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A Publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance  
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## News to Know

### **Cathedral Concert Coming Up December 8th**

The annual Cathedral Concert will be at 3:30 p.m. Sunday, December 8th, at the Basilica of St. Fidelis in Victoria.

Terry Crull, choral director, said, "This is a tradition for 34 years; it's the best way to begin the holiday season. Come and hear glorious sacred choral music."

Groups and soloists performing this year include:

- The Fort Hays Singers, FHSU Concert Choir, and Smoky Hill Chorale, conducted by Crull and accompanied by Pam McGowne.
- The Hays High School Chamber Singers, conducted by Alex Underwood and accompanied by Alexis Robinson.
- The FHSU Brass Choir, conducted by Peter Lillpopp.
- The Hays Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Brian Buckstead.
- Brad and Renetta Dawson, on trumpet and horn respectively, accompanied by Tom Meagher.
- Soprano Ivalah Allen, accompanied by McGowne.
- Kay Werth on oboe, accompanied by Judith Ofcarcik.
- Meagher on organ.

Crull urged audience members to arrive early due to limited parking.

### **Ministerial Alliance Schedules December Meeting**

The Ellis County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) will meet at 10 a.m. Wednesday, December 11th, at the Gamers Guild, 200 E. Eighth.

Presentations to the board must be scheduled in advance with the ECMA president at [president@ourecma.com](mailto:president@ourecma.com).

### **Salvation Army Seeks Volunteers to Ring Bells**

The Salvation Army is seeking volunteers to help ring the bells for the organization's annual fundraiser.

"During Christmas we need volunteers to help us collect donations," said Julie Smith, with the organization's Ellis County office. The red kettle fund drive at Christmas is the organization's major fundraiser of the year, she added.

"All monies collected in Ellis County stay in Ellis County to help families and individuals," Smith said.

Volunteers may sign up at [www.registertoring.com](http://www.registertoring.com). More information is available at 785-621-2794.

### **Community Christmas Dinner Will Be at VFW**

The 11th Annual Community Christmas Dinner will be held from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday, December 25th, at the VFW, 22nd and Vine.

The dinner is free and represents an opportunity for community members "to come together to celebrate Christ," organizers said.

Volunteers are needed to help at the dinner and to make deliveries to homebound individuals. Volunteers may sign up by emailing [communitychristmasdinner@gmail.com](mailto:communitychristmasdinner@gmail.com) or by calling (785) 625-5528 between now and Dec. 19 or (785) 259-9735 between Dec. 20 and Dec. 24.



ONE is the official publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) which guides its mission, content, and theme. The ECMA encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies, and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to [one@ourecma.com](mailto:one@ourecma.com).

The ECMA ONE Advisory Board will choose appropriate and timely submissions for publication. The columns in ONE represent the views of the author.

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## Emmanuel, God With Us

**Pastor Dave Buller**  
**North Oak Community Church**

*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. - Matthew 1:22-25 (NIV)*

Immanuel is a name of particular import. These verses tell us that Jesus was and is called by it. Matthew 1:23 defines it as simply meaning, "God with us". This particular idea—that God is with us—fills me with both reverence and celebration.

Scholars use two different words to describe God: transcendence and immanence. These words communicate two important concepts. What I hope to do in this brief article is to help you understand these two words, and then to see why they are so important.

**Transcendence:** The Bible teaches that God is transcendent—He is wholly other, completely separate, not limited in any shape or fashion to our known world. His ways and thoughts are higher than our own (Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33-36). God is unapproachable (1 Timothy 6:15-16) and barriers must be set so that people are not killed by exposure (Exodus 19-20). He is holy, untouchable, and consequences are steep for seeing His face (Exodus 33:20). We see this thematic

characterization of God not just in the Old Testament, but also throughout the New Testament.

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?" For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. - Romans 11:33-36 (NIV)*

When God reveals Himself, people are struck with terror. In Revelation 6:12-17, all peoples cry out and hide fearing the face of God and the coming wrath. Isaiah cried out his ruin as he is overwhelmed with the holiness of God revealed through a vision (Isaiah 6). The Lord reveals his power and superiority over idols by burning up a sacrifice soaked with water and burning up the stones as well. The response? People fall to the ground with their faces in the dirt crying out that the Lord alone is God (1 Kings 18:38-39).

What description! For those familiar with the story of the Ten Commandments and Moses on Mount Sinai, they may be reminded of how the entire mountain was covered with smoke and fire, how the voice of God thundered in the heavens, and how the people cried out and shrank back in terror, pleading for Moses to intervene, for if God speaks again to them they will die. That is transcendence.

**Immanence:** When the prophet Isaiah penned the name of the Messiah as "Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14) it communicated the immanence of God; it spoke of how close He would

be to His people. This is the opposite of transcendence—this is presence.

Immanence means that God is intimate. He is knowable. He is present with us at home, in our beds, in the car, at work and at school. The Bible promises that the Spirit of God lives inside of those who have trusted Jesus as their Savior.

Consider these verses:

*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. - John 14:16-17 (NIV)*

With this "Immanuel" really comes confidence (Hebrews 10:19), power (Acts 1:8), and help (John 16:7) from God. This is Good News!

During the Christmas season, we celebrate the birth of Jesus. It is the most vivid demonstration of a transcendent God becoming immanent—becoming God with us. Jesus walks on our planet. He becomes fully human and yet remains fully God. This mystery can only be accepted by faith. But let me ask you, is there any greater God to be imagined? Look at how much he loves us! Jesus, though despised and rejected, takes our sins to the cross and promises the Holy Spirit to dwell in us so that each human being has the opportunity to experience God with us. That is immanence, and might I add, the best Christmas gift ever.

Have a blessed Christmas season and may you know the Lord as God with us.

## The Wise Men Visit

**Becky Rogowski**

**Hays First Presbyterian Church**

*Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you've found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him." When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route. —Matthew 2: 7-12 (CEB)*

I, like many others, read quickly through this part of the passage and it becomes short and sweet as this "The Wisemen took their gifts to Baby Jesus". However, upon a deeper and more reflective reading, there is SO much more happening! It begins with Herod having a secret meeting with the Magi (the wisemen). He wants to kill the newborn baby. His intentions are FAR from generous. He had no plans of "honoring" him as he told the Magi.

They go back out and suddenly find the star again - where it had disappeared to, nobody really knows. We do know from the wording throughout the passage that sincere and true joy was felt by the Magi over the birth of this baby. They did not know Herod's intent. The Magi felt extremely privileged to be making the trek to visit the babe and didn't think twice about returning to Herod and taking him to see the newborn. They have no plans themselves of harming the baby - they are truly innocent bystanders doing the work of a very evil man.

The men follow the star to Bethlehem and then enter "the house". This seems different from the quick version we are used to retelling. Isn't he in a manger? In a stable? No room at the inn? By the time all the "visitors" have come and gone from Bethlehem, the young family would have no trouble getting into a better place to stay and this passage indicates they are now in a house.

The passage mentions the men see the baby and his mother. The blessed Babe is naturally mentioned first, then the mother; but Joseph, though doubtless present, is not noticed, as being but the head of the house. Next the visitors fall down and worship the baby. Clearly, they aren't just paying random homage to a petty Jewish king. They know they've been on a spiritual voyage and are currently having "a moment". Then the men present

gifts to the baby.

Beyond a shadow of a doubt, therefore, we are to understand the presentation of these gifts by the Magi as a religious offering. Visits were seldom paid to sovereigns without a present. The choice of their gifts, to most of us, seem a little "different". Frankincense was an aromatic used in sacrificial offerings; Myrrh was used in perfuming ointments. These, with the "gold" which they presented, seem to show that the Magi were persons in affluent circumstances. That the gold was presented to the infant King is a small token of His royalty, the frankincense a token of His divinity, and the myrrh, of His sufferings; or that they were designed to express His divine and human natures; or that the prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices of Christ are to be seen in these gifts; or that they were the offerings of three individuals respectively, each of them kings, the very names of whom tradition has handed down--all these are, at the best, precarious suppositions. We do get the point that the feelings of these devout givers are to be seen in the richness of their gifts, and that the gold, at least, would be highly serviceable to the parents of the blessed Babe in their unexpected journey to Egypt and stay there... alluded to by the final line of this passage - the trip takes an unexpected turn.

**"Who can add to Christmas? The perfect motive is that God so loved the world. The perfect gift is that He gave His only Son. The only requirement is to believe in Him. The reward of faith is that you shall have everlasting life." - Corrie Ten Boom**

## Holy Family Escapes to Egypt

**Pastor Celeste Lasich**

**Hays First Presbyterian Church**

*After the wise men had gone, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Hurry and take the child and his mother to Egypt! Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is looking for the child and wants to kill him." That night, Joseph got up and took his wife and the child to Egypt, 15 where they stayed until Herod died. So the Lord's promise came true, just as the prophet had said, "I called my son out of Egypt." When Herod found out that the wise men from the east had tricked him, he was very angry. He gave orders for his men to kill all the boys who lived in or near Bethlehem and were two years old and younger. This was based on what he had learned from the wise men. So the Lord's promise came true, just as the prophet Jeremiah had said, "In Ramah a voice was heard crying and weeping loudly. Rachel was mourning for her children, and she refused to be comforted, because they were dead."*  
- Matthew 2:13-18 (CEV)

It is disturbing, isn't it, that this passage is part of our Christmas story? We would rather remember Jesus "tender and mild," an innocent babe asleep in the hay. In all the chaos of this season it is soothing to linger in the still soft glow of Silent Night just a little longer. Newborn Jesus is so much less complicated. As an infant he demands nothing from us. It is easy to adore a sleeping baby.

And yet, in Matthew's gospel we come face to face with a harsh reality. Jesus' coming as Immanuel, God-with-us, is a powerful threat to those who claim power for their own sake over God's world changing vision of justice, mercy, peace and love. The God we meet in Jesus experienced fear, violence, suffering, and horror, and stands in solidarity with those who suffer.

Jesus' family is offered an angelic warning to flee for their lives in the dark of night. They made the grim choice to escape, to make the long and dangerous journey to safety in Egypt with only what they can grab and carry. "No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark"

wrote refugee Warsan Shire in her convicting poem. Yet even as the Holy Family runs for their life we hear the broken hearted cries of families who were not warned what was to come. Their little ones are ripped from their lives by a cruel tyrant who will stop at nothing to further his political power. Herod is consumed by such great fear that every baby boy in Bethlehem represents a threat. What kind of weak and fearful tyrant retaliates against 2-year-olds?

In this season when we celebrate night sky angels heralding peace on earth and good will to all people, may we remember the whole of Jesus' story. Without the harsh reality of danger and escape, the Christmas story is simply a sweet tale with no power to save or change us.

Every day as followers of Jesus, we have the choice of living with faith over fear of the other. The reality of Jesus the refugee gives us compassion to see the face of God in those who flee for their lives, to mourn with those who have suffered heartbreaking loss, and courage to live this life with faith, purpose, and love.

## Sarah and the Christmas Cookies

**Linn Ann Huntington**

**North Oak Community Church**

*This column first ran in the Hays Daily News in December 2010.*

I'm sorry to say I don't remember the doctor's name—only that he was a resident in orthopedic surgery at St. Luke's Hospital in Kansas City, Mo., several years ago and treated my husband, Don, following Don's surgery there.

Don's doctors in Hays had sent us to Kansas City for a second opinion after they told us they would have to amputate his right leg. Don had accepted that diagnosis, but we were both delighted that the specialist at St. Luke's found a way to remove the infected tissue and bone without taking the whole leg.

Don had had surgery the day before Thanksgiving. Now it was Christmas Day. It's horrible to spend

a major holiday in the hospital. First Thanksgiving, now Christmas, and it looked as if Don would be there for New Year's, as well.

Don had high regard for the specialist who had saved his leg. But, shortly after Don's surgery, the specialist had introduced us to his group of residents. He explained to us that his head resident would be the one managing Don's post-operative care.

St. Luke's is a large teaching hospital, so it is not unusual to see

## ***Sarah and the Christmas Cookies, continued***

doctors walking down the hall with a large group of young people scurrying behind them. Still, it was disappointing, as the weeks dragged by, that the healing process on Don's leg seemed to be taking so long. The resident made his rounds every day, but the visits from the specialist were few and far between.

Our families, who all lived out of state, had not been able to travel to Kansas City for Thanksgiving, but we were hoping some of them could come for Christmas. On Christmas Eve, we learned otherwise.

So it would be just the two of us once again. Don was dozing when I arrived at the hospital early on Christmas morning. So I quietly settled in a chair and contemplated our day. I knew the staff would be serving turkey and dressing for Christmas dinner. Perhaps that would brighten Don's spirits.

Yesterday a group of children had come caroling down the hospital corridor. Don was a reading teacher, and normally, if anything could lift his spirits, it was children. But even they had not been able to brighten his mood.

Every day that went by without a visit from his surgeon seemed to leave him feeling more depressed and forgotten. Now his family would not be coming either. He was so anxious to go home. He had even started making comments to the chief resident that he wanted to see his "real doctor."

I knew the chances of that happening on Christmas Day were very remote. In fact the nurses had

already told us that a different resident would be making the rounds today. It seems the chief resident had Christmas Day off also. Don's scowl had expressed my feelings exactly.

But mid-morning the chief resident poked his head in the door. He was dressed in a nice pullover sweater and slacks, not his normal white coat. "Feel like a little company?" he asked.

Before we could answer, he opened the door wide, and ushered in a little girl. "This is my daughter. Go ahead, Sarah."

She walked over and handed me a baggie filled with Christmas cookies shaped like stars, Christmas trees and snowmen. She explained that she and her mother had gotten up early that morning to bake the cookies. "I got to put all the sprinkles on top," she said proudly.

She was lovely, dressed in a beautiful holiday dress with white stockings and black patent shoes. In the next few minutes we learned she was in first grade, reading was her favorite subject, and she had a baby brother at home. "Mama couldn't come 'cause she had to stay home with him," she told us matter-of-factly.

Don was captivated. Within minutes they were talking about what books she was reading in school. He knew exactly the series of primers that her school used.

All too soon the visit was over. "Come, Sarah, we have many more visits to make," her father said. Seeing my inquisitive look, he told me Sarah had asked last year if she could make cookies and visit his patients on Christmas morning. "It's something she really likes to do," he



said. "It has become sort of a holiday tradition for us."

Before they left, Sarah led us all in singing "Jingle Bells." Then she gave both of us hugs, grabbed her sack of cookies, and they were gone. A few minutes later, we could hear her clear, sweet voice singing to another patient down the hall.

Later in the day I commented to one of the nurses about Sarah's visit. "Isn't she delightful?" the woman said. "You know, last year her father wasn't sure how the patients would react to her visiting."

I shook my head. "I just can't imagine a child getting up that early on Christmas morning to make cookies," I said. "Most children would race to open their presents from Santa and then want to play with them the rest of the day."

The nurse gave me an odd look. "Then you don't know," she said. "The doctor and his family are Jewish."

Isn't it amazing how just when we feel abandoned by friends, family—even doctors – God demonstrates that He has brought into our lives the very people who can provide us with the things we need most? My husband, Don, has been gone 14 years now, but every Christmas season I remember that holiday we spent together in a hospital in another city, in another state, where we knew no one. But love is not bound by place, tradition, or time. As a little child, with her Christmas cookies taught me, love is universal.