

Advent Celebration



2011 Reflections & Calendar



*Second Baptist Church * Richmond, Virginia*

*Now after Jesus was born in
Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the
king, behold, wise men from the East came to*

*Jerusalem, saying
“Where is He who has been born
King of the Jews? For we have seen His star
in the East and have come to worship Him.”*

*M*atthew 2 : 1, 2

The First Week of Advent

We Need a Savior

November 27 ★ Psalm 32:1-5 (NRSV)

In the words of Psalm 32:1-2, we hear echoes of past troubles and the testimony of one whose sins have been lifted away, covered over, canceled from the records of God.

Following the experience, the psalmist felt happy - centered - blessed.

The psalmist regresses and shares the root of those feelings. Keeping silent, his sins weighed heavily upon his mind, making him sick (v. 3-4). Only later did he acknowledge his sin and confess his guilt before God. That step led to forgiveness.

Can you identify with the psalmist? I certainly can. I, you, we need to be forgiven. We need a Savior ...

BILLY KRUSCHWITZ

November 28 ★ Isaiah 53:12

Today's Scripture comes at the end of Isaiah's four "servant poems." It is the capstone and climax to them. The Servant's mission of redemption to a world in need is summed up. He poured out His life in death as He was counted among the transgressors. He took upon Himself the sin of many as He interceded for all those in sin.

The Servant was the Savior. He fulfilled God's plan to redeem His people from their sin. He met their need. Because of this, He triumphed and was highly exalted by God (read Philippians 2:5-11).

WAYNE VARNER



November 29 ✦ Titus 3:3-7



Mercy and grace are concepts I understand and appreciate more as time goes on and I pray that my understanding of them will continue to grow for the rest of my life. In my younger years, it was hard not to be prideful of my own perceived self-reliance and independence. As my relationship with Jesus has grown, I've discovered how much I needed His mercy and grace.

Recognizing Jesus' mercy and grace helps us overcome our own flaws, gives us hope, and opens our eyes to all God's blessings. Paul's letter to Titus reminds us that these blessings are possible through God's love.

MASON CARPENTER

November 30 ✦ John 1:32-34

The longing expressed in the carol, "Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus," must have been in the heart of John the Baptist. He was given a sign for the identification of Jesus as Lord – the arrival of a dove indicating the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Residents of a small town once reported that when their pastor walked along the streets they felt the spirit of the Lord present as well. Will others recognize Jesus as Lord through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

As we think of receiving and giving gifts this Christmas, may our wishes not be for what the world gives, but for what the familiar hymn asks: "Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me."

NANCY R. ELLIOTT

December 1 ✦ Romans 3:23-24

Jesus' arrival into a lonely stable in Bethlehem was a startling time. Wise Men brought gifts and angels sang in celebration of the Good News. They knew what was happening – they were welcoming the One who was perfect, blameless, and without sin.

We do not know exactly what we do to deserve God's grace and unconditional love. We do know we believe, overcoming our unbelief. We are all sinners and fall short every day. During this season we turn our eyes to the Christ Child, seeing that celebrated arrival brings us redemption, cleansing, and hope for tomorrow.

ALLISON ROTHSCHILD

December 2 ✦ I Corinthians 15:21-22

As we await the arrival of our first child, we cannot help but find comfort in this passage. Our own child will be born into a world of sin from which we cannot protect her. However, through the birth of Christ, we have all been given life eternal by His abounding grace. We would have no hope for our unborn child's salvation were it not for the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. So it is during this time of the year that we remember, without the birth of Christ Jesus, we would not have eternal life.

KATHRYN & JONATHAN RAY

December 3* ✦ John 3:16

The book, *Same Kind of Different as Me*, is a true story of a couple, Ron and Deborah, who reach out to homeless people. They wanted to be friends with a man named Denver. Denver said he wanted "always" friends, not friends who are there for a while, then stop caring.

By giving us His Son, God has worked hard to show us He loves us with an "always" love. His love extends to all people and it is the same. We may not always feel God's love. We may do sinful things. But God's love is steadfast. He is loyal and faithful – for always.

Believe and trust in the love of God.

ANNE STRATTON

**Written for young readers*



The Second Week of Advent

We Need God's Love



December 4 ★ Romans 5:8

What a miracle it is when a baby is born! They are so very small, totally and completely helpless and dependent on those who love and care for them. Without that unconditional love, they would not survive.

So it is with us as Christians. We have been born again into a new life with Christ. We are totally dependent on His love and the amazing grace of God to sustain us and guide us each day. We need the unending *agape* love of God, through the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins, that we may have eternal life with our Heavenly Father.

This Christmas let us not forget to thank God for the gift of Jesus ... there is no greater gift ... there is no greater love.

LEONARD CAKE

December 5 ★ Galatians 2:20

To live by faith in the Son of God, we must recognize and surrender our pretense, our shame, our foolishness, our emptiness, and our weakness that we may know our need of Him. Simply put, we must let go of our sin so we can be born again by the Spirit of God.

Once we surrender all, our deepest desire will be to see ourselves as Jesus sees us. When the sinful pride of our hearts is revealed and surrendered, we are no longer condemned. In unity with Him, we die to our old life. Christ becomes our power for living and our hope for the future.

HELEN SALT

December 6 ✦ I John 4:11-12

Sometimes I get a little overwhelmed when I reflect on God's love for me. When I became a mom two years ago, I experienced a taste of how deep a parent's unconditional love is for their child and I can only imagine that God's love for us is a million times deeper. This passage tells us that God doesn't want His love to stop with us, but calls us to love one another. My prayer is that I will show love to others so they may see God's love completed in me. What more can we strive for as believers than to be used by God in this way!

AINSLEIGH GASKINS

December 7 ✦ Ephesians 5:1-2

The Apostle Paul presents the highest imaginable standard for all Christians: "Be imitators of God." How difficult that can be - extremely difficult, except for the knowledge that we have an Advocate with the Father, Christ, God's Son. He taught us how to walk in love and to forgive as we have been forgiven.

To be imitators of God demands that we be actively engaged in getting this message of love and forgiveness to people who have never heard and responded to His saving grace. We have no other choice. To imitate God we have the assurance of His presence and direction in accomplishing this great assignment.

BETTY VAUGHT

December 8 ✦ Romans 8:38-39

Can anything block God's love for us?

Philip Yancey, in his book, *What's So Amazing About Grace*, recalls the moment when he realized that no matter what he did, he could not make God love him more, nor make God love him less. God's love is His choice, His commitment, based on His grace.

We can disappoint God, break the fellowship and closeness, face God's correction. We can even reject Him. But nothing in all creation – and He is our Creator – can stop God's love for us.

MARTHA SKELTON



December 9 ★ John 15:8-12



Jesus' message to His disciples is simple and beautiful: "remain in My love." Love is not a choice but an act of obedience; Jesus tells us to "love one another as I have loved you."

I often struggle to explain to my daughter why she must do what her parents ask. Of course, "what's in it for me?" is an attitude not limited to two-year-olds. Jesus explains that His command has a purpose. When we share God's love with others, His joy will be in us and our joy will be *complete*. When it comes to the gift of love, it is best to give *and* receive.

CHRIS TRIBLE

December 10* ★ Romans 12:9a

What is love? A dictionary says it is "a feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection" When you tell your parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, or friends that you love them, you want them to know how you feel.

In this verse, it also says the love we express should be "genuine." Something genuine is real. A genuine love is true, not based on what it gets, but what it can give.

God first loved us, and sent Jesus to show His genuine love for us. Advent season reminds us to love Jesus as our Lord with a love that is true, deep, and genuine.

WAVERLY ANN JACKSON

**Written for young readers*

Advent IV

December	18	5:00	p.m.	Service of Remembrance in the Chapel
		6:00	p.m.	Middle School Christmas Party
		6:30	p.m.	<i>Morning Star</i> Class Christmas Party at the home of Joe & Kathi Traficanti
		6:30	p.m.	Sanctuary Choir Christmas Party at the home of Bill & Michelle Hobbs
		6:30	p.m.	Portuguese Language Ministry Christmas Play in the Family Life Center
	20	6:00	p.m.	High School Christmas Party
	21	6:00	p.m.	College Christmas Party
	24			<i>Christmas Eve</i>
		5:30	p.m.	Christmas Eve Candlelight Service in the Sanctuary
		11:00	p.m.	Christmas Eve Candlelight Service in the Sanctuary
	25			<i>Christmas Day</i>
		11:00	a.m.	Morning Worship Service in the Sanctuary
		6:30	p.m.	<i>Portuguese Language Ministry</i> Christmas Worship in Spence Hall
	26			CARITAS begins in Spence Hall (through January 2)
	31			<i>New Year's Eve</i>
		9:00	p.m.	Portuguese Language Ministry Banquet & Watch Night Service in Spence Hall
January	1			<i>New Year's Day</i>
		9:45	a.m.	Sunday School
		11:00	a.m.	Morning Worship Service in the Sanctuary

The Third Week of Advent

We Need God's Guidance

December 11 ★ III John 1:11

During this time of year we think about getting ready – being prepared to see the Savior, the Christ Child, the Babe in a manger. Being prepared for Christ's coming is essential and requires our preparation all year long. This Scripture encourages us to be prepared.

How are we to “get ready” - by “being good”- by imitating Christ. The Scripture states, “The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.” In doing good, we, each day, prepare ourselves to “see God.” Have you seen Him? Are you prepared? Be an imitator today and get ready to “see Him.”

SHARON HORSLEY

December 12 ★ Amos 5:21-24

How often do we go to worship out of habit, or go to Sunday School because someone “expects” us to? As we pass the communion plate, do we think of the real reason for the Lord's Supper?

God expects our faith - and thus our worship - to be real. Going through the motions does not please Him. We cannot live lives of sin and expect to do no more than show up on Sunday morning to be forgiven.

Worship that pleases God comes from an obedient and faithful heart. In this Christmas season, may our worship reflect our love and awe of the Lord, and our desire to honor Him.

LISA DULEY

December 13 ★ Proverbs 3:5-6

Spiritually preparing for the coming of Messiah requires a balance between utilizing our God-given ability (loving the Lord our God with everything in us, Mark 12:30) and trusting in the Lord with everything in us. This calls for what I would describe as a humble inquisitiveness. Ultimately we cannot rely on our own understanding because a major component of our faith is acceptance of that which remains mystery and beyond our comprehension. Therefore, invite God to guide your path for “He's the one who will keep you on track” (Proverbs 3:6b, *The Message*).

BOB LEWIS



December 14 ✦ Psalm 119:105



Throughout Psalm 119, the writer praises God's words, from the blessings of His law (Psalm 119:1,2), to the spiritual victory His instructions assure (Psalm 119:174-176).

In verse 105, God's utterances are portrayed as "light" in our lives, pushing back the darkness of man's world. His Word is likened both to a "lamp" for our "feet" - where we are - and a shining presence directing our "path" - where we are going.

God's Word can empower every step in life. That is the message Jesus came to demonstrate. Each day our Savior carried the "lamp" of God's love; He walked Calvary's path guided by the "light" of God's promises; and no darkness could overtake Him.

MATTIE FLOWERS

December 15 ✦ Micah 6:8

Remember that question we all get asked when we were about five years old - "What do you want to be when you grow up?" It's a great question, but soon enough we begin to turn **be** into **do** and get stuck cranking out life instead of creatively living it. We become human *doings* rather than human *beings*.

Micah's focus was to simplify - remind the people of their purpose. Our purpose is found in the larger purposes of God.

Micah's words remind us that life can be simple if we will choose to love God and others and let the rest take care of itself.

DARDEN BATTLE

December 16 ✦ Psalm 25:4-5

Let's be honest - who really likes to be told what to do? Most of us prefer the freedom to chart our own course. We live in a world where determination and personal ambition are virtues; this is what we teach our children after all. I offer help to my daughter, Abigail, only after she has assured me she has exhausted all of her personal resources. This ego, reinforced by our environment, is what we must overcome, or better yet, forsake, when we submit ourselves to the Will of God. This is the Psalmist's prayer, and our challenge, as we humble ourselves before our King. Make me, teach me, lead me, O Lord!

WELFORD ORROCK

December 17* ✦ James 1:22

Being a good listener is important. It helps us understand directions when we play a game, or put together a toy. However, Scripture tells us listening alone can be incomplete – we need to take action. God is pleased when we listen and do.

What if the Wise Men had only listened to God telling them to follow the star to Bethlehem? They would have missed seeing Baby Jesus. The Wise Men listened and obeyed. They weren't only "hearers," they acted on what they heard.

BETSY BEAMER

**Written for young readers*

The Fourth Week of Advent

We Need the Messiah

December 18 ✦ Luke 1:5-21 (RSV)

The priest, Zachariah, and his wife, Elizabeth, are growing old. Life has been disappointing for this righteous couple, both of the priestly lineage of Israel. They had no children. Their hopes for a Messiah to restore their nation had not been realized.

Then suddenly everything changes! An angel - *the angel Gabriel* - appears to Zachariah and announces that they will have a very special son! This unexpected child at their old age will play a unique role in the coming of the Messiah. He will prepare the way of the Lord; he will bear witness to the Light! What a turn-around! What a way to conclude your life!

CAROL ALLEY



December 19 ✨ Luke 1:26-39



Gabriel's words to Mary in this passage are often referred to as the Annunciation. Throughout Christian history, the scene has inspired artists and musicians alike, who have tried to capture this world-changing encounter.

Can we appreciate the range of human emotions - fear, doubt, confusion, and yes, joy - that Mary experienced hearing the angel's message? Can we imagine how those emotions were revealed in Mary's face?

In response, Gabriel reveals another *magnum mysterium*, barren Elizabeth's pregnancy. Elizabeth and Mary are cousins. Gabriel leaves Mary, and all of us, with the reminder that with God nothing is impossible.

LAURIE MCINTOSH

December 20 ✨ Luke 1:39-45

I am certain that Mary was comforted by the words of the angels while they were speaking to her. But what happened when they left?

Mary quickly decided to seek counsel from a trusted relative, someone else going through a miracle birth. She visited Elizabeth, the soon-to-be mother of John the Baptist. The Holy Spirit revealed to Elizabeth that Mary would become the mother of the Messiah. Elizabeth is filled with joy and has sudden insight into Mary's faith. God prepared Elizabeth to help Mary. Mary and Elizabeth both believed the message from the angels and because of their belief, they both would be blessed.

KATHY LAPLANTE

December 21 ✨ Luke 1:57-66

God's glorious plan continues to unfold.

God chose John the Baptist, chose his parents. He chose his name and chose John to be the forerunner and messenger of the prophesied Messiah. John was a child chosen by God and marveled at birth by many as one on whom truly God had laid His hand.

Just like John the Baptist, God has chosen us and has laid his hand upon us to be messengers of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; to proclaim Jesus through His virgin birth, Son of God, as Savior of the world through our faith and belief in Him.

ASHBY KNIGHT

December 22 ✦ Luke 2:1-7

Since the dawn of time, cultures, societies, and empires have struggled to answer the problems of humanity. Some tried with an iron hand, some with sophisticated philosophy or logic, and others with calls for equality of all persons. Rome, with its god-like emperors, sought to rule all the world for all time, but her armies, census takers, and tax collectors ultimately failed and faded away. However, during Rome's time a Child was born who changed everything. Forever. Emmanuel. God with us.

RUSS STARKE

December 23 ✦ Luke 2:8-20

Even as a newborn, Jesus brought light to those in darkness. His birth was not announced to the rich and powerful. His birth announcement, delivered by an angel surrounded by God's glory, came first to tired shepherds terrified by the uncanny sight. They went into Bethlehem seeking the Baby, finding Him in a dim stable.

This Child would bring the light of salvation to His own flock. He would call them in from the dark fields of sin to join Him in His Father's palace. Never again would they - we - be in the dark, terrified, but living in the light throughout eternity.

MARC HARDING

December 24 ✦ Matthew 2:1-12

Imagine Herod's fear when the Magi come to him seeking the One born King of the Jews. The emperor in Rome had made him king of Judah; could there be an even higher authority? What if the prophets were right? Let the Magi do the legwork, he decided. If they found the Child, he could destroy his rival.

Imagine the wonderment and faith in the hearts of the Magi as they followed the star toward the Messiah! They found Him in other than regal circumstances. Yet they kneeled before Him, worshipped and presented their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Their obedience to God's direction led them to go home without reporting to Herod.

WARD RICHARDSON



December 25 ✨ Isaiah 11:1-2 & John 1:32-34



One of my favorite childhood Christmas memories was the ride on Christmas Eve. My family would get in the car, and ride around town looking at Christmas trees and lights. Maybe you did that last night after the service, and you ended that experience with joy, hope, and vision.

I think something similar preceded Isaiah writing Isaiah 11. Times were tough in Jerusalem. Enemies were threatening. There was no peace on earth. They had a poor king and needed a Messiah. So maybe Isaiah took a prayer walk around Jerusalem and returned with a renewed vision.

Much of lush Judea had been deforested by Isaiah's time. Enemy attackers cut trees for firewood, siege ramps, and shelters. There would have been lots of stumps around Jerusalem, each a reminder of tough times. However, new life can bud out of dormant stumps!

As Isaiah saw God bringing forth those buds, he envisioned God bringing forth a Branch from the root of Jesse. A descendant of King David would come and re-establish the Kingdom. He would be known by the Spirit - God's Spirit - who would rest upon Him.

John the Baptist, with his ramblings in the wilderness, knew a lot about stumps. He saw his prophetic role as being God's "hatchet man" who would lay the ax to the root of the tree. He would blaze a repentant trail that would prepare the way for the coming of the promised Messiah. John saw God's Spirit descend on Jesus. The Spirit bore witness to John's spirit that Jesus was indeed, "the Son of God." He was the long-awaited One, the Coming One, the Shoot, the Branch that Isaiah promised.

Times are tough in Richmond. There are stumps where once there were forests. But when we find a place of repentance amidst the things that have been cut down in our lives we find supernatural possibilities to experience new growth!

Remember the stump has budded. The promise has been fulfilled. The Savior, the perfection of God's love and guidance, the Messiah, the Son of David - Jesus - is born! Hallelujah!

CRAIG A. SHEROUSE

Our Wish for You & Your Family is a Blessed Season of Advent



Craig A. Sherouse, Ph.D.
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Raymond L. Spence, Jr., D.D.
Pastor Emeritus

William L. Miller, Jr.
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Kathi Traficanti
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Judy Mawyer
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Kathy Driver
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