ones.

As I started to celebrate these seasons with my own family, I have been trying to replicate my experiences in the house of my parents, even though it became the place I could not go back to because of my pride and arrogance. This season I would like to return to the home I can go back to and know I will be welcomed. This is the season of returning to the Lord and helping others to do the same.

Mark Goshima, a formerly rebellious son of a Japanese pastor, is currently being trained at Asbury Theological Seminary to become a pastor.

COMPLETING THE JOURNEY

Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach (Deuteronomy 30:11).

The question of Mary and Joseph's journey has led many believers to wonder what it would be like to set out on such a journey, not knowing what perils loomed along the way. Mary and Joseph knew they had to be obedient to the law of the land and to God who had promised them Mary's Son.

How many of us have set out on a journey that our Father has given us to complete in obedience? The journey could be illness, ministry, accident, loss, or many other things for which we were not prepared. My personal journey through chronic illness, and perhaps your journey also, has led me on trails never taken. But all are covered by our Lord as He travels with me. His constant presence has been manifested in hands that have helped, feet that have walked with me, smiles that have cheered me, and most importantly, prayers that have upheld and blessed me.

At the end of Mary and Joseph's journey there was no room at the inn. But no matter; God protected them every step of the way. He protected His children then just as He does now and forevermore.

Joyce Dickinson and her husband, Barry, began to attend WFMC about the same time they moved to Wilmore five years ago. She is the mother of Jennifer Skaggs and the grandmother of Aubri and Jonathan.

CHRISTMAS MUSIC WITH GLITTER

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).

I don't remember exactly when my family decided that Handel's *Messiah* was required listening for decorating the Christmas tree. By the time I was in high school, however, the tradition was firmly established. Down from the attic came the boxes of ornaments. Out from the cabinet came first the vinyl record, then later the CD. With such a glorious musical backdrop, even our dough ornaments, carefully painted in Sunday school and a bit overcooked from summers under the roof, sparkled nicely.

While I would probably enjoy the music for its instrumental beauty alone, the combination of the music and the lyrics — most of which are taken directly from the King James Bible — has an even greater power.

Names are important in my family, which might explain why the song based on Isaiah 9:6 is one of my favorites. The Son given to us so generously had weighty titles placed on His tiny shoulders: Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Counselor, Prince of Peace and, most simply, Wonderful.

I'll be digging out my own recording of *Messiah* this year and delighting again in the musical story of a baby — and then a man — who is indeed Wonderful. The bottom half of our tree will fill with Sunday school ornaments, and the air will fill with the sounds of His praise. I can hardly wait.

Rebekah Daniel is wife to William, mom to Annesley, Amie and Alister, and a sucker for paper-and-glitter ornaments with tiny fingerprints in the glue.

HOPE FROM THE ROOT OF JESSE

...Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:12-13 NRSV).

When we think of "root," we think of the source, the stabilization, of the tree or plant. A root is also unseen. This is important in this context, since Isaiah is calling for the coming of the Messiah. It takes faith to think that an unseen Savior is coming to be the source of strength and stability for the world. Not only is He coming, He is coming to rule all, including Gentiles. Gentiles were not believers in God and persecutors of the Jewish people. Yet Messiah is to give the Gentiles hope. The assumption is that He will be an earthly leader, one who would take charge and rule His people in an earthly manner. This is why we need to look further into the passage. He is to rule the Gentiles but not in an earthly manner. He is to lead through His joy and peace. He is the God of hope. He is the one Whom the Holy Spirit has sent. Jesus is coming from a holy line, "the root of Jesse." If you follow the lineage in Matthew 1:1-17 this is a direct line to Abraham himself. This man is to give "peace in believing" to hostile people, the Gentiles. Not only that, but enable them to "abound in hope" through His Holy Spirit. He is coming to be our support, strength, and fill us with "joy," "peace in believing," and "hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

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WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT

*But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4-5 NASB).
For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:14 NASB).*

Strange isn't it. No Christian is ever to be under the Law. We are never again to be subject to its condemnation, the stirring up of sin which it promotes, or its pronouncement of death as a result of our transgression of its commands (Romans 7:7-10). No, we are now under grace. And yet the King of all grace, Jesus Christ, subjected Himself to be born into this world and placed under that Law. Furthermore, this King of kings and Lord of lords submitted Himself to enslavement (Philippians 2:7) so that we might be redeemed from our enslavement. He took upon Himself our sentence of death that we might enjoy eternal life. That truly is what Christmas is all about. He came to where we are, submitted Himself to our circumstances, so that we might be where He is. What a great sacrifice! Contemplate that for a moment.

And then I would suggest we ask ourselves this question: What little sacrifice might I make this Christmas season to help lead someone else to where He has brought me?

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