

# RE-IMAGE THE WORD

*Advent 2022*





## FOREWORD

The theme for this year's Advent Devotional Booklet is "Re-Image the Word." The Christian faith is dependent on words. Words are the way we communicate with each other and describe our belief in God. When scripture seeks to identify Jesus, it does so, in part, by calling him the pre-existent Word. Yet, language changes and evolves. It changes and evolves within the church as well as outside. We cannot take for granted that what is spoken is actually what is heard. It is imperative that we continually examine our language. Re-imagining the word is an exercise in making sure what we say is what is heard. Or, more specifically, what we say is what a love-starved world needs to hear.

William Willimon tells an interesting story from his time as Dean of Duke University Chapel. A group of students and faculty approached him asking his support for a spirituality garden. The garden would be a meditative place for students, faculty, and staff to sit and reflect in the midst of a beautiful setting. In his classic manner, Willimon said, "It sounds like a lovely idea, but why would I be supportive? I'm Christian. When we practice our faith, we get together and talk. We don't sit among shrubbery."

The Christian faith is a religion of words. We speak to one another. We listen to one another. As a religion of words, we must always pay careful attention to what we say, how we say it, and to whom it is spoken. The changing nature of language and the incarnational reality of our faith demands nothing less.

For many years I was involved in a pulpit exchange with our local reformed synagogue. I would preach on Friday night, and the rabbi would preach on Sunday. One particular Sunday was going to be the last for my dear friend and colleague Joshua Lief. I wanted to give him a meaningful gift that signified how much he meant to me and the congregation. I decided on a book written and signed by the great Baptist George W. Truett. When I presented the book to Rabbi Lief, I identified Truett as a great champion for religious liberty. When I went back to my chair, a colleague leaned over and said, "You know, some folks use the phrase religious liberty very differently than our traditional Baptist understanding." He was correct. Because language and interpretation are always changing.

This Advent Season, let's pay particular attention to the words we use and the way we use them. Let's invite those inside and outside the church to talk back to us. And, if necessary, let's re-image our language to give a more vibrant witness to the Word made Flesh.

Advent Blessings,  
- Kyle Reese, *Interim Pastor*

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Sunday, November 27<sup>th</sup>

## A TANGIBLE WORD

*The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word. The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one. Everything was created through him; nothing-not one thing-came into being without him. What came into existence was Life, and the Life was the Light to live by. The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn't put it out...The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish. (John 1: 1-4, 14 The Message)*

When you are going to think outside the box to re-imagine anything, you cannot re-imagine better than God. When it came to re-imagining the Word (Logos), God knocked it through eternity from everlasting to everlasting! God created a tangible (touchable) Word in Christ! For you see, God did not re-imagine anything, God was the Word (Logos). Being present to all the people in a way they could comprehend was and is God's plan.

One of the most frustrating experiences is to have a young child around two years of age, just beginning to talk, wanting something. They begin to get louder and louder making sounds and motions. You try the guessing game. After several attempts the child cries and throws down the latest incorrect attempt. In exasperation you say, "Use your words!" With more tears, the child utters a word they know, and you comprehend. If you are fortunate, you supply the desired item. Everything has been translated from thought to motion, to word and peace reigns supreme once more, for a little while.

As we grow, we learn how to use words. Parents often teach their children sayings to help. One which we were taught to deflect the name(s) someone was calling us was, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." It may help momentarily, however, we know names and words can create some quite severe emotional pain. Fortunately, other and more helpful words were taught to me. You see, Dad had a degree in Journalism from U.N.C. Chapel Hill. and Mom was an R.N. (Registered Nurse) so, they were both well educated and had a vibrant Christian Faith.

Dad was about wisdom and taught me, "If Wisdom's ways you wisely seek, five things observe with care; of whom you speak, to whom you speak and how and when and where." He also taught me a poem because poetry was one of his interests. One poem said, "He drew a circle that shut me out, heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But Love and I had the wit to win, we drew a circle that took him in." Both have served me well when I have chosen to use them (really a wise choice). There were those other times when I chose not to use them. (Not wise!) Mom was all about the Bible, and she focused on the concept of the Hebrew Psalmist, "Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee." (Psalm 119:11)



Words do have significant power to create both good and evil. I once read that fascinating book by Nathan Aaseng, “*The Navajo Code Talkers*” about some of our Native American Navajo patriotic brothers who served to help us win the war with Japan in World War Two. (Navajo was also used in the Korean and Vietnam Wars.) The Japanese were never able to break our coded messages because they were in the Navajo Language! We know full well words can foster war as well as peace. Words are powerful because they can create!

Christmas has several significant words that resound for me particularly from the message of the Angels, “Fear not for behold I bring you good news of great joy for all people about a baby that is being born. That child is the Word (Logos) of salvation, Christ the Lord!” There is the calming word of peace, “fear not!” There is joy, the best of news. You can know the Word. The Word is real. You can touch the Word and relate to the Word. The Word seeks to love you by healing every kind of brokenness and suffering you experience! There is great hope, for this Word is Love! It is available here today.

The great hope, love, peace, and joy of Christmas is the Word living in you and me through every act of loving service provided to all people everywhere! This is the good Word, and that Word is not confined to a season. It is for all time(s). Christmas is you and me, the tangible, touchable, precious present gift of love. You and I are the presence (present) of Christ, the Word of God. Go be the tangible Word this Christmas in honor of our Christ! One of my appreciated poets is Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Consider these words.

*I heard the bells on Christmas day  
Their old familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet the words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

*I thought how, as the day had come,  
The belfries of all Christendom  
Had rolled along th'unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

*And in despair I bowed my head:  
“There is no peace on earth,” I said,  
“For hate is strong, and mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”*

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
“God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;  
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good will to men.”*

*- Will Barnes*

**Monday, November 28<sup>th</sup>**

## **HIS LIGHT IN US**

Do you pay attention to your words? Not just the words you have chosen, but the intent you have in choosing those thoughts. Some weeks ago, I had a brief conversation with a leader in the local justice ministry. I suppose that I wanted to demonstrate to him that I had practiced the kinds of ministries that are proposed for our churches. I shared with him how many houses I had a part in constructing for Habitat for Humanity, how many families had been served in providing fuel assistance, how many families had been supported with help on utility bills, and so on. On reflection, I began to wonder just what my intention had been. I suppose there is a fine line between boasting about one's achievements and simply sharing one's experiences. I was drawn to Matthew 5:16 when Jesus says, "...you should be a light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do and will praise your Creator in heaven (NCV). Truth be told, I doubt that I was calling attention to the extraordinary love that was a result of God's caring for those people.

Kim Andre Arnesen has written "His Light in Us." The anthem has haunted me for months with both its message and its beauty. The lyrics include:

*God's distant call flares in the night  
So long expected, so longed for;  
And all my life, Christ called my name  
And now at last, I'll answer Him.*

*Renewed, his hope, his light in us  
Incarnate, fragile, our Lord appears  
Alleluia, alleluia!  
Eternal, so perfect, his cry of changeless love.*

*Alive, awake, his call is here:  
It is the crying of the Child;  
I know Christ's call  
Its hidden flame  
It makes my spirit flare with hope.*

- Charlie Benton



**Tuesday, November 29<sup>th</sup>**

## **HOSPITALITY**

*Selections from Hebrews 12 & 13: ...you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.... Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.... Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels unaware...*

Christmas---the season of hospitality. No doubt, you have just begun dispensing it out of your home or will soon be experiencing it in the home of others. The Christmas story has created some indelible images of hospitality. On the one hand, we have that positive image of those Wise Men who came to visit bearing thoughtful “hostess gifts”: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And then, there is that innkeeper...

I think we may have created a somewhat fanciful scenario of what happened on that very first Christmas, when a very pregnant Mary and her husband Joseph arrived in Bethlehem to give birth to our Salvation. Luke simply reports that Mary, having given birth, placed the Child in a manger “because there was no room for them in the inn.” But, oh, how we have embellished that story and vilified that innkeeper---who is NEVER specifically mentioned. Year after year, I hear that anonymous innkeeper vilified, and every time I hear it, I squirm a bit, and long to come to his defense! Today I shall!

As late 20th century, western Christians, we have put our own “spin” upon that scenario of the inn, imaging that Joseph and Mary had driven up late one night, and with the assumption that they had guaranteed reservations at that Bethlehem Motel 6---perhaps one of those rooms with a small coffee maker and tiny shampoo and cream rinse bottles waiting---only to be told that their room had been given away, and, if that if they wanted shelter for the night, they would have to bed down in the garage! What was the matter with that heartless innkeeper---couldn’t he see that Mary was about to give birth.! What kind of stupid oaf would banish a pregnant woman to a stable!!! And year after year, we punch the memory of that innkeeper as the first example of the “inhospitability” of this world to the Christ—an “inhospitability” that would, indeed, characterize his earthly ministry, as Isaiah reminds us: “He was despised and rejected of men...”

But do you know what a 1st century, Middle Eastern inn was probably like? They are more commonly known by their later Arabic designation, “caravansary”---places to accommodate the caravan travelers who moved the commercial goods of the ancient world. The men who stopped at them were not sophisticated, white-collar business travelers, who tote laptops and hold MBAs. These were rough and tough camel jockeys, who probably



drank much and bathed little. They were toughened by the rigors of crossing deserts, fighting off bandits, and maneuvering recalcitrant camels. “Inns” were large, open halls, where “travelers” sacked out together, with their saddlebags to cushion their scruffy heads, their knives handy, and one eye left open to guard against the unwarranted “attentions” of so many unsavory characters. Female “guests” were rare---if they came at all, they were probably paid to be there, if you know what I mean.

And so, if indeed, it was the conscious act of that innkeeper to “banish” Mary to the stable, it was, more likely, a great act of kindness---of hospitality---to offer her a place of privacy and relative security in which to give birth! In a society where animals---chickens, goats, donkeys, horses---often shared the house because they were considered such precious possessions, bedding down in a stable would probably not have offended the sensibilities of Mary and Joseph as it does ours.

Several years ago, a pastor-friend preached an Advent sermon series around the theme of “What Would Jesus Say?” “What would Jesus say to Santa, to Scrooge...etc.” And we could ask the question, “What Would Jesus Say to the Innkeeper?” And we might---just might be surprised to hear Christ saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant...”! Because, perhaps, the innkeeper---having an inkling that he might just be “entertaining angels unaware”--- had given Christ, the best of his rooms!

Each day, Christ comes to us looking for space in our busy lives, and, too often, finds that we have “no room” for him---we may be too busy, or too anxious, or too self-absorbed. But he continues to ask us, as Mary and Joseph must have asked that innkeeper, to make room: alongside our friendships, next to our desks, within our relationships, smack-dab in the center of our thoughts. And those are GOOD places in which to host him.

The 17th century poet Robert Herrick has given us a simple reminder, though, of what constitutes the BEST of rooms---it also forms the text of a beautiful choral anthem by Charles Wood:

*Christ, he requires still, wheresoever he comes,  
To feed, or lodge, to have the best of rooms.  
Give him the choice; grant him the nobler part  
Of all the house: the best of all's the heart.*

- Marilyn Borst



Wednesday, November 30<sup>th</sup>

## WORDS THAT CHANGE

Some of the comfort that comes with the music of Advent and Christmas is brought by familiar lines sung year after year, such as “Hark, how all the welkin rings!” Wait—what?

In 1739, John and Charles Wesley published *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, which includes Charles’ “Hymn for Christmas Day.” Even in their time, “welkin” was an obscure Saxon term for the sky or the heavens. Fourteen years later, in *A Collection of Hymns for Social Worship*, George Whitefield changed the first line to “Hark, the herald angels sing.” He also changed the second line.

Multiple other alterations have been made by editors across nearly three centuries, and whole stanzas have been omitted. By the time the text became part of our inheritance, stanzas had been paired and the first two lines (by Whitefield, not Wesley) had become a refrain. Here is the whole of what Wesley wrote, with the lines we sing differently in bold and the richly-biblical lines we don’t sing at all indented:

**Hark, how all the welkin rings!**

**“Glory to the King of kings!**

“Peace on earth and mercy mild,

“God and sinners reconciled!”

Joyful, all ye nations, rise,  
join the triumph of the skies,

**universal nature say:**

**“Christ the Lord is born today!”**

Christ by highest heaven adored,  
Christ, the everlasting Lord,  
late in time behold him come,  
**offspring of a Virgin’s womb.**

Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see,  
hail the incarnate Deity!

**Pleased as man with men to appear**  
**Jesus, our Immanuel here!**

**Hail the heavenly Prince of Peace!**

Hail the Sun of Righteousness!

Light and life to all he brings,  
risen with healing in his wings.

Mild he lays his glory by,  
born that man no more may die,  
**born to raise the sons of earth,**  
**born to give them second birth.**

*Come, Desire of nations, come,  
fix in us thy humble home,  
rise, the woman's conquering seed,  
bruise in us the serpent's head.*

*Now display thy saving power,  
ruined nature now restore,  
now in mystic union join  
thine to ours, and ours to thine.*

*Adam's likeness, Lord, efface,  
stamp thy image in its place,  
second Adam from above,  
reinstate us in thy love.*

*Let us thee, though lost, regain,  
thee, the life, the inner Man:  
O! to all thyself impart,  
formed in each believing heart.*

It was not until 1857 that the much-altered words become attached to Felix Mendelssohn's tune (written to celebrate the anniversary of the printing press). "Christ the Lord is risen today," Wesley's "Hymn for Easter Day," was written in the same urgent poetic meter, 7.7.7.7., and both were at first probably sung to EASTER HYMN. (Try singing the original pairing in your imagination. Be sure to insert the "Alleluias.")

In services of Lesson and Carols, the final reading is often the Prologue from John, the most theological of the Gospels. As a response to that lesson, the congregational song is typically this one, the most theological of the Incarnation hymns, as we proclaim the undefinable Word that changes us and the whole creation.

Across four decades, my teaching responsibilities were in two areas, vocal pedagogy on the one hand and music and worship on the other. I became convinced that sound liturgy and sound voice teaching have the same aim: to remove the minor mysteries so that we can approach the major mysteries. Blessed, therefore, be those who alter, edit, update, and translate to give us Scriptures and hymns in ways that offer clear meaning here and now (and in each place and time), that the words may present the Word, that the Word may do its recreative work with us.

– Paul A. Richardson



Thursday, December 1<sup>st</sup>

## AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH

The season of advent is about preparing for this reality. We look forward with eager hope to the birth of Jesus. We may nurture romantic notions of starry skies and angels singing, resplendent wisemen bearing precious gifts, youthful shepherds with their compliant lambs peering into a manger.

It's easy to forget that these dumfounded shepherds have momentarily left their herding duties to witness the wonder of a human birth. Amidst the pangs of childbirth and the smell of manure, the Word becomes *flesh* – bone and sinew, a human body, a divine mystery. Here a young mother disregards her own pain to soothe and comfort her crying infant son. Jesus is born into a broken, messy world to save it.

This earthy, earthly setting is a holy metaphor for the work God sent the Christ child to do. Salvation is created. In the Basque Carol, *The Infant King*, the text by Sabine Baring-Gold movingly illustrates the arc of God's plan of salvation. The carol begins as a sweet lullaby, but then instructs us to let the baby Jesus sleep as he dreams of the suffering that lays ahead:

*Sing lullaby!*  
*Lullaby baby, now reclining,*  
*Sing lullaby!*  
*Hush, do not wake the Infant King.*  
*Angels are watching, stars are shining*  
*Over the place where he is lying.*  
*Sing lullaby!*

*Sing lullaby!*  
*Lullaby baby, now a-sleeping,*  
*Sing lullaby!*  
*Hush, do not wake the Infant King.*  
*Soon will come sorrow with the morning,*  
*Soon will come bitter grief and weeping:*  
*Sing lullaby!*

*Sing lullaby!*  
*Lullaby baby, now a-dozing,*  
*Sing lullaby!*  
*Hush, do not wake the Infant King.*  
*Soon comes the cross, the nails, the piercing,*  
*Then in the grave at last reposing:*  
*Sing lullaby!*

*Sing lullaby!  
Lullaby! is the babe a-waking?  
Sing lullaby!  
Hush, do not stir the Infant King.  
Dreaming of Easter, gladsome morning,  
Conquering Death, its bondage breaking:  
Sing lullaby!*

Thankfully, the Infant King does not awaken before he dreams of the joyous victory of Easter.

This is the promised Word! The Word that humbled himself and took on all the messiness of humanity. The Word that breaks the bonds of death. We live with hope because, like Jesus in the Basque Carol, we know where this story goes. We know Jesus suffered like us, and we know he suffered for us. We also know the story has a happy, redemptive ending. Is it any wonder we look forward to celebrating his birth?

- Mark Borst

**Friday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>**

### **REFLECTIONS ON PASSAGES FROM JOHN**

*“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14*

Christ is no longer flesh, yet the Holy Spirit resides in me. It is now my flesh, and the flesh of the followers of Jesus Christ that carry the Word of God on earth. Am I worthy? Do I live each day as Christ would if he lived in this time? Is everyone I meet welcome to sit with me? To eat with me? Do I treat them with the truest compassion shown by the Lord when he lived among us as the Word in flesh? As keeper of the Word, do I share the truth of God’s love for everyone and of the sacrifice of his Son to others? Or only keep it wrapped up, hidden inside my own heart as though it were a gift meant only for me? Do I do works for God in his name’s sake or for my own internal pride and make my works known to others so they will commend me?

*“He who saw this has testified, so that you may also believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.” John 19:35*

Society drives the fears of humankind against one another. Racism, bigotry, a caste system of wealth and poverty dictate who someone simply says, “Hello!” to. A small gesture or a single smile. It was these expressions of acceptance that Jesus offered everyone without

exception. And it is these similar moments that will allow me to open doors of friendship and eventually fellowship with others who are God's children and may be ready to receive his Word. Or do I too often save those moments and conversations for Sunday school, church events, and the safety of my congregation?

We celebrate the Yule season as the holy birth of our Lord. We give thoughtful and sometimes extravagant gifts to one another to celebrate a birthday that is not our own. It was Our Father's gift of love by sending his Son that became the greatest gift of my life. This gift should be the gift I am most excited about giving to others.

It doesn't require credit cards, wrapping paper or bows. I only have to actively open my heart and release my faith in everyday encounters with all people, allowing the Lord's love and kindness to be shown in the flesh of my smile, his comfort to come from the flesh of my arms, so that they may be able to feel the love God has for them through my embrace.

I am not special, but I am blessed because I carry the Holy Spirit and the Word of God here, now, in my own flesh on earth. A humble, blessed, vessel where God's greatest gift resides. The knowledge that he gave his only Son, a Son sent as the Word in flesh, to teach us, to love us, and to carry the burden of our sins by giving his life for everyone, so that we may be forgiven in grace. Even the stranger, the wealthy, the poor, the unkind, the angry, the forlorn, the ones we overlook when we avert our eyes to the floor.

This season I will unwrap the bow around my heart that is filled with his love and mercy, paying attention to the people around me. Not the ones I know, but the ones I have never noticed. So that I can smile, say hello, and trust God to offer me the opening to share, and the words to give his gift to others.

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16*

- Stacie Morris

**Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>**

### **WORDS FROM A FRIEND**

When Marty Foxx honored me with the request to participate in this year's Advent booklet, she began her e-mail with, "Hello, old friend." Those words brought back such a flood of memories that I had to take a moment. It has been over 30 years since Sheila, Sharon, and I moved from Savannah and FBC to the Atlanta area but the relationships we have with our friends at FBC have not diminished, just the frequency of getting together.



We have remained involved in the lives of our FBC friends through weddings, I officiated two and James Richardson one, a funeral, and the births of grandchildren. We have enjoyed periodic visits, choir tours, and a river cruise over the years.

These memories may not read like an Advent meditation, so let us look at the Word. The writer of John's Gospel, who calls himself the “beloved disciple,” writes more intimately about Jesus than any of the other Gospel writers. It seems that his aim was not to present Jesus as teacher, healer or savior, but simply, one who was God among us, Immanuel, to show us the love of God. Those who recognized that love and believed, received the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)

It is this “God with us” idea that permeates the Gospel and makes Jesus' relationships, suffering, and death so intimately real to us. “God with us,” most definitely is an Advent concept and the major theme of all our lives as we live out the Gospel of being Christ in the world and bringing Christ to the world.

Marty's opening line and the flood of memories reinforced the realization that none of those wonderful relationships would have been possible without FBC and the ministries that brought us together as friends. The importance of our love for Christ through service in the church was and is the defining point of origin for all the resulting and lasting relationships that we have. I cannot imagine what life would be like without these relationships and memories or that in all of our lives, God is with us.

This Advent could be a time of reflection on what memories will be most important to you as you remember your time at FBC. I pray that your memories and the time you remain at FBC will be a time you can say that God is/was with us.

*- Richard Ferrell*

**Sunday, December 4<sup>th</sup>**

**... AND THE WORD WAS GOD**

Some years ago, when I was teaching the children's choir a cantata for Christmas, I found the need to try to explain the beautiful text from the gospel of John, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” One of the children wondered how Jesus could be God and also be the Son of God. Another argued a point she had probably learned in Sunday School, that “the Bible was the word of God.” Since children sometimes listen better to poetry than to prose, I decided to write a Christmas poem for them, that I then read in worship during children's time.

But I digress. I decided that for this year's Advent devotional booklet, I would recycle some of that poem — the parts that specifically mention John referring to Jesus as "the Word of God." Did my little poem teach the children something about Jesus? I hope so. Perhaps it even made someone think of the Trinity, which remains a difficult concept for most of us to grasp. But if it caused even one child to ask questions and to discover that there is always more to be learned if we keep an open mind, my lesson plan for that day was successful. And perhaps it can do those same things again this year.

If heaven is such a wonderful place,  
Why would Christ Jesus come here to embrace  
Those who would treat him so mean on this earth,  
Where there was not even a place for his birth?

Why would he give up his heav'nly estate  
To come to a world filled with anger and hate?  
To try to find answers I think we should look  
Inside the Bible, for that is God's book.

The shepherds, the angels, the wise men, the inn —  
Since these are familiar, here's where we'll begin.  
The reason we know these so well is no fluke —  
They're found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Those parts of the story are what we know best,  
But let's not forget to look at the rest.  
To understand better the Father and Son  
We need to consult the gospel of John.

There is a passage that you may have heard —  
"In the beginning," John wrote, "was the Word."  
But this Word's not made up of letters and sounds;  
This Word is our Savior, in whom life abounds.

John goes on to tell us that right from the start  
"The Word was with God," that means, inside God's heart.  
But then most important, he says at the last,  
"The Word was God." To that message hold fast!

For when he says later, "The Word became flesh,"  
Well, that is the baby we see in the creche.  
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay,  
Is the very same Savior we worship today.

The Jesus who loves you and lives in your heart,  
This Jesus of Nazareth knew you from the start.  
For if Jesus is God as John says that he is,  
Then all of God's children must also be his.

What a magnificent, beautiful story!  
No wonder all of the angels sang "Glory!"  
But that's not the end of the story — oh, no —  
The gospel of Luke says that Jesus did grow

In favor with God and in favor with man;  
He taught and he healed — it was part of God's plan.  
And to take human form on the earth would imply  
That like all of humanity, Jesus would die.

So what do you think it could possibly mean  
When John reports later, in chapter fourteen,  
That Jesus made promise another would come,  
When he had returned to his heavenly home?

Well, that is the Spirit, the One who's here now,  
And the Spirit is God, though I can't explain how.  
Father and Son and Spirit — all three —  
Are all the same God — and that God loves me!

- *James C. Richardson*

**Monday, December 5<sup>th</sup>**

### **GRANDMOMA'S SHIRT - *The Gift that Kept on Giving***

When my sister and I were children, we spent hours searching for the hidden cache of presents our parents would hide from us so as not to spoil our Christmas morning. On those rare occasions when we discovered these treasures, we experienced mixed emotions, realizing we had indeed spoiled much of our Christmas. To our childhood way of thinking, a gift was simply what we wanted for Christmas.

Years later, my dear grandmother passed away three days before Christmas. She had already decorated her vintage trailer and purchased presents for everyone. Opening her present to me the day after her funeral, I discovered a brown and white, paisley patterned shirt. I wore that shirt for years, not because it was the height of fashion for a 1960s era

high schooler, but because I could remember and feel the care she took in shopping for it. The image symbolized her gentle, abiding love for me.

A gift should represent more than an object. Among the spiritual traditions of various peoples of the First Nations, including the Kwakwaka'wakw Indians along the Pacific coast of British Columbia, is a ceremony called a Potlatch. Practiced for hundreds of years, potlatches were criticized, even outlawed for their wastefulness of redistributing wealth, conferring rank, and increasing personal status by giving extravagant gifts. All the guests, sometimes thousands of them, received gifts of varying values, enough in some cases to change the course of the recipients' financial fortunes.

Chief Bill Cranmer, hereditary chief and elected leader of the Canadian tribe, cautions fellow Potlatch hosts that, "The thing is not to go overboard and buy really expensive gifts. But enough to show people that you care for them and are thinking about them." The chief is on to something. To be sure, life has a way of redefining the meaning of "gift" to transcend monetary value, exclusivity, and status. The more you think about the true gifts you have been given, the broader the meaning of the word.

This summer my dear Aunt Louise died in Charleston, SC. She was known to me for my entire life as "Aunt Blease," since I couldn't pronounce her name as a toddler. She was a second mother to me, after my mom passed away. Moreover, she was a Follower of Christ and lived her life obeying the greatest commandments: love God and your neighbor as yourself. She taught English to immigrants. She was a talented beautician, fixing hair for women who needed a tonsorial tune up. Even as illness drained her life, she continued to bring joy to every staff person in the facility where she was cared for. She gave me the gift of choosing a positive attitude despite the circumstances we face. Thankfully, on one of my last visits with her, I had the opportunity to tell her how much I appreciated her special gift to me. Some of the best gifts this Christmas and throughout life are worth more than money can buy.

*- Jerry Davis*

**Tuesday, December 6<sup>th</sup>**

**CALM**

Calm is the name of an app I use on my phone. Filled with images of peace and serenity, brimming with sounds of nature, and introspective guides for meditation, it channels the challenges of my days with a sense of peace and tranquility. On days that are chaotic, depressing, filled with doubts I will often click the button and reliably for a matter of minutes I immerse myself in the soothing quietness.

Until I was asked to write this piece it had never occurred to me how much I associate this holy season with the word calm. As a child the nestling under a handmade quilt nurtured me as I awaited Christmas morning. I often basked in the lights on the tree to stare intently, to relax and imagine how wonderful life would be if those twinkling lights lasted all year.

The simplicity of the idyllic moments in childhood remains what I seek even today. Woes arise, crises come, distractions take hold, and I long for the sense of calmness. It becomes a test of living all these years to let go of all things that remove myself from the presence of God. Undeniably a momentous task but one I have found I can achieve by listening to that small voice inside of me to live daily by being an instrument of God's peace.

It has become possible for me to find that unique gift by spending large portions of my daily existence by seeking a sense of calmness. That does not mean a disregard for the reality of this world but rather shifting my perceptions to embrace each day knowing that I have the tools to guide me. Remaining calm in all situations is impossible for us mortals but we are able to step back, breathe deeply, and turn our hurts and confusion over to our Holy Creator. I will end with these simple lyrics "all is calm, all is bright" in the vastness of abiding love.

- Janis Lewis

**Wednesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>**

### **AN AWARENESS OF ANGELS**

As a very young child, one of my favorite Christmas books was The Little Lost Angel by Janet Field Heath. Perhaps you remember it, too. The story is about a little angel who came down with a multitude of angels to greet the Christ Child. She arrives with a group of angels with crowns, radiant gowns, and magnificent wings. In the night, she and the angels approach the shepherds in the field to announce a message of good news. Accidentally, the little angel fell asleep and woke up all alone; then her adventures begin. The little angel created happiness by giving away her most prized possessions, her harp, her crown, and her wings, as gifts to others.

When the Christmas season begins, angels again capture my imagination as we sing and listen to Christmas carols and decorate our homes. Many of our old beloved songs include references to angels, such as "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," "Angels from the Realms of Glory," and "Angels We Have Heard on High." Angel figures, all elegantly attired, are scattered on our mantles and Christmas trees to create beautiful decorations of the season. As time goes by, our desire to learn more about certain topics prompts us to look toward the scriptures of the Holy Bible. The presence of angels throughout the Bible is significant to us because they serve as messengers for God.

The first chapter of Matthew tells us that the angel Gabriel came to Zechariah and Zechariah became fearful. The angel brings the message saying, "Fear not, for your prayer was heard, and your wife, Elizabeth, will bear a son, and you shall call him John." Zechariah doubts the angel and the angel replies, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the very presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news." John, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, "grew and became strong in spirit" and is known to us as John the Baptist.

Also, the first chapter of Matthew recounts that Joseph receives his message from an angel during a dream. The angel spoke to Joseph and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife for the child within her is of the Holy Spirit; she shall have a son, and you shall call his name Jesus..." Joseph obeyed the angel.

In the first chapter of Luke, readers are told that God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth with a special message for Mary, who was promised in marriage to Joseph. The angel said, "Hail, you are highly favored, do not be afraid, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women... You shall have a son and call him Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the son of the Highest." Mary responded, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" and the angel departed from her. Mary accepts the message.

About this time Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the nation. Everyone was required to return to his ancestral home for the registration. Mary and Joseph travelled from the Galilean village of Nazareth to Bethlehem in Judea. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their sheep at night. Suddenly an angel appeared and stood before the shepherds. The glory of the Lord shone all around them and the shepherds became afraid. The angel reassured them, by saying, "Fear not, I bring you good news of great joy for all people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."

Quickly the angel was joined by vast numbers of angels praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth for all those pleasing him," and the angels returned to heaven. After following the instructions and seeing the baby, the shepherds returned to their field, praising God for the visit from the angels and because they had seen the baby, just as the angels told them.

Throughout the Bible, people have seen and received messages from God through the angels. Others see angels but do not recognize them. Some have unknowingly spoken with angels, because they did not recognize them to be any different from man. "...for thereby some have entertained angels unaware." Hebrews 13:2.

"Glory to God in the Highest"

- Pam Finland



**Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup>**

## **MADE FLESH**

Christmas 1982 was horrible. My first husband was killed in a plane crash eleven days before Christmas. I wanted to die, but knew I could not do it alone. Certainly there would be one person in the funeral line who would whisper in my ear, "Dianne, I know you are hurting, I love you and will help you escape this agony." I studied each face for a clue that "this is the person." That person never came. However, the full realization that I had to live through this was crystal clear. The person who knew how to do that didn't show either, or so I thought.

But! One woman came to me and said, "This happened to me." WHAT? I knew her husband and children, all alive. She explained that her first husband died young from cancer. That was my first glimmer of hope... "the Word made flesh." She said several helpful things and her very existence gave me a sliver of hope.

There was a second woman in Bull Street Baptist Church. She sat beside me in the Church Library, leaned in close holding my hand in hers and said, "This happened to me, too." I thought to myself, this is really weird. I knew her husband also. Her first husband was a pilot in the Korean War. Surviving when his plane was shot down, he was placed in a Korean prison. She was certain when the war ended he would come home. All would be well. She was pregnant, had the baby, sent pictures to him. Those pictures arrived after he died in prison. She had survived more than I was facing.... "the Word made flesh." There was a third woman.....MORE FLESH.

My dear Quaker Pastor gave invaluable instruction. "Go back to Savannah. You must be in the place you lived life with Allen. Grieve, acknowledge and accept his death, and find peace" ..... "the Word made flesh." All messages were loud and clear. "You can survive this tragedy. It will be hard work. We are here for you. Life can be good again." And so it was and is. Thanks be to God for the "Word made flesh."

*- Dianne Gardner*



**Friday, December 9th**

**FAMILY**

Christmas is about God's love! God is love! Thank you, God, for the gift of Jesus! ("You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you.") God helps me carry the burden of tough lessons. His love, his forgiveness teaches me to love, to forgive! ("Peace on Earth and mercy mild, God and sinner reconciled")

Christmas is a time to rejoice in receiving the loving and living Word of God. Acknowledging that God's love and forgiveness is an incredible blessing is what fills my heart with celebratory joy on Christmas! Thank you, God! Thank you for the Word!

A word that has changed for me over time is family. My First Baptist Church of Savannah family uplifts me! Thank you to Sarah Davis and Mulligan, for so generously inviting Piper, Pumpkin, and me to receive a blessing, and thanks also to Will Hodges for joyfully, on that same day, encouraging me to join FBC by saying, "You know, you can pick your family." I am forever grateful!

To love and be loved, to welcome and be welcomed, to accept and be accepted at First Baptist Church of Savannah is the greatest gift. Thank you! To enjoy the fun loving kindness of so many talented, beautiful people is God's love in action. Amen and Hallelujah! Merry Christmas to all and May God Bless You!

*- Melissa Ralph (& Pumpkin too)*

**Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup>**

**A VISIT WITH CILIE SUTTON**

On October 15, 2022, I called Cilie Sutton to arrange a long-overdue visit. She graciously welcomed me into her lovely home which gave me a refreshing refuge from the chaos at my house where the kitchen ceiling was being replaced. She admired my white hair for its natural curl; I confessed that besides keeping it cut short, I hardly give it a second thought after running my brush through it in the morning. Her own hair is getting longer than she usually wears it. Her eyes shine bright and clear. I moved a chair up close to hers and turned on my Sony voice recorder. She allows me to record our visits.

I explained that I wanted to write about our visit for the Advent Booklet. She remembers Christmas at First Baptist Church as a wonderful time to gather the whole family together for a program in Lewis Hall where a story was read and bags of candy were given to every

child. The Christmas Eve services began in the 1970's with the two Chrismon trees. The church was decorated with greenery which was brought in from Orson and Bettina Beecher's farm west of Savannah. In the Sutton home, the Christmas tree was hung from its top in the double doorway between the living room and the dining room. Gifts were then piled under the tree on a piece of green fabric. It was a space saving idea all her own. A nativity shelter made by her friend Steve Bond, a local wood craftsman, held the Holy Family; it's still treasured by her family year after year.

The Suttons have been a special part of First Baptist Church all their lives. Cilie was born the same year the Education Building was built; 1925 is carved into the cornerstone on the northeast at Whitaker and Hull. She's 97 years old and has seen many changes through her lifetime. I asked her what was the biggest change she has witnessed in her life. She gave it some thought before saying it has been the integration of the races in all areas of life. The acceptance of people regardless of their skin color has changed for the better. If communities don't change, they die out.

Our conversation turned to news about people and events in the life of the church. I shared the Classics activities and Justin's Ordination service and the start of adult Sunday School classes. She recalled that children had "Sunbeams" in Lewis Hall during worship services at one time. Her dear friend, Dr. Jane Jennings, had come to a recent organ concert at First Baptist with her son, John. She has Jane's phone number taped to the table beside her. They visit by phone almost every day. We recalled Jane's medical missionary trips to Pakistan after her retirement. We are inspired by her faith and bravery; she lives an extraordinary life wherever she is.

As I shared news about Jack's engagement to Camryn Chapman, she rejoiced with me that things are going well with my family. Privately, I remembered 1972 when I gave birth to my son, Scott. The Sutton family came to our home on Barnard Street to welcome him into the FBC family. Cilie gave him a little book of prayers. I still have it. Great is their faithfulness. Thanks be to God.

- *Marty Fox*

**Sunday, December 11<sup>th</sup>**

**CHRISTMAS GIFT!**

More than thirty years ago, a friend in Atlanta gave me a copy of a small hardcover book near the beginning of the Advent season. There was nothing particularly impressive about the cover of the little volume, and truth be told, it appeared at first glance to be an item directed at impulse buyers standing in supermarket checkout lines nationwide.

The title of the little book was *Christmas Gift!* by an author whose name now escapes me. The main thrust of the story, as I recall, was that members of a certain rural community spent the better part of Christmas Day each year attempting to surprise each other with the words “Christmas Gift.” One person would sneak up on another, and before being detected, would cry out the two magic words. The main point of the whole exercise was to startle and surprise one’s sibling, child, neighbor, or friend by being the first to announce the good Day of Christ’s birth.

I casually mentioned the book not long afterward to my parents and summarized the point of the story. That was when my father said: “That’s interesting because we used to do that same thing in our family on Christmas morning.” He went on to describe his early life, first in the small Mississippi River town of Winfield, and then later in the big city of St. Louis, where members of the Finley, Miller, and Birkhead families would get together on Christmas Day for the exchange of presents and an extended family meal. And always, there would be the attempt to startle the grandparents or the cousins with those two words: “Christmas Gift.”

Who knows where this tradition originated in our family? My guess is that it is a remnant of our Scots-Irish heritage brought to the new world by my fourth great-grandfather Patrick Finley, who arrived in Charleston as an indentured servant from County Antrim, Ireland in the mid-eighteenth century, or by my second great-grandfather John Roger Miller, who was born in County Derry, Ireland in 1838 and settled in Lincoln County, Missouri by the 1860s. Perhaps one of these ancestors passed down the tradition of those two startling words: “Christmas Gift!”

Reading the New Testament, one gets the impression that the Christmas story was all about surprises: the angel’s dramatic announcement to the fearful young girl, Mary; the reassuring words offered to her startled husband-to-be, Joseph; the totally unexpected revelation concerning Messiah’s birth which came to lowly shepherds in fields near Bethlehem; the undeserved mercy of the divine coming to inhabit human form; the gracious gift of a God who assures us that we have not been left alone in our sins.

The birth of Jesus is the Christmas Gift which sneaks up on us early of a December morning, catches us totally unaware, and literally takes our breath away. His surprising story is beyond all telling: we are loved, forgiven, and redeemed in Jesus Christ.

Christmas Gift!  
– *John Finley*



**Monday, December 12<sup>th</sup>**

## **GRANDMA**

Grandma is the word that speaks to the most special place in my childhood memories. And when I think of Christmas, my grandma was the most important part of my life growing up. I had grandmothers on both sides of my parents' families but spent the most time with my dad's mother. This is the Italian side of my family. When I think of her, I think of love and abundance, care and joy, adventure and storytelling, and wonderful food and service.

I called her Grandma JoJo; her name was Josephine. She taught me to sing "Jesus Loves Me" and she loved to hear it sung. More importantly though – she wanted me to know that Jesus loved me. She brought to life all that I learned about God as a child. She was faithful and kind and loving. Family was very important to her. She had a twinkle in her eye whenever she looked at me. She had a special way of making me feel seen and heard.

My Grandma JoJo lived a life of service to people in need, service to family members, neighbors, the elderly, the hungry, the list goes on. She and her sister, my great aunt, cooked and served Meals on Wheels for decades. During Christmas time she loved to gather as many people as possible. We ate around a ping pong table where we gathered in the basement of her small bungalow in Cicero IL. Sometimes she had so many guests that there were tables set on the main floor and even the upstairs apartment where my great aunt and uncle lived. Grandma JoJo exuded gratitude for these gatherings and always had an abundance of love and food in her home during Christmas, and on Sunday nights in general as we went to her house for dinner on Sundays for much of my childhood.

She was the youngest of several siblings and I remember many Italian relatives; some spoke Italian only and some spoke English, but the words weren't important. There were cousins, aunts and uncles and friends who came and they just loved us because they knew we were her grandchildren. Several of these relatives brought my sisters and me gifts, often handmade crochet, and special candies every year. She took us on walks through her Italian neighborhood and we often visited neighbors. Everybody was always happy to see her and her grandchildren. We were treated with love and celebrated not because of who we were – but because we were hers.

- *Cathy Girardeau*



**Tuesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>**

**A STORY RE-IMAGINED**

The battered pickup truck pulled up in front of the only motel in town on a cool winter's night in south Georgia. Motor missing badly. One headlight burned out. Gas gauge on "E" for the last fifteen miles.

In the back of the truck lay a beat-up suitcase and a dented toolbox, the only possessions of the exhausted young couple in the cab. They were on their way to Atlanta, where (they'd heard) there was work to be found. They shouldn't have been on the road at all, for the young woman was very pregnant. But jobs were scarce, and she wasn't due for another two weeks.

The sign said "No Vacancy," but the desperate young man explained their plight to the night clerk, and asked (begged, really) for anyplace they could sleep. The clerk was sorry, but the motel really was full. Then, almost apologetically, he mentioned the kennel behind the motel. It wasn't much, but he'd just cleaned it. Not too cold out; no threat of rain. He could move a couple of rollaway beds out there, and provide some sheets and blankets. Would that be all right? Indeed it would.

Grateful for even this much, the young couple retired to the kennel. Sometime during the night, even before a doctor could be summoned, she gave birth to a son, their firstborn. Both mother and baby were fine, with a fantastic tale to tell for years to come. True story? Or too good not to be true?

- *Howard Pendley*

**Wednesday, December 14<sup>th</sup>**

**PRESENTS**

When I was young, the word that I associated most with Christmas was *presents*. I looked forward to the presents I hoped to get and was impatient for the day to come when there would be presents under the tree and in nicely wrapped packages. Starting around Thanksgiving, my friends and I talked a lot about what we hoped to get and eagerly shared our success with each other afterwards. It was unbridled, self-centered materialism.

I can't remember when *giving* presents became important to me. I'd heard the verse, "It's more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35 KJV) often enough in Sunday School, and in sermons, and from my mother and grandmother (deeply religious pillars of our Baptist church). When I was a little older, Mother started taking me to stores to select



presents for me to give to my family. I gradually came to look forward to finding and helping her wrap what we decided to buy. And then, on Christmas Day, it was fun watching them open the gifts I'd given. But looking back on it, it was still about *things*. I loved my family, of course, and wanted to give them nice presents, but for me, Christmas was still mainly about material things.

As I got older, the message about "the true spirit of Christmas" began to sink in. The stories in Matthew and Luke about the birth of Christ gave me insight about giving that went far beyond presents. John 3:16, of course, was an important element in the transformation I was undergoing. God gave of himself for us. There was no materialism at all.

In thinking about how to write a devotional about *presents*, it came to me that the word is pronounced exactly like *presence*. And the birth of Jesus was a tangible presence of God among us. From that moment on, God was a presence on earth that believers could experience any time, not just at Christmas. I felt it strongly when I made my profession of faith and walked down the aisle to take my pastor's hand and tell him I wanted to be a Christian.

Although I have felt God's presence in many places, that presence is most keenly felt in worship services. First Baptist Savannah, which I joined forty years ago, has been the place where that divine presence has been most immediate to me. The ministers have been inspired to create services that combine music and the spoken word in ways that make the worship experience greater than the sum of its parts.

During this time of transition in our church, *presence* becomes all the more important. We all may experience the presence of God in worship, but the challenge for us is to attract people so they may also experience what we do. We are a unique Baptist *presence* in Savannah. Making that known widely is vital. Celebrating the centennial of our Skinner organ brought in many who had never been inside our imposing sanctuary. Our various mission projects reach many who could become members – although that is not the main reason for doing so. Through such ministries and programs we witness to the presence of God in this place. And if we can succeed in sharing the presence of God, what a present that would be.

- George B. Pruden



Thursday, December 15<sup>th</sup>

## SMILE

We all **smile** at different times in our lives, whether we're being told to "*say cheese*," or simply *just because*. It seems the amount of smiling we do is based on the season of life we're in. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-9) Even just minutes after a baby is born, loved ones and strangers alike hover over, patiently waiting to capture that moment you see the newborn **smile** for the very first time. The natural high we feel at this very moment brings to our soul a unique reward (one that is commonly sought after; ending sometimes with devastating consequences). The **smile** is a very powerful tool.

I remember the exact moment when I started a new office job and was excited to see what would happen if I shifted all my focus to sharing a genuinely hospitable **smile** with everyone I met, regardless of how I was feeling. I quickly realized this secret weapon had the power to positively alter the vibe of every single human interaction I faced. A year later, once I started reading the Bible, I realized it was the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) behind my **smile**. And the super-power I thought was mine was actually God's. Fast-forward 26 years later to the spring of 2021, I called it quits to a very successful career in restaurant hospitality because although my genuine **smile** of joy instantly relieved every guest's insecurity and loneliness, it was no match to the overwhelming feeling of emptiness I had upon realizing there was nothing more left for me in hospitality, for I no longer had the desire to **smile**.

Depending on which version you're reading, you'll see the word **smile** written several times throughout the Bible. It's scripture alone that fills the emptiness when you think smiling isn't possible. I thank God several times a day for his **smile** because although society is diligently working to spread the news of the importance of smiling, the only reliable source to receive the genuine smile we all need is from God.

- Bianca Raub

Friday, December 16<sup>th</sup>

## A CHRISTIAN

I'm an imposter. Or at least, I sometimes feel like one when I'm sitting in church or examining my faith. The truth is, I struggle with what it means to be a good Christian. Am I a good Christian? I'm not sure. Is being a good Christian simply believing in God? Going regularly to church? Being able to quote the Bible (or even turn to a passage quickly when called upon)? I see other Christians around me who seem to have it all together, living full

faithful lives, who don't appear to have the same struggle. It's then that I ask myself, "Is there something wrong with me? How can I be a better Christian?"

Then I remember, God loves me for who I am, and it makes me want to be a better person, a better Christian. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

So, I keep trying. I try to live by the simplest definition of what I think a good Christian should be: someone whose heart and actions mirror Jesus Christ. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. The second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matthew 22:37-39)

If only we connected and communicated with each other guided by this basic rule... In his book, The Five Love Languages, Dr. Gary Chapman describes five unique ways we communicate. His book was intended for married couples, but I think just as easily applies to the rest of humanity. The five languages are: words of affirmation, quality time, giving, acts of service, and physical touch. God speaks each of these languages to us and I want to believe being a good Christian means expressing these languages to those around us. Imagine if we all began expressing out loud the good that comes to mind. Likewise, we should never underestimate the power of a random, heartfelt compliment to a stranger. Find joy in being the reason someone smiles today.

Maya Angelou said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." This Christmas season, we focus on giving. But is there no better gift than to give someone your time, your undivided attention, simply being fully present (**quality time**)? By listening, hearing their struggle, are you not saying to them, "You matter"? (**words of affirmation**) Holding a hand or a long unhurried hug (**physical touch**.) Asking, "What can I do to help you?" (**acts of service**) These are my love languages, my endeavor to be a good Christian.

- Libby McIntosh



**Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup>**

## **JOYFUL ANTICIPATION**

Only a few short weeks ago we went through the change back to “eastern standard time” which of course resulted in the shortness of daylight hours being more noticeable in the evenings of our days as we move toward winter. In Alaska, some parts of the state only see as many as 67 days without light. Can you imagine living through 67 days in which there is no visible sunrise at all? Think about that for a moment. How would you deal with days in which there is no sunlight at all? How does darkness impact your life in these days of diminished daylight? How have you had to “adjust” to doing things in the dark when you get home in the afternoons these days?

Again, imagine how it would be if the darkness was not just a shorter day but a period of days in which there was no light? The prophet Isaiah writes of such a time when he writes in chapter 9 of “a people who walked in darkness” and announces that they have “seen a great light” and “those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them has light shined.” (9:2 NRSV) Then, he goes on to write of the birth of a child, a son who has been given to us.

During the Advent season we recognize that we are people who often walk in darkness – not so much physical darkness but spiritual darkness. We sometimes allow ourselves to lose sight of the Light that has come to us in Christ. And so, during Advent, we wait, we recognize the darkness and we anticipate the coming of the Christ child again, knowing that we have been in the darkness and therefore are those who need the Light to come to us again, to begin our journey of the Liturgical year with this season of anticipation, reflection, and rebirth.

As those who live in the northern lands endure the many days of darkness, so we endure the days of waiting for Christmas. We wait for the coming of the Child to become reality for us once again and for the Light to shine on us. Can you imagine the joy that they experience when at last they glimpse that first glimmer of light? Maybe we can if we think back to the days of childhood and how long it seemed before Christmas would come to us at last. Those were days of joyful anticipation, we made our Christmas lists and we waited, sometimes not so patiently for the day to come at last. We sang our carols hoping for the day when we could finally sing “Joy to the World, the Lord Is Come.” How great was our joy on that morning when it came at last! To quote the great actress Octavia Spencer, “We take the spirit of Christmas with us every single day. And that’s about being kind, being of service, just trying to be the best person you can possibly be. If you walk in joy, you will bring joy. That Christmas morning feeling is joy.” May our days of Advent devotion and preparation be days of joyful anticipation and expectation fulfilled at last.

*- Rob Harrelson*

**Sunday, December 18<sup>th</sup>**

## **THE PLAYING OF THE MERRY ORGAN**

My love of organ music has close connections to the season of Christmas. One year when I was about eight years old, my grandmother gave me two cassette tapes that she had purchased from the bargain bin at our local Rite Aid. The cassettes were volumes one and two of “The Christmas Organ.” The tapes featured various Christmas carols, both sacred and secular, being played on a real pipe organ in London, England. This was intriguing to me because the organ in the church where I was raised was electronic. Even at a young age, I could clearly hear the difference in the quality, variety, and power of the sound. I vowed then and there that I was going to learn how to play one someday.

The cassettes, along with the later funeral service of Princess Diana, were my first introductions to the broader world of church music. The tunes that the organist on the tapes played for “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear” and “O Little Town of Bethlehem” were not the same as the ones I knew. As I listened, I began to realize that music, especially the music set aside for use in worship, could be so much more than what I had known or experienced in our small country church. Who would have thought that a simple gift from my grandmother would be the thing to set me off on a vocational journey of curiosity, exploration, and discovery?

My favorite carol to listen to on the tapes was “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” which they listed as “Adeste Fidelis.” I had always liked that carol, but I really loved how the organist interpreted it on the recording! He made the words come to life, and the music actually did what the text was saying! Little did I know at the time that the organist was playing the beloved setting of the carol by Sir David Willcocks. Willcocks’s third stanza incorporates strains of “Angels We Have Heard on High” when talking about the angels, and the grand final stanza includes a chord that made the hair on the back of my neck stand up the first time I heard it. Years later, I played this same setting as the first selection on my own Christmas organ CD.

The reharmonized chord I mentioned in the last stanza of “O Come, All Ye Faithful” has become rather iconic among church musicians. Some would even say that it is not Christmas until they either hear or play it. The chord occurs on the word “Word” in the phrase, “Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.” I believe that David Willcocks did this intentionally to make the singer or the listener pay attention to what was being conveyed in that moment. The chord is complex (a bmin7b5 for the music theory nerds among us), and aptly accompanies one of the most complex references in our theological canon. Christ as the “Word of God” is a common and poetic analogy, but what does that really mean?

Through the incarnation, Christ came to be the voice (*Word*) of God on earth. Through the incarnation, Christ came to fulfill the prophecies (*Word*) of God. And, through the incarnation, Christ challenged us to think about the teachings (*Word*) of God in a new and different way. Christ's entire ministry on earth was constantly challenging us to "re-image" what we knew the "Word" to be. So, as we journey through this Advent season, let us open our hearts and minds to the new ways that God may be speaking to us. And when you sense or hear something that makes the hair on your neck stand up, pay attention and rejoice!

- Justin L. Addington

**Monday, December 19<sup>th</sup>**

### **CHRISMON**

Chrismon...a combination of the words "Christ" and "monogram," meaning symbols of Christ. During the early nineties, our United Methodist Women adopted a church-wide project to prepare a Chrismon tree for our sanctuary. The ladies did their homework. They discovered that in a small Lutheran Church in Danville, Virginia in 1957, Frances Kipps Spencer began thinking of a way to decorate the Christmas tree in her church using symbols that signify the life of Christ. She made numerous designs and shared her craft in several books and publications for other churches and Christian groups to use.

With this information and patterns in hand, this project became a combination of a craft class for fellowship and devotional time to study and remember the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. Symbols such as a star, the cross, a fish, a crown, the triquetra, and the alpha and omega were chosen. All ladies of the congregation were invited to participate. Some chose to be in fellowship with each other at the church while others chose to work in the sanctuary of their own homes.

Since Chrismons are traditionally colored white and gold, (*White is the liturgical color for Christmas and symbolizes that Jesus was pure and perfect; Gold symbolizes his majesty and glory.*) a craft room was filled with white felt, fabric, gold beads and sequins, sewing thread, glue guns...all the essentials needed to make these beautiful ornaments.

My dear Christian mother was in awe of these ornaments. She participated in the classes, delicately cutting patterns and sewing beads. She enjoyed learning about the meaning of each ornament. The project had served to be a perfect opportunity for sisters in Christ to become closer to each other, to become deeper in their faith, and share their talents with the entire church family.

As many of you know, aging parents are very difficult to buy for at Christmas. Remembering Mother's love of these ornaments, I decided to take the patterns and reduce



to a size that would fit her 7 foot tree. Every evening after dinner, I would cut, sew, and glue in an effort to give her something special that year when our family gathered at her home for our annual Thanksgiving lunch.

Each year when lunch was over and as the ladies would begin to clean the dishes and salvage leftovers, the men would head to the storage building and bring in her artificial tree for the annual decorating. This year the decorations would be different. Mother received an early Christmas gift . . . a big box of beautiful white and gold Chrismons. Needless to say, she was overjoyed. She carefully oversaw the hanging of each ornament. And when Christmas was over, she was very careful to wrap and store her ornaments for the following year. One of her grandsons took great interest in her ornaments and the joke between them was that she would “will” the ornaments to him one day. Decorating her Chrismon tree continued to be an annual tradition until she was no longer able to live at home. She was true to her word and now the Chrismons adorn a tree in Justin’s home.

As the years have passed, many of my church’s Chrismons have been mended or needed to be replaced. But I never enter the sanctuary during Advent that I don’t think of my mother. Her love for her God, her church, her family.....and her Chrismons.

*- Janice C. Addington*

**Tuesday, December 20th**

### **PERSERVERE**

“PERSEVERE - You can do hard things!” This is the mantra that we have in some of the kindergarten classrooms in the school where I work. I don’t know if you have been to a kindergarten classroom lately, but those kids work HARD! They have to learn letters, letter sounds, patterns, counting to 100, addition and subtraction, at least 100 sight words, and learn to read, just to name a few things. I don’t know about you, but that’s really different from when I was 5 years old! It is hard work for young children, but the sense of achievement that you see in their faces when they accomplish a difficult task makes it all worth it. We celebrate the achievement together: “See? You did it! You persevered! You CAN do hard things!”

When I think of Advent and Christmas, I often think about Mary and how she felt about the difficult task that she was given - to give birth to the Son of God. There are so many strange and unusual things that she had to go through! Being visited by an angel sent from God, having to travel to Bethlehem on a donkey, and of course, having to deliver a baby in a stable. I often wonder how she managed to persevere through these daunting tasks? Who was there to help cheer her on? To support her when things got really difficult? I’m sure

that Joseph did his best, but honestly, I have always pictured him as being a bit panicked and worried, too. (My own husband nearly passed out during the birth of our daughter, and that was just when I was getting the epidural!)

I always imagined that Mary felt very alone during that time. Perhaps it is from the usual characters that we see in nativity scenes - just Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, and a few animals. She didn't have any of her mom friends organizing a meal train to help her out after the birth! And yet, despite all of these obstacles, she managed to persevere.

No matter how rough things get in our lives, let us remind ourselves to be like Mary. We can do hard things! We will persevere! Let us continue on our course of action no matter how hard things get. God will give us the strength that we need just like he gave to Mary, and we will get through the hardest times of our lives, just like Mary.

- *Caroline Creaser Prichard*

**Wednesday, December 21<sup>st</sup>**

## **WORDS MATTER**

“God rest ye merry, gentlemen!” Just reading those words puts you in a certain mindset, doesn't it? It makes me feel very nostalgic! But, if I'm completely honest, I had no idea what the words really meant when I was young, let alone how they related to my life. Now, it's not every day that we sing, speak, or hear something written in the 1700's. And, there's something wonderful about that - the idea that it's stood the test of time and still endures today. But, as much as I love this song, and others like it, I have to wonder what might be gained by re-imagining the spirit of the text and bringing it forward a few centuries into modern English and our modern lives.

There's a sort of debate among some church goers about whether to leave hymn texts unchanged to appreciate tradition, or to update the language in order to bring new relevance to it. (And, if you're thinking “that must be a very specific type of person engaged in this debate,” you would be correct: we're called church/church music nerds.)

I used to be squarely in the traditionalist camp. If it isn't broken, don't fix it. We appreciate classic literature, don't we? Why wouldn't this be the same? My perspective changed, though, through the same process that altered so much of my worldview: when I came to terms with my sexuality. You might wonder what in the world these two things could have to do with each other. Well, it was through the process of coming out that I gained an understanding of what it was like to be different, to be a minority in society (even as I recognize that my background, education, skin color, and more still offer me an incredibly

privileged and protected status). But this very personal process did have a profound impact on so many aspects of my life, including my intentionality in being welcoming and affirming to minority groups.

So, how could we update and modernize hymn texts so that they can be more inclusive and affirming to all people? I'd like to offer a few suggestions. For one, instead of saying "man" and "mankind" we can easily substitute "people" and "humanity." The former reading, taken in a literal sense, leaves out approximately half of the population. And, although it may be more taken for granted today, for much of history women have been subjugated and oppressed, so it's important to overtly include them.

Also, God doesn't always have to be referred to using masculine pronouns and imagery. Why? Well, if we are created in God's image, then God could be male or female or transgender or non-binary or intersex. Because God is described in both masculine and feminine language in the bible. Because some people don't have positive relationships with father figures in their lives, and those references that are meant to be positive may not be received in the intended manner. And, perhaps because the reality of God may be totally beyond our human understanding.

Finally, I think that singing our beloved hymns and carols with updated texts can open us to think of the overall meaning anew. This could be in something as simple as updating the language; for instance, can you relate more to "thou" and "thee," or "you?" Or, maybe more impactfully, it could mean adding completely new verses to familiar hymns in order to include others in the sequel. (Yes, that is a reference to the musical Hamilton.) It is possible to write new poetry that matches our theology and life experiences, and sing it to hymn tunes we already know and love...or new ones.

By being open to altering some of our hymnody, even hymns that we dearly love and which may hold deep meaning to us, we can relate important messages to a wider audience. If we want others to hear the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love that we lift up in this season, and to share the opportunity for community and belonging that we have all found in the church, then why not attempt to be as inclusive as possible?

To return to where I began, I invite you to consider the following version of "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen" with text by Jeffrey Wilsor, written in 2019. It is, admittedly, a more extreme example of what I've been describing, but one that truly illustrates the goal of welcoming and affirming all people through the music of the church. I would be willing to bet that it makes you think about the message of Christmas and Christianity with new eyes, let alone the original version of the song. Of course we can still sing the original version, too. But just imagine how many other people a hymn like this could reach - and all the good that it could do in their lives!

*God rest you merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay!  
Remember Christ will bring love's light the dawn of Christmas day,  
To lead us all from woe and sin when we have gone astray.  
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,  
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

*God rest you also, women, who by men have been erased,  
Through history ignored and scorned, defiled and displaced;  
Remember that your stories too, are held within God's grace.  
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,  
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

*God rest you, queer and questioning, your anxious hearts be still,  
Believe that you are deeply known and part of God's good will  
For all to live as one in peace; the global dream fulfilled.  
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,  
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

*God rest your mind, O humankind, let strife and conflict cease.  
Remember love is active here, and only to increase,  
To carry us to well-springs of God's joyous hope and peace.  
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,  
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

*- Kyle J. Ballantine*

**Thursday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>**

### **A PRAYER RE-IMAGED**

When I entered the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in 2011 as a young grad student, I had no idea what the following two years would be. From laughter to tears and everything in between, my time as a performing arts student changed my perspective on the world. One particular class, Voice for the Actor, broadened my knowledge of what words can truly mean and how their definitions can expand with research and care. For actors, words are a guide to the discovery of emotion. Without words, actors have a tough time conveying meaning. During my voice class, we learned how to dissect words and sentences through a process called image structuring. This method of re-imaging words and phrases forced me to approach the obvious with new eyes. I won't go into the arduous process of the various symbols and signs used in image structuring, but I will reveal the first and most simple rule. The words and phrases you seek to re-image start with finding an alternate definition or synonym. I've used the knowledge I gained in graduate school to

re-image a familiar worship element that we use each week: The Lord's Prayer. It is not a verbatim translation of Merriam-Webster definitions, but rather an interpretation of what the words mean to me.

*Caregiver of all, who dwells in the unknown, your presence is excellent!  
May your relationship with us grow beyond the unknown and into the familiar.  
Give us the strength to get through the day, and forgive us if we do harm.  
But let us also be in communion with those who harm us.  
Do not allow us to give in to impulse. Show us a path of clarity and truth.  
Your creation is all-encompassing, energetic, magnificent, and infinite. Amen.*

- Evan Goetz

**Friday, December 23<sup>rd</sup>**

## **THE WORD BECAME FLESH**

Reflecting on over seven decades of Christmas celebrations, both within the family and within the larger faith community, there are so many words and phrases that come to mind. Among those are the obvious such as joy, gifts, Christmas trees, seasonal music, and all the people who make each Christmas special in its context. At this time in my life, the term "became flesh" when associated with the coming of Our Lord, has special meaning.

When we celebrate as a family, we are God's creatures gathering to remember and give thanks for the gifts of grace, compassion, and salvation that define Jesus. And, I don't mean just Jesus as Lord, but Jesus who walked among us, in the flesh, experiencing life much as others in his time did - much as we do today. He felt hunger and thirst, love, loss, joy, anger, disappointment, and all the myriad of other feelings that I experience. He became like me to redeem me.

My family is buying me a new Apple watch for Christmas since my current one has died. I'm giving my children money to buy personal gifts for my grandchildren since they know them better than I do. I'm giving myself the gift of a Christmas Season in Paris so I, my wife, and our best friends can see the lights of Paris during this festive season. I don't need another Christmas gift this year. But I do need the gift of knowing that the Lord I celebrate during this Season each year, held me in such esteem that he came, in the flesh, and dwelt here on earth.

The Hymn "I Walked Today Where Jesus Walked" has these lines: "I walked today where Jesus walked, in days of long ago. I wandered down each path he knew, with reverent step and slow."

It's a sweet hymn which I haven't heard in years. It reminds me that we should seek to be like Jesus. And yet, try as I may to follow his steps, I believe I am a blessed person, not because I try to walk with him, but because he chose, and chooses, to walk with me.

*"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:14 (NASB)*

- Tom Nichols

**Saturday, December 24<sup>th</sup>**

## **TRADITIONS**

Tradition is a word that comes to mind when I realize that the season of Advent is underway. Growing up in a large family with everyone attending First Baptist Church was a tradition that started for me soon after I was born, and Pauline Cargill Powers (my maiden name) was written in swirly cursive on a piece of diploma-like parchment paper that said: "First Baptist Cradle Roll."

To me, Advent conjures up memories of Sunday School lessons leading up to Christmas and familiar holiday hymns sung in church the weeks approaching Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>. Attending Sunday School and church was a tradition for the Powers family from as far back as I can remember. It is a tradition that has continued with my family, including Steve, and our girls, Polly and Mary, when they were growing up.

First Baptist Christmas memories were something all my siblings experienced as well. By definition, tradition is the transmission of information, customs, or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way. Not too long ago, while going through a box of papers stored in my home office, I stumbled upon the certificate that my parents were given by the church in the 1950s when I was brought forth into this world.

I am the youngest of five children and the unofficial family historian – in other words, the child who ended up with most of the boxes of newspaper clippings, certificates, photos and other memorabilia that my parents stored in their attic, closets, and desk drawers. Every now and then I plunder through the boxes and find treasures that I had no idea existed.

Along with my cradle roll certificate I found similar certificates for my siblings, church programs, and an oversized glossy, black and white photo of my older twin sisters as 4-year-olds participating in a church choir program. It's humorous to me that our first cousin, who was about their age is in the photo because he attended the Presbyterian church. But First Baptist has always been a welcoming congregation.

Throughout the years, even when my sisters had families of their own and were living in Atlanta, they made the journey home to Savannah each and every Christmas. It was a tradition that continued until my parents died. My nieces who are married with families still recall the family custom of Christmases in Savannah and attending First Baptist on Christmas Eve, which also is the twins' birthday. The nieces and their cousins grew up going to the 5:30 p.m. candlelight services and smile when they recall longtime soloist Earnest Murphy and the cadence of "Congregation, Arise."

We would light candles and then walk out to the front steps and sing Christmas carols. More than once it was freezing. Afterward we all would dine at Carey Hilliard's and then congregate at my parents' house for a rousing rendition of "Happy Birthday" sung before a birthday cake from Baker's Pride. Among the traditions for my family is Christmas at First Baptist Church. Let us be thankful for those traditions that also unite us all as a church family.

- *Polly Stramm*

**Sunday, December 25<sup>th</sup>**

### **THE WORD OF GOD**

The First Book of Kings tells of God speaking to Elijah in a "still, small voice." Specifically, 1 Kings 19:11-13 says, "And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice."

We often think of God speaking to us in dramatic, cataclysmic fashion: Moses and the Burning Bush, for example, or the Temple Veil being torn in two at the moment of Christ's death on the cross. Often, however, God speaks to us in a "still, small voice," evident in the most subtle ways. One only must listen to hear it.

When I was a very young child, my mother would read stories to me at bedtime. Many of these were Bible stories. I was always intrigued by these. There was a mystic quality to each of them, a prevailing undercurrent of something greater. One of the stories which most intrigued me was the tale of Abraham being asked by God to sacrifice Isaac, his only son—and of his being willing to do so.

The idea seemed horrific to me. I imagined my own father, to whom I was very close, being asked to do that—I could not see him going through with it, not for anything in the world.

“Why would Abraham be willing to do that?” I asked.

“Because he loved God. And he had faith that the God would provide for him as long as he obeyed.”

“That still seems awful,” I said, imagining my father, his eyes oddly dark and maniacal, brandishing a long, silver-bladed sacrificial knife.

“Well, God did not make Abraham go through with it. But God did send Jesus, his only son, to sacrifice Himself for our sins.”

“Why did God do that?”

“Because He loves us,” she said.

“Why does God love us?”

“Because we are his creation. God loves us all just because we exist.”

“Even the bad people?” I asked.

“Even the bad people,” Mama said.

The fundamental concept of love can be a difficult one for humans to grasp. All too often, in modern society, love and physical attraction are inextricably intertwined. The ancient Greeks spoke of different types of love: Eros, which is derived from sexual passion; Philia, or affectionate regard, the sort of love one has between friends; Storge, or the love between a parent and child; Philautia, or self-love, expressed as the ability to have regard for one’s own happiness and advantage; and Xenia, which is simple hospitality, often to strangers, as a moral obligation. But God’s love for humanity is something different. It is an amalgamation of several of the non-sexual types of love, an unconditional regard for each of us as living creatures. It illustrates our worth both to God and to one another. And it is that sort of love that is the foundation of the Christian faith.

The seminal part of this is contained in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”

God’s love for us is reflected in the unconditional love a mother has for a child, or grandparents for their grandchildren. It is the essence of Christian charity, the foundation of compassion, and the flame which illuminates all good relationships. Without love, life has little meaning. With love, life is exhilarating, boundless and eternal, transcending all mortal boundaries. I have only to see the broad smile on my granddaughter Violet’s face as she runs to greet me to understand the singular nature of love’s vital miracle. It is a gossamer thread which binds us to one another inextricably, defining us both as Christians and as human beings.

Indeed, Love is the actual “Word of God.”

*- Mark Murphy*



## A MEMORY

When mother was a child, Santa always brought the tree with the gifts on Christmas morning. The tree was lit with real candles. She had wonderful memories of Christmas mornings. Over the years the tree gave way to the electric light, but many of the old ornaments survive. The tree makes its appearance way before Christmas morning.

The tradition that started was having mincemeat tarts Christmas morning. This tradition continues until this day. Mother cooked them, and Sara continues. The Christmas season was her favorite. She loved to celebrate the birth of Christ. She was very committed to her religion and the First Baptist Church.

- *John Thomas*

## FINAL THOUGHTS

I want to extend special thanks to everyone who contributed to this Advent tradition, both the writers and members of the Music and Arts Committee. This booklet is a true and joyful representation of the current state of our church. Much like the fact we had no one turn down the request to serve on a committee, or the fact that we reached and exceeded our pledge goal, we had more submissions for this document than we had days in the Advent Season. The submissions also came from our broader church family, including friends and family both near and far. In similar fashion, our devotions this year will be released online each day (a new tradition), and will include special video elements in order to reach people in a powerful and expansive way. I pray that it warms your hearts to see the ways in which the members of our church are coming together to make sure that the story of our God, one that started in a manger so many years ago, will be told for many years to come through the work and ministry of First Baptist Church. On behalf of all of the church leadership, I wish you a blessed Advent, Christmas, and New Year.

- *Justin L. Addington, Editor*



## **ADVENT & CHRISTMAS AT FBC**

### **Hanging of the Greens Service**

November 27<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am - Sanctuary

### **Nativity Display Begins**

December 4<sup>th</sup> at 9:30 am - Lewis Hall

### **Second Sunday of Advent Worship**

December 4<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am - Sanctuary

### **December Fellowship Dinner**

December 7<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm - Lewis Hall

### **Gaudete Sunday Worship**

December 11<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am - Sanctuary

### **Christmas on Chippewa Square Concert**

December 11<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 pm - Sanctuary

### **Deacons' Christmas Banquet**

December 12<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm - Lewis Hall

### **Lessons & Carols (*Re-imagined*)**

December 18<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am - Sanctuary

### **Church-Wide Christmas Caroling**

December 18<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 pm - *Locations TBD*

### **Christmas Eve Worship**

December 24<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm - Sanctuary

*(Prelude begins at 5:30 pm)*

### **Christmas Day Worship**

December 25<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am - Sanctuary

*For more information about these events,  
please visit [www.fbc-sav.org/news](http://www.fbc-sav.org/news).*



*And the Word became flesh and lived among us,  
and we have seen his glory,  
the glory as of a father's only son,  
full of grace and truth.*

*- John 1:14 (NRSV)*



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