

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

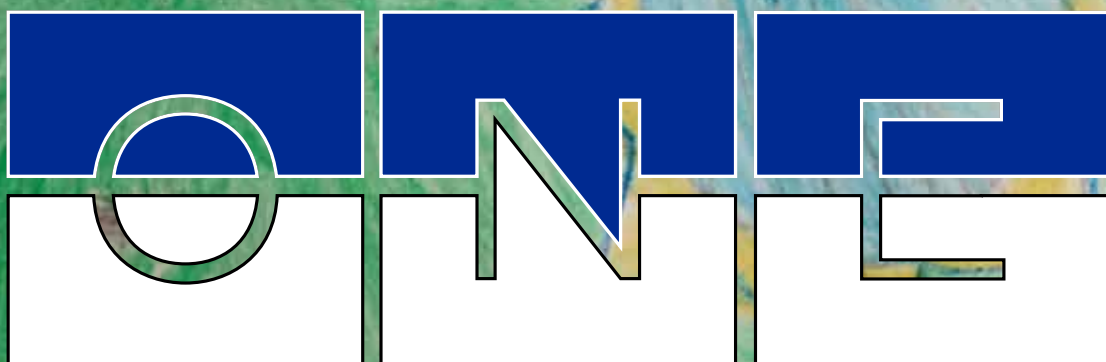
God

sent Jesus!

Mary



Joseph



INSIDE:
+ The Christmas
narrative

A publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance December 2016

Spirit speaks in different ways

The Christmas narrative in Scripture about the birth of our Lord is one of the most well-known stories in all of human history. As per our tradition at ONE, we have asked local area residents, clergy and non-clergy, to write a reflection on a particular portion of that story. I'm amazed each time we do this to see the ways in which the Spirit speaks to different people as they read the Sacred Text. This month is no exception.



Welcome
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The articles you will read will help you think about the birth of Jesus in a different way, highlighting the joy of diversity in our community.

Of course, the story of Jesus is a story that must be told. It must be told and retold to generation after generation. This month's writers help retell this story, the greatest story ever told, with fresh insight.

I challenge you to read these articles and the accompanying Scripture as part of

your daily devotions leading up to Christmas. Allow these thoughts and words to penetrate your spirit and help you focus on what truly matters this holiday season: Jesus.

Blessings,

Kevin Daniels
ONE Advisory Board Chair

SUBMISSIONS

ONE and the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to one@dailynews.net.

The ECMA advisory board will choose appropriate and timely submissions for publication.

The columns in ONE represent the views of the author.

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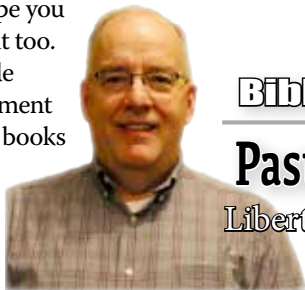
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Wrapping up the year with the reading plan

Hello Bible Reader! It's December! Thanks for reading the Bible with me this year. I hope you have enjoyed this year's reading plan as much as I have. We used the "Community Bible Experience" reading plan from the International Bible Society again this year. I continue to enjoy the rearrangement if the texts, I hope you have enjoyed it too.

To conclude our Old Testament reading of the books of the Law and History we will finish reading through the book of



Bible Reading Plan
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To wrap-up our New Testament readings we will read the book of Revelation, one of the most challenging books to read and understand. This book is written in a completely different style and form than the rest of the New Testament, it is written on an ancient style called apocalypse. It is a style that describes images and visions. Revelation means "unveiling". Revelation describes a 4-part vision that the Apostle John

had regarding the condition of the early Church. More than any other New Testament book, (in my opinion), an understanding of the challenges

that Rome gave the early church is essential to understanding what the Spirit is saying to us through this book. Many of the challenges facing early Believers are facing us today. Therefore understanding this book is essential. I would recommend a study Bible or a Bible handbook as you navigate

these readings. You will gain a much greater appreciation and understanding the eternal nature of the Kingdom of God.

Thanks again for reading with me this year. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and watch for our new Reading Plan in the January One Magazine

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ONE is the official publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance, which guides its mission, content and theme.

It is produced by The Hays Daily News.
Volume 9, Issue 12
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On the cover: The winner of this year's coloring contest was Xiarhianna, a 7-year-old second-grader from Liberty Foursquare Church.

December

1....Weekend Review	17.....☐ 2 Kings 20	☐ Rev 12
2.....☐ 2 Kings 9	18.....☐ 2 Kings 21	☐ Rev 13
3.....☐ 2 Kings 10	19.....☐ 2 Kings 22	☐ Rev 14
4.....☐ 2 Kings 11	20.....☐ 2 Kings 23	☐ Rev 15
5.....☐ 2 Kings 12	21 & 22....Weekend Review	
6.....☐ 2 Kings 13	23.....☐ 2 Kings 24	☐ Rev 16
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12.....☐ 2 Kings 17	28 & 29....Weekend Review	
13.....☐ 2 Kings 18	30.....☐	☐ Rev 21
14 & 15....Weekend Review	31.....☐	☐ Rev 22
16.....☐ 2 Kings 19		

Gabriel announces Jesus' birth

One of the most exciting times in any couple's life is when they find out that they are going to have a baby. There are many things that must be done to prepare for the birth of a new baby, but none is more important than choosing a name for the new arrival. A baby's name should be chosen very carefully because the baby will live with that name for the rest of his or her life.

Sixty five years ago the name Kyle was not an overly popular one. As a matter of fact, I went all the way through high school and halfway through college before I ever met another Kyle, and when I finally did, she was a girl! My mother told me I was named after a college football standout at the time, Kyle Rote and I later found out in a book on baby names that the origin of my name was from Scottish geography meaning "narrows, channel, or strait".

In our Scripture passage when Mary and Joseph found out that they were going to have a baby, they didn't go to a bookstore to help them choose a name for the baby.

In fact, they didn't choose the baby's name at all! God chose it for them! God sent an angel Gabriel to tell Mary, who was a virgin, impregnated by the Holy Spirit, what to name her baby. "The angel said to Mary, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus."

In the Hebrew language the name Jesus means "Salvation or the Lord saves." It was

important for Mary's baby to be named Jesus because the Bible tells us that there is no other name that can save us from our sin (Acts 4:12). Unlike the name Kyle, Jesus was a very common name in Scriptural times. In the Old Testament, Hebrew names such as Joshua and Jeshua are simply linguistic variations of Jesus.

While the name itself is fairly common, it's meaning "God's salvation" and the person of

Jesus the Messiah is utterly unique for in him is the one Son of God. His name on the one hand emphasizes Jesus' commonness – He was born in a simple stable, to a humble servant girl Mary and her betrothed husband Joseph. On the other hand, the name Jesus shows his divine uniqueness.

This baby Jesus was the only begotten Son of the most high God, born to redeem humankind to eternal life. His name sums up the things which He came into the world to do and which only He can do. He came into this world to be the Savior of the world who alone can deliver us from the consequences of our sinful

nature. He came into this world to be the Great Physician who alone can bring healing to the bodies and souls of mankind.

He came into this world to be the Light of the world who alone can overcome the dark shadows of evil's grip upon our lives and set us free.

What's in a name? Our faith, hope, salvation, and expectation of eternal life are called forth in only one name, the name above all names...Jesus.



Pastor Kyle Ermoian

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Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then 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 bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." – Luke 1:26–33 (NKJV)

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Mary Miraculously Conceives

A virgin conceives, and that baby is the Son of God, our Savior. Luke states this as a matter of fact; an event occurring in history. The Gospel writer's claim calls for more than assent to a historical fact, however. It calls for faith. Faith is much more than mere acceptance of a bit of history. Accepting the fact declared by Scripture may be at the heart of belief, but that is not equal to faith. Faith is not just belief. Faith is trust. We can glean two simple truths from Luke's account of the virginal conception of Jesus: faith is trust in God's power, and faith is trust in God's promise.

To have faith is to trust in the power of God. The story, after all, is that of a powerless young woman who trusts in God's power. A literal translation of the words spoken by the angel to Mary in Luke's Gospel reads, "Nothing can render



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God powerless." God cannot fail. God does not fail. We can fail. We do fail. We cannot save ourselves. We are not our own savior. We need a savior. The higher power referred to in twelve step programs is nondescript, while the God revealed in Luke's Gospel isn't, but the premise is similar. We admit our powerlessness, and we trust in a higher power. Only from this perspective do we see the need to trust in God's power to save. Only then does the story of the virginal conception of the Savior come as a powerful proclamation of good news.

Therefore, faith is trusting the promise contained in the powerful proclamation of the good news about the coming of the Savior. The promise is given in the book of the Prophet Isaiah that a virgin will conceive. The Son of God, humankind's Savior, will appear in human history through a virginal conception (see Isaiah

Mary said to the angel, "I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God. Remember your relative Elizabeth. It is said that she cannot have children, but she herself is now six months pregnant, even though she is very old. For there is nothing that God cannot do."

"I am the Lord's servant," said Mary; "may it happen to me as you have said." And the angel left her. – Luke 1:34–38 (GNB)

7:14). A promise, to be effective, requires trust. Mary trusts in the promise and says yes to God's messenger. The promise is fulfilled in her. Literally! The promised Savior lives in the one who trusts the promise. That is not just a reference to a reality that happened to Mary long ago, it is a reference to a reality that happens through faith today. The Christ Child, spiritually speaking, is conceived in every heart that trusts in the fulfillment of the promise. The promise becomes not a historical abstraction, but a living reality in the hearts of the faithful. Thus the story of the promise fulfilled in the virginal conception is not a history lesson. The Virgin Mary is prototypical. Some say

she is the first Christian on account of her faith.

In conclusion, the story of Christmas is not only an account of the historical fact of the birth of Jesus Christ, who is conceived of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, as it is recorded in the Gospel of Luke. It is that, but it is more than that at the same time. Our response to the story may mean belief; assent to the historical truth of Jesus' virginal conception and virgin birth, but it is more than that too. The story of Christmas is a proclamation that comes with the infallible power of God; a story of a glad promise fulfilled that, when trusted, fills human existence with the presence of the divine.

The Angel Visits Joseph

Words have power. One sentence can cause you to lose your job. Just ask Justine Sacco. Three years ago, using the social media platform Twitter, she posted a comment that caused her to lose hers.

As I reflect on the Christmas story, I am struck by a very prominent character in the story: Joseph. More than any other character in the Christmas story, God spoke to this man. Four separate visions. Direct instructions about marriage and the places that he was to live, and the times he was to move. Each time Joseph obeyed.

Joseph's obedience to God preceded these visions. Matthew's account identifies him as a "righteous man" (Mat-



Pastor Dave Buller

North Oak
Community Church

Now the birth of Jesus Christ happened this way. While his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph, her husband to be, was a righteous man, and because he did not want to disgrace her, he intended to divorce her privately. When he had contemplated this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." When Joseph awoke from sleep he did what the angel of the Lord told him. – Matthew 1:18–21, 24 (NET)

thew 1:19). The Old Testament describes a righteous person as a "Tsaddiq."

Tsaddiq is a Hebrew word meaning: conforming to the standard, will, or character of God; upright, righteous, good; in a right relationship with God; fair, honest; innocent.

But what fascinates me about Joseph is what is missing. He doesn't speak even one word that is recorded in the Christmas narratives. God speaks to him with greater frequency than anyone else in these stories, and yet, it is a mystery to us what this "tsaddiq"—this righteous man—said.

How to speak like a tsaddiq

Thankfully, the Bible has many instructions for us about how to speak like

a tsaddiq. As you gather together with family or friends this holiday season, here are six helpful tips on how your mouth should behave.

Use your words to build up others

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. – Ephesians 4:29

Most people are quick to criticize, condemn, or complain. That is just not the way of grace. Instead, help your mouth behave by using your words to bless people.

Confess your sins

Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. – James 5:16

Confessing means owning up to your problems. Confession is imperative to repair our relationship with God and others. If you have a tense human relationship, seek to make things right. Simply saying a heartfelt, "I'm sorry" gives significant traction in these dialogues.

Declare your forgiveness

"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." –Jesus in Luke 17:3-4

Express your thanks

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. –Luke 17:15-16

In Luke 17:11-19, Jesus heals ten people that have leprosy, but only one returns to give thanks. It astounds Jesus that more people aren't thankful. Pretty good reminder that we need to express our thanks for those who serve.

Dream and declare a better future

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. –Hebrews 10:23

If you are going to speak like a tsaddiq, then you



need to be thinking about how God is going to redeem the past and the present. I have found that this involves imagination. Imagine. Think creatively. How can God redeem the difficulties that you face or continue to struggle with? What about the trials of other people in your life? Declaring a better future is a hope-bringer to the hopeless, and it is one of the ways that righteous people speak.

Proclaim His glory

With Jesus' help, let us continually offer our sacrifice of praise to God by proclaiming the glory of his name.

–Hebrews 13:15

Proclaim his glory by singing together with other believers and sharing how God is working in your life.

So speak like a righteous person giving light and life to those around you. Merry Christmas!



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Mary Visits Elizabeth

I am in awe of the courage and vulnerability of Incarnation. Whenever I hold an infant, I am struck anew that God would choose to experience the wonder and suffering of life in frail human flesh

With each year I become more drawn to the courage and world changing faith of Mary, a humble girl in an oppressed country and



The Rev. Celeste Lasich

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perilous circumstances, who nevertheless is called to be a prophet speaking God's truth. She believed (believe really means "Give your heart") that this child would be the fulfillment all that God had promised. Mary knew covenant history by heart and she trusted in all that God had spoken from age to age. The Song she sings in affirmation is often called the Magnificat- Latin for My soul magnifies the Lord.

Mary sings of the promises of God which will be fulfilled through this unlikely child. God who, against all odds and observable evidence, will through Jesus bring the

powerful down from their thrones, lift up the lowly, feed the hungry, and send the rich away empty. She praises and trusts in God who is, and ever shall be, turning the world around. Each year in this season I turn with hopeful expectation to one of my favor-

ite nontraditional Christmas songs, the Cantic of the Turning. The text is Mary's Magnificat set to a rousing Celtic tune, Star of the County Down.

Cantic of the Turning

My soul cries out with a joyful shout that the God of my heart is great, and my spirit sings of the wondrous things that you bring to the ones who wait.

You fixed your sight on your servant's plight, and my weakness you did not spurn.

So from east to west shall your name be blest. Could the world be about to turn?

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.

Let the fires of your justice burn.

Wipe away all the tears, for the dawn draw near, and the world is about to turn.

Though I am small, my God, my all, you work great things in me,

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." – Luke 1:39-45 (ESV)

And your mercy will last from the depths of the past to the end of the age to be.

Your very name puts the proud to shame, and to those who would for you yearn, you will show your might, put the strong to flight, for the world is about to turn.

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.

Let the fires of your justice burn.

Wipe away all the tears, for the dawn draw near, and the world is about to turn.

From the halls of power to the fortress tower, not a stone will be left on stone.

Let the king beware for your justice tears ev'ry tyrant from his throne.

The hungry poor shall weep no more, for the food they can never earn;

There are tables spread, ev'ry mouth be fed, for the world is about to turn.

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.

Let the fires of your justice burn.

Wipe away all the tears, for the dawn draw near, and the world is about to turn.

Though the nations rage from age to age, we remember who holds us fast:

God's mercy must deliver us from the conqueror's crushing grasp.

This saving word that our forebears heard is the promise which holds us bound,

'Til the spear and rod can be crushed by God, who is turning the world around.

May we in this season, remember God's saving Word. Despite all the raging, God's mercy and justice still hold us fast. Have courage and be as bold as Mary as you proclaim and act in obedience to God's love and justice, which is even now turning the world around.

Jesus is Born

These words of Saint Luke are some of the most beloved

passages to be read at Christmas time. Here in these words, we are told about the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, who was of the house and line of King David.

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

Jesus the Christ was born to fulfill the Word of the Lord. This child was born in the humblest of ways, He was born for all



Pastor Rocco Mallardi

Messiah Lutheran Church

of mankind, to deliver us from our sins. The name that the angel gave to him was Jesus.

The name Jesus means "the Lord delivers." Therefore, this child was born to fulfill the scriptures and was born to be the Lord's deliverance.

As the child was

born, the Light of the World stepped forth into the world, God himself came as this little baby. Upon his birth the virgin mother took her son into her arms. She wrapped cloth around him and laid him in the stone manger, because they were in a cave that was turned into a stable.

Jesus's birth was prophetic. At Jesus's birth the Savior of the world, God and man,

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 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 cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. – Luke 2:1-7 (NIV)

stepped forth into the world through the virgin womb. Taking upon himself the name "the Lord delivers," he was wrapped in cloth and laid in the stone container. Thirty-three years later Mary would once again be witness to her Son wrapped in cloth and laid in a stone cave...laid in a stone tomb. In His sacrifice upon that cross, the child born of the house and line of David in the town of

Bethlehem, made the final sacrifice for the sins of the world. It was a sacrifice that only God could make for us to forgive our sins and give to us eternal life.

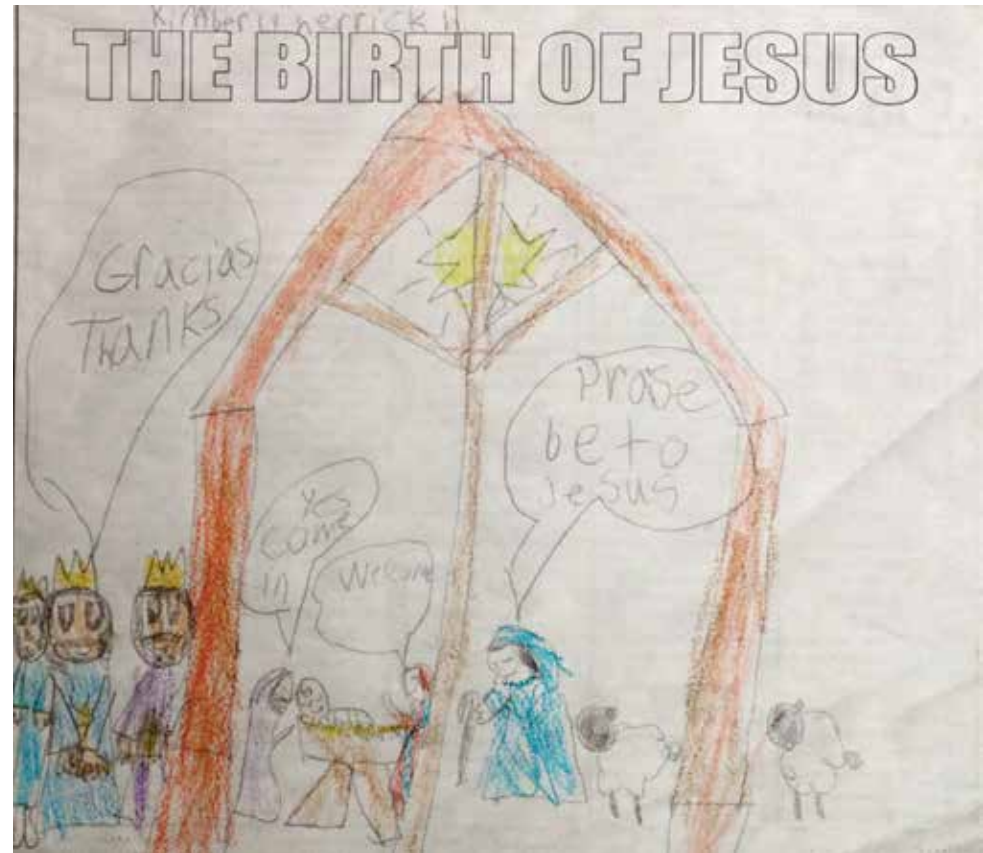
And that is what Christmas is all about Charlie Brown. It's about the Son of God, who stepped forth into the world to redeem the world from its sins and give to us eternal life.

CHRISTMAS COLORING CONTEST

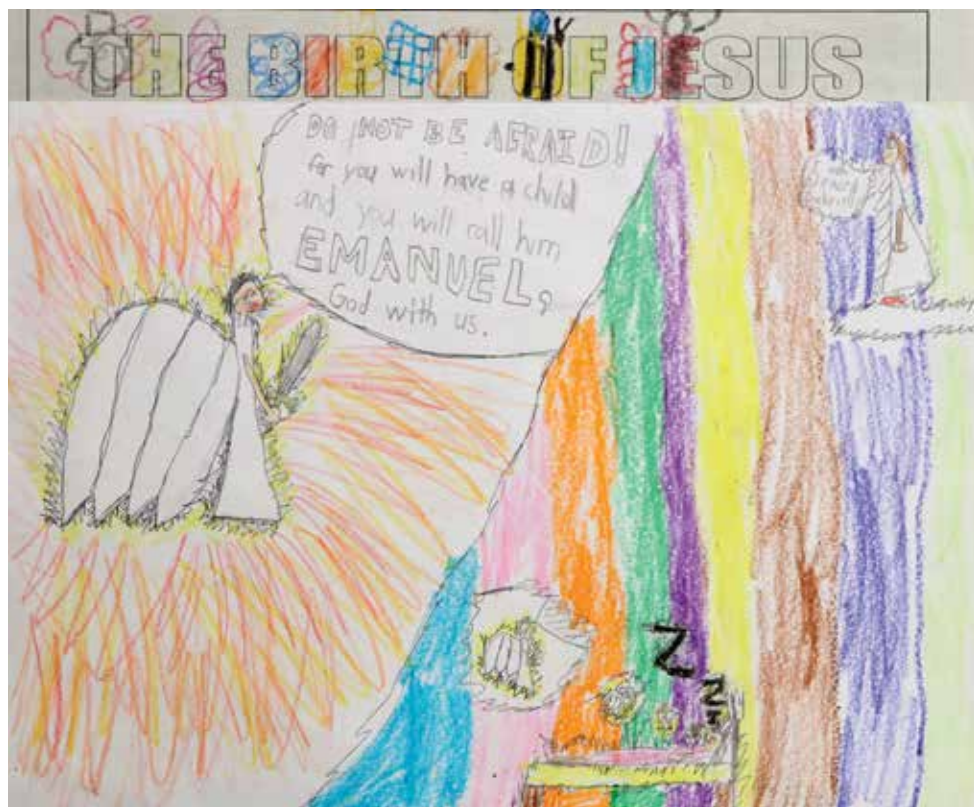
Below are the runners-up of the ECMA coloring contest. The theme was "The birth of Jesus"



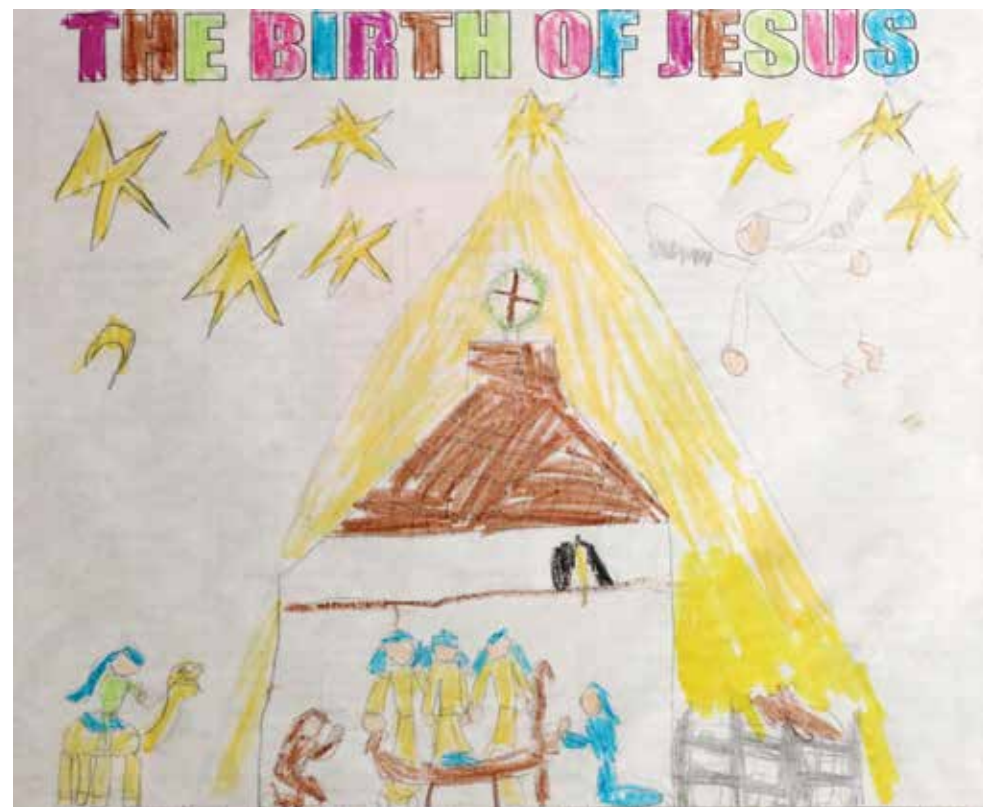
Emily McEwan, First United Methodist Church.



Kimberly Herrick, Liberty Foursquare Church



Roman McLoughlin, Victory Christian Academy.



Bryson Dumler, Victory Christian Academy.

The angels appear to the shepherds

Can you even imagine? To share the good news of Jesus Christ's birth, the angelic messengers of God take flight. And, with glory and power, they deliver the news not out to the kings of this world—not out to the big cities and urban areas—but first, to the shepherds (2:8). The rural, agricultural, working-class people. People like you, and me.

This divine encounter with the angels gives us a glimpse of the God whom we trust, and praise, and worship. By the humble power of a babe in a manger, we are promised a God who meets us, and greets us — just as we are! — who offers us the hope, and the joy, and the peace of our Savior.

Unlike the pattern of authority in this world, this message of joy is not given solely for those who are “most qualified.” It is not reserved just for the most privileged, or the best educated, or the one making the highest income.

Far from it! Instead: we are told of a God, who appears, in glory, to the shepherds of the field. Instead: we receive a welcome.

Allie Smith
St. John
Lutheran, Ellis

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. “This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” – Luke 2:8-14 (NASB)

Good news, of great joy, to all the people (2:11). Just as they are. Just as you are.

The promise of the angles reminds us that there is no “exclusive club card” to get into the manger. It reminds us that there is no hierarchy of those who might see the Savior-King.

Instead, there are only the welcome words of God, bidding

you to come:

“Come, and see!

Come, see Jesus, the Christ child!

Come, and see: he is here, and here for you.”

What might it be like, to witness this message of joy, in your own field by night? Imagine:

Stars shimmer in the dark, endless sky of the Kansas prairie.

It's just after the first hard-frost of the year: the perfect time to harvest your fields.

On the combine, it's cold.

Against the November dark, you see your breath forming steam clouds.

The clouds drift away, slowly, as you pass rows stripped bare of grain.

It's nearly time to shut down for the night.

You've been out working since before the sun came up.

Now, long after the sun is gone, you are out in the dark once again.

And then—suddenly—something catches your attention.

A blur of motion, and light, in the darkness.

Light explodes, all around you!

Feathers dance wildly around you.

It's so bright out, it could be daytime;

It's so lovely, it could be heaven.

And there are angels!

Their wings are like pheasants: full of rich earth, and harvest, and home.

Sunlight streams around them, and tosses their hair.

Song comes from their mouths, and pours out around you.

And their message is peace:

And their message is joy:

“Come, and See! The Christ child is born! Come, and see. Jesus: He is here. He waits for you.”

May the promise of joy, in our Savior Jesus Christ's birth, bring you peace on this day, and always!

The shepherds visit Jesus

Good news should be shared! It can't wait for a convenient time.

When the angels disappeared from their heavenly choir, the shepherds had no doubt about what to do next. They immediately turned to one another, not to rationalize away the appearance, but to follow the angel's command to go to Bethlehem. They wanted to see for themselves what the heavenly host



Pastor Ken Ediger
North Oak
Community Church

had declared to be true. They went to Bethlehem in a hurry (v. 16) and found their way to Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus.

One can only imagine their arrival in the sleepy village with clues from the angel messengers as to the child's whereabouts: (1) that there was a newly born babe; (2) that the babe was a boy; and (3) that he was to be found in a cattle-feeding trough, wrapped

in strips of cloth. What a stir it must have created as those shepherds, converging on the town of Bethlehem, in the middle of the night (vv. 8, 15-16), knocking on doors, seeking to find a child meeting these descriptions. One looking on the town from a

distance could have seen the whole town progressively lit up, astir with the news which the shepherds brought. From every house where the baby

was not found, there was probably another addition to the search party. Perhaps the entire town was awakened and engaged in the search before the babe was found. All of this served to make the news of the Christ-child's birth known, as well as to create a mood of expectation and curiosity. At some of the homes, at least, there may have been the request to come back with news of where Messiah was

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. “This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” – Luke 2:8-14 (NASB)

found.

After the shepherds found the child they no doubt exchanged stories with Mary and Joseph, enhancing their understanding of what it all meant. But they clearly understood that their experience was not just for their own spiritual enrichment. Then “they told everyone. They reported what the angel had said about this child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them” (vv. 17-18).

The shepherds knew what to do with

good news—they shared it. Our mandate is the same. “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15). Share the gospel with a neighbor, invite someone to an evangelistic event at your church, or pray for an encounter with someone eager to discuss spiritual things. Many people are lonely and seeking for meaning during the Christmas season. Ask God to prepare hearts to be receptive, and then share the true joy and peace found in the person and work of Jesus.

Jesus presented in the temple

There are two different things that really speak to me in this particular passage. The first part of the passage refers to the circumcision of our Lord Jesus on the eighth day. This was the law then and said to get rid of the infants' sins. As we know, Jesus was without sin. Following this particular law, then, made him more common – something that would later become such a great asset to his leadership. He led by “fitting in” and by “being a friend to all”. He wasn't conceited and abusive of his power. He tried to be as common as possible. It's incredible to think that Mary, a young virgin mother, was being guided by the hand of God in ALL things. If you have given birth or

know someone who has, think about some of the decisions that are made surrounding a pregnancy and a birth. These decisions are made not knowing what the child's future will be. For Mary, however, her child's future was already known. *amazing!*

One of the biggest challenges in becoming a parent is in giving the child a name. People's names are so much a part of their identity. Personally, I have named four children. Each has a specially chosen name, given before

I had any idea of their personality, looks, demeanor, or *future*. Mary was not given the opportunity to name her son. Her son was named before she even knew she was to give birth. Imagine finding out all in one day that not only are you giving birth, but



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Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived.

Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. The law of the Lord says, “If a woman's first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the Lord.” So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—“either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” – Luke 2:21-24 (NLT)

that *God* has a name picked out for the child already! If you are really adventurous, then consider all the *rest* of the details Mary then needed to accept about her own *child!*

Matthew 1:21 says “She will give birth to a son, and you shall give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.” Imagine being a teenage virgin and having an *angel* show up at your house and say these things. I would definitely have questioned my own sanity if I had been Mary! I highly doubt Mary

was planning to become a *mother* at that particular time, let alone the mother of the *Christ* child!

The last part of the passage refers to the sacrificing of two birds (possibly turtledoves or pigeons). Why is this included? I believe it is included because “God's law” said that *every* firstborn male child would be a holy offering to God. Jesus, the very *son of God* was not exempt. He was the firstborn male child and thus given as a holy offering to God. Talk about obedience. God said. They did.



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Fax: (785) 623-4207, website: www.heartlandparishes.org
Fr. Jarett Konrade

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Saturday at 5 PM

Sunday at 9:30 AM and 11:00 AM

Daily Mass - Wednesday, and Friday at 7:00 AM

Reconciliation: Saturday at 4:00 PM

Immaculate Heart of Mary Church



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Fr. Barry Brinkman, Pastor

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Sunday Spanish Mass - 12 PM

Weekday Mass Schedule:

MWF 6:45 AM - TTh 8 AM Wednesday Spanish 6:30 PM

Reconciliation: Saturday 4 PM and Thursday 5 PM

The Prophecy of Simeon

Waiting. As people we usually do not like to wait for things. We are always on the move, anticipating the next thing we need to be doing. Most of us also do not like silence. And this passage from Luke has both of these things: waiting and silence.

Simeon has been waiting; waiting a long time to see the Messiah of God. And as we read in the text, Simeon was led by the Holy Spirit to come to the temple at the exact time that Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus are coming to the temple.

Once Simeon sees the holy family, he takes little Jesus into his arms and blesses or praises God. In the blessing to God, Simeon says “you can now re-



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lease your servant.” Some scholars refer to this as Simeon saying that he is now ready to die; he has seen the Messiah. And as part of some Lutheran liturgies, you may have also sung this refrain as a sending hymn. But this blessing Simeon gives to God caught my attention in relation to Advent because Advent is also all about waiting. It is about waiting in anticipation for the birth of the Christ Child. We like Simeon, are waiting; waiting to celebrate.

But we as people are also like Joseph and Mary who are speechless when they hear Simeon’s words. We are surprised and speechless each year at the wonder, awe, and majesticness of how God was born as a little child to a mother who was probably not very old

In Jerusalem at the time, there was a man, Simeon by name, a good man, a man who lived in the prayerful expectancy of help for Israel. And the Holy Spirit was on him. The Holy Spirit had shown him that he would see the Messiah of God before he died. Led by the Spirit, he entered the Temple. As the parents of the child Jesus brought him in to carry out the rituals of the Law, Simeon took him into his arms and blessed God:

God, you can now release your servant; release me in peace as you promised.

With my own eyes I’ve seen your salvation; it’s now out in the open for everyone to see:

A God-revealing light to the non-Jewish nations, and of glory for your people Israel.

Jesus’ father and mother were speechless with surprise at these words. Simeon went on to bless them, and said to Mary his mother,

This child marks both the failure and the recovery of many in Israel,

A figure misunderstood and contradicted— the pain of a sword-thrust through you— But the rejection will force honesty, as God reveals who they really are. – Luke 2:25-35 (MSG)

– some say a child herself. But nevertheless, God came to earth in human form, not a mighty warrior or king, but a little baby.

So as we wait and prepare for Christ-

mas, I wonder what else in your life are you waiting for? What causes to you be surprised or speechless? What can you give blessing and praise to God for in your life?

The Wise Men Visit

Let’s start by taking a look at this story from a modern perspective. Can you honestly imagine a few fully grown, wealthy heads of state leaving their homeland and traveling a vast distance to see a baby—all because they saw a star? Oh, and bringing extravagant gifts? Even with today’s technology, where this would mean a few hours on a plane, I just can’t see it. I imagine their advisors would have a fit as well. However, if this baby were seen as a threat in any way, I can imagine monarchs or presidents being equally as interested as Herod was, and wanting an update.

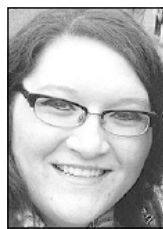
It would be much more difficult for these modern Magi to see Jesus, and then leave and not tell Herod. I mean, who does anything these days without updating their Facebook, posting some pics on Instagram, and tweeting about it? Or at least sending a Snapchat to

your closest buds?

So what do I take from all this modernized doubt clouding my view of this story? I take that it happened at the right time and place—where there were three receptive men who would get the message about Jesus, go out of their way to find and worship him, and risk trouble to keep his location a secret. I also take it as a chance to step back and think about my own modern interactions with social media and

big events.

If we keep watching events through a screen while we snap pictures, and ignore in-person conversations because we are having virtual ones, will we notice our star in the east? I am not saying to miss out on getting that perfect blackmail video of your cousins seeing how many bows they can stack on your snoring grandpa before he wakes up. Or to completely shut out friends and



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Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea during the time when Herod was king. When Jesus was born, some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem. They asked, “Where is the baby who was born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, as were all the people in Jerusalem. Herod called a meeting of all the leading priests and teachers of the law and asked them where the Christ would be born. They answered, “In the town of Bethlehem in Judea. The prophet wrote about this in the Scriptures:

‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not just an insignificant village in Judah.

A ruler will come from you who will be like a shepherd for my people Israel.’”

Then Herod had a secret meeting with the wise men and learned from them the exact time they first saw the star. 8 He sent the wise men to Bethlehem, saying, “Look carefully for the child. When you find him, come tell me so I can worship him too.”

After the wise men heard the king, they left. The star that they had seen in the east went before them until it stopped above the place where the child was. When the wise men saw the star, they were filled with joy. They came to the house where the child was and saw him with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. They opened their gifts and gave him treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But God warned the wise men in a dream not to go back to Herod, so they returned to their own country by a different way. – Matthew 2:1-12 (NCV)

family who are far away this holiday season. But don’t forget to cherish human interaction. Maybe try to visit someone you would have just called or

texted, and always be mindful of the everyday miracles that seem to happen at Christmas.

Escape to Egypt

“Run for you life!” That’s the message the angel gave Joseph that day. And he did. He took Mary and Jesus and ran to Egypt. He didn’t wait around to see if it was really necessary – he left “that night.”

Two things strike me about this passage. First, I’m impressed with Joseph’s immediate obedience.

How many times do we know what the right thing to do is, but we stall. It’s like telling my kids to go brush their teeth and get ready for bed. It seems like we tell them multiple times before they start moving in that direction! It can be so frustrating as parents, and I imagine that God has that same frustration when I don’t immediately obey His words and direction.

Joseph and Mary, however, obeyed instantaneously and without question. Without hesitation they picked up and moved to a foreign land. The love that they had for their child was unwaver-

ing. Parents will do many things when their children are on the line, and we see that love demonstrated by Joseph and Mary here.

The other thing I notice about this passage is that this is the first violent, rage-filled reaction to Jesus. Jesus was under 2 years old and already had an enemy that was willing to kill innocent children just to try and stop him from

growing up. The rage that Jesus causes people is sometimes unimaginable. But Jesus told us that he would divide people. He

said in Luke 12 that, “I have come to set the world on fire. Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I have come to divide people against each other! From now on families will be split apart.” (verses 49-52)

Even from his very birth he was already doing that! Yet as followers of Christ in the Western world, we are afraid of offending someone with our religious words or beliefs. We shove our beliefs in the closet because we want everyone to like us and be happy. We strive for peace and harmony at



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After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.”

Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men’s report of the star’s first appearance. – Matthew 2:13–16 (NLT)

all costs – at the very expense of Jesus himself.

When we don’t stand up for Jesus, we are not doing some good, noble deed. Instead, we are compromising and watering down Jesus so that he is more palpable to our neighbors. The problem is that when we water down Jesus, when we water down the Good News, we lose the faith that has been passed down through the ages. When we attempt to hide Jesus so he’s not offensive to people, we miss the fact that even in his birth he was offensive to people!

In Matthew 10:22, Jesus says, “And all nations will hate you because you are my followers.” I sometimes wonder if we’re too nice about Jesus. Maybe

we leave a little Jesus out so he’s more palpable to others. Maybe we just don’t talk about some things he said because we don’t want to offend. When we do that, when we water down Jesus, we lose him completely and we present a counterfeit Jesus.

Jesus was not some wishy-washy guy who didn’t stand for anything. He called out the Pharisees and religious leaders of the day on multiple occasions. He didn’t care if his message was offensive or politically correct. He spoke the truth, and he spoke the truth in love. When we don’t do the same, we rob people of the gift of knowing the real Jesus, the one that started making enemies the day he was born.

VISIT, from 10

A part of this story that speaks to me during this time of year is the traveling. While it can be fun to update and catch up with people on social media, nothing can beat a hug from your grandma!

At our church the wise men from our nativity “travel” along the windowsills in the sanctuary, each Sunday getting closer to the manger scene.

I know there is talk that the Magi really would not have made it to see Jesus until sometime around his second birthday, but that image of them arriving and worshiping the baby king

is an iconic one.

At Christmastime, as families get more and more spread out, traveling becomes as much a part of the holiday as gifts and pie.

The Magi were guided by a star, but what guides our holiday travel? Is it the promise of Grandma’s homemade goodies, the hope of getting that gift you’ve been coveting, or is it just in our nature to travel like the Magi, following our star?

I think the answer is all of the above—and more. While the food and gifts are great, the company we

share is the most important. The Magi traveled to see the “King of the Jews.” They brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh—expensive, valuable gifts, fit for a king. And they came to see a baby with his mother.

So, while we are liking all of our aunt’s posts, and untagging ourselves from unflattering photos, let’s not forget to take time to worship Jesus, look for ways in which God is calling us into fellowship with each other, and see the stars he places ahead of our paths.

BRIEF

And out of the basement shall come a church basement program of good tidings, great humor and joy. The ladies are serving it up again in Oakley. Their Christmas show, “Away in the Basement: A Church Basement Ladies Christmas,” will appear at the Oakley High School Auditorium, at 7:30 p.m. Thursday. Western Plains Arts Association, with assistance from a major season partner, the Dane G. Hansen Foundation, Logan, Kansas, and numerous northwest Kansas businesses and individual donors are making this popular production to our area. Admission is by WPAA season ticket or \$20 adults and \$10 students.

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