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Advent 2017

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Advent 2017

GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY

In Mary Oliver's "Instructions for Living Life," she offers a compelling bit of advice for the ordinary living of our days, but especially for these Holy days of Advent. She says, "Pay attention, be astonished, and tell about it." I can think of no more appropriate words to frame our living into the season than these. These days require something from us. This season demands that we pay attention to the frenzy around us (and sometimes within us) and the rhythm of our own living. Such moments of reflection ought to evoke astonishment and awe deep within our spirits. Indeed, the power of astonishment is perhaps the most appropriate way to dance into this season.

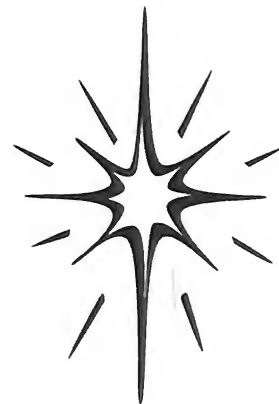
Most of us press through the whirlwind of the season without giving thought to the power and presence that accompanies us each day. Immersed in a tsunami of activity, we rarely pause long enough to catch our breath, much less to get our wits. In so doing, we miss the astonishing and powerful journey that is the season of Advent. Our prayer is that the annual tradition of an Advent guide will prompt us all to heed the sage advice of Mary Oliver. It is perfectly fine to take a moment to both reflect upon and enjoy the season.

This work would not be possible without helpful and supportive colleagues. Dr. Jim McConnell is a veteran to the cause but this year, we welcome Dr. Cal Robertson to the team. Our administrative assistant, Lisa Hollifield, anchors this endeavor with her good spirit and remarkable work ethic. I am grateful to each one for their work and friendship.

As always, a debt of gratitude is owed to the creative services team for their design expertise and timely responses to our editorial schedule. The administration has been wonderfully supportive of our work. Were it not for the collective contribution of these, and our valued writers, this work would not be possible.

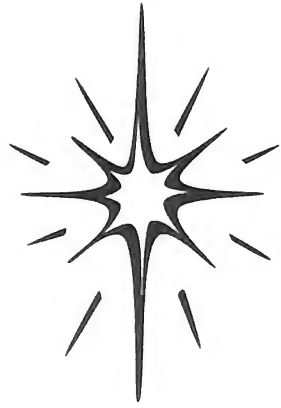
Allow these reflections and the poetic/prophetic words of Mary Oliver to contribute to a meaningful and purposeful Advent journey. It is in that spirit that the Advent guide for 2017 is presented.

Grace and Peace...



Advent at
Gardner-Webb
2017

Danny M. West
Professor of Preaching
and Pastoral Studies
School of Divinity



Sunday,
December 3

Gerald Keown
Associate Dean and
Professor of Old Testament
Interpretation
School of Divinity

Isaiah 64:1-9
Mark 13:24-37

Christians who give attention to the Advent season most often focus on the coming of the babe in a manger. Our scripture passages for this day in Advent remind us that the biblical message speaks of another “coming.”

Isaiah 64 offers what appears to be a cry for help directed to God, pleading that God indeed do as God has done in the past, come down and exhibit power that challenges the oppressor and relieves the oppressed. The speaker in this passage acknowledges that even those who seek God are unworthy in God’s presence. God is the potter; the people are the clay. That image, more familiar in the message of Jeremiah, offers both a word of caution as well as a word of hope. There is caution in the reminder that God is God and we are not. There is hope for the same reason. God can even reshape us when we are “spoiled” into a vessel which may be used by God.

Mark 13, often referred to as the “little Apocalypse,” takes the imagery of God’s appearance on the earth to an even more dramatic plane. In the midst of terrifying omens in the heavens, the “Son of Man” is portrayed as “coming in the clouds with great power and glory.” What follows this second advent is a time of reckoning when the Son of Man will summon the elect from the ends of the earth. Mark 13 does not explicitly describe a scene of judgment, but the parable which concludes Mark 13 clearly assumes such.

What ought we to conclude from this focus on a non-traditional aspect of “advent?” Perhaps the clue is found in the final command of Mark 13, words which are used by Jesus on a number of occasions in instructing his followers: “Be awake!”

That word of instruction reminds us of the challenge of being Advent people. We are called to a consistent pattern of living that demonstrates our awareness of whose “coming” we await. We do not know the timing, but are nonetheless called to a consistent way of life that is always “awake.”

In this Advent season, may we be awake, not only to the way in which God came in the form of the babe, or even in our awareness of that climactic Second Advent, but in the way God comes to us in the form of the “least of these” (Matthew 25). In keeping with the parable of Jesus in Mark 13, we are then fully “woke.”

In preparing for today's devotion, I tried to do a little research into the texts that are listed from Micah and Revelation. I quickly realized that I was the proverbial fish out of water. My appreciation grew for my friends who make their living in a pulpit and those who prepare our students in the area of undergraduate and graduate theological studies. Although I may understand intercollegiate athletics and the complexities of the NCAA, I am not as confident when it comes to searching scripture for hidden meaning!

As anyone who knows Franki and me could tell you, we have been enjoying our roles as Nana and Grandy for the past couple of years. Fortunately, our son and daughter-in-law live close, so we are able to see Bailey, our grandson, on a regular basis.

I could use a number of words to describe Bailey, but a few that would relate in a small way to today's scripture passages would be hopeful, secure, and peaceful. When Bailey visits, he is hopeful that we will take a ride on the "big" tractor to cut grass together. He's hopeful that I'll put him in the backpack while we use the weed eater to trim the yard or that we'll run across a backhoe or another piece of construction equipment on our walks together.

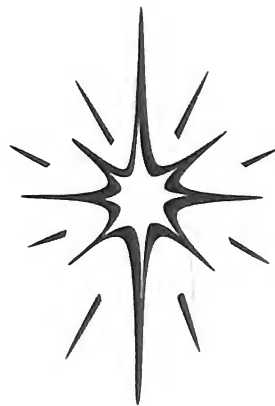
With our children grown and out on their own, it's been awhile since we have had a toddler around and I have been impressed by how secure Bailey is when his parents are there, providing him with the comfort and assurance of their presence. Bailey is a climber; there's

nothing too tall or dangerous, and there's no hesitation in him when he's secure in knowing that "Dada" is watching his every step over a rock or whatever else he may be scaling on that day.

I'm not sure there's anything more peaceful than a young child when he or she is being held after falling asleep. It appears all is well in Bailey's world when he finally settles down and falls asleep in his mother's arms or right after he awakens and wants to cuddle with his Nana.

Thankfully, today's passages in Micah and Revelation do more than promise us a feeling of hope, peace, and security. We have a certainty that exceeds anything that Bailey can feel in our presence. God's promise of hope was not because of an unrealistic or unattainable dream. Instead, it's a hope based upon a God whose promises are sure and never broken. We can celebrate now in preparation for that day when all of our challenges are defeated through the strength of a God who loves us in Christ.

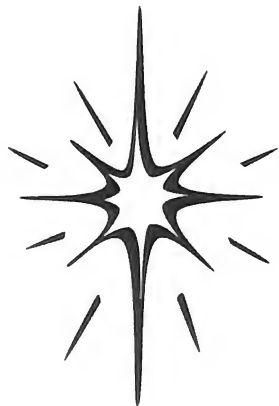
In the coming weeks as we celebrate the Christmas holidays with family and friends, let's celebrate the hope, security, and peace that we have because of the promised birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Let's follow the challenge of Micah 4:5 and "walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever."



Monday,
December 4

Chuck Burch
Vice President for Athletics

Micah 4:1-5
Revelation 15:1-8



Tuesday,
December 5

Aileen Lawrimore
Gardner-Webb University
School of Divinity Student

Micah 4:6-13
Revelation 18:1-10

Lately, I can hardly scroll through the headlines without feeling a sense of despair. It so often seems that we are moving away from the Holy day Micah describes in today's text. We witness the lame and afflicted overwhelmed by the waters of hurricane-borne floods. We see them shut out by institutional systems that deny their worth. We listen as wealthy power-brokers amplify their own significance while diminishing those Micah promises will be redeemed.

It's into this cacophony that John the Revelator calls God's people to turn away from luxury and influence and look to the authority of heaven. I don't know about you, but it seems to me that John has been doing a bit too much stargazing. According to my newsfeed, the winning team is the one with money and power, not the one with poverty and disenfranchisement.

Reading these texts in the context of modern injustices, I listen as Micah speaks of labor pains and John speaks of destruction; I wonder: what will be born of this destruction? What redemption lies on the other side of all this misery and injustice?

Oft-quoted American minister and reformer Theodore Parker (1810-1860) said, "I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, . . . [but] it bends towards justice."¹ That's a lovely sentiment, indeed one of my favorite quotes. But first, does that arc have to be

so ridiculously long and second, what of the arc of pain? Where is it headed?

On December 5, 2016, Judge Clifton Newman declared a mistrial in the case of Michael Slager, the former Charleston, SC, police officer accused of murdering 50-year-old Walter Scott. Judy Scott, Walter's mother, surely stood on the arc of pain when she received the news of the verdict. Yet she strode forward and declared,

Today I'm not sad. And I want you to know why I'm not sad. Because Jesus is on the inside and I know that justice will be served because the God that I serve, he is able. . . . God is my strength and I know without a doubt that he is a just God and injustice will not prevail. . . . I'm just waiting on the Lord. I'm just gonna rest in the Lord. I'm gonna rest in the Lord 'cause you see, . . . there's something about Jesus, when he's on the inside I fear not. . . .²

And as she spoke, the arc of pain bent towards hope, towards righteousness.

Here at the beginning of the Advent season, as we await the coming of King Jesus, hear the good news: labor has begun and Hope will be born. "Cause you see, . . . there's something about Jesus."

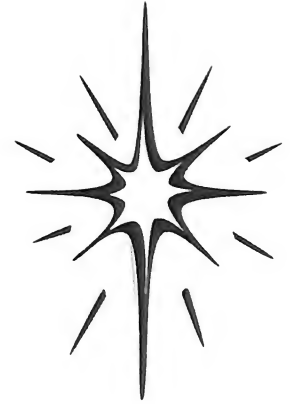
¹ According to his Wikipedia bio, Parker lent words to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and most certainly to Martin Luther King, Jr's "Where Do we Go from Here" speech when King said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."

² www.cnn.com/videos/justice/2016/12/05/walter-scott-family-reaction-slager-mistrial-sot.cnn.

There is a lot of turmoil in the world right now. Every new day brings with it a new threat. Whether that threat is war, white supremacy, political turmoil, or natural disasters, there is trouble in every direction we look, including in our own lives. Some of us are facing sickness, financial troubles, the loss of a loved one, job insecurity, and the list could go on and on. It can easily seem like the walls are closing in and that the enemy is at our gates. However, Christmas is upon us, and with Christmas comes hope. Sometimes that hope can be hard to grab hold of, especially when all we see around us seems so bad.

Our hope is that, through Jesus, all things will be restored. Luke 21 tells us to watch. When everything seems so dark in our world and in our lives, watch for the good of Christ. It is through watching and seeing that we can find the strength to escape whatever enemy has surrounded us. When the threat of war looms, watch for the peacemakers. When a broken group of individuals march to demonstrate their superiority over other human beings, watch for those who stand in their way. When politics seem to divide us and split our relationships right down the middle, watch for what unites us. When natural disasters threaten our friends and neighbors in both our country and neighboring ones, watch for those who open their doors to the stranger and for those seeking to rebuild.

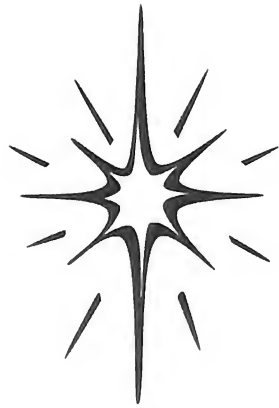
Evil things happen in our world. Evil, however, does not reign. May you watch for and find peace this Christmas season.



Wednesday,
December 6

Will Raybon
Gardner-Webb University
School of Divinity Student

Micah 5:1-5a
Luke 21:34-38



Thursday,
December 7

Zach Emory
Gardner-Webb University
School of Divinity Student

Hosea 6:1-6
Thessalonians 1:2-10

When I was younger, I would often peer intently at the night sky in search of a dazzling light heralding the return of Christ. I expected the vast canvas of stars to be torn asunder and a parade of angels to spill forth, escorting a white-robed Jesus to gather the faithful ones for Heaven.

The season of Advent offers us such an opportunity to gaze vigilantly in both remembrance and anticipation. We celebrate the arrival of God in flesh many years ago in the quaint town of Bethlehem. While reflecting on the First Advent of Christ, we should look forward expectantly to the time at which Christ returns, the moment of God's final consummation of creation and the full realization of the Kingdom.

But should our eyes remain fixed on the heavens, or might we also find Christ elsewhere? It took me some years to understand that Jesus teaches us that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand for those with eyes to see. The Church has been given a tremendous responsibility. The writer of Thessalonians exhorts us to "imitate the Lord . . . and serve the living and true God." Likewise, the prophet Hosea urges, "Let us press on to know the Lord."

The arrival of Christ and our knowledge of God is imminent when we begin to die to ourselves and allow the Spirit of Christ to live within us. Each moment of our lives is an occasion for the return of Christ. When we heed the call of the prophets to

"do justice and love mercy" (Micah 6:8), Christ is resurrected. When we "feed the hungry and clothe the naked" (Matthew 25:35-36), Christ walks the Earth yet again. My prayer is that you and I will indeed anticipate the return of Christ, but that we will be active agents in ushering in the Kingdom of Heaven, rather than mere passive observers. As the prophet declares, the appearance of Christ is indeed as sure as the dawn. Let us search our own hearts as well as the eyes of others for a sign of the Christ. May we be anointed by the Spirit to be models of steadfast love, and may we come into the knowledge of God by imitating Jesus. Christ and the Kingdom comes when we go forth.

I have to admit that people tried to tell Ronna (my wife) and me just how much life was about to change. We listened but did not understand until experiencing it for ourselves. There are midnight feedings. There are dirty diapers. There are bottles to wash, clothes to wash, and sheets to wash, all while trying to maintain a sense of “normalcy” to life.

The truth of the matter is, after a baby is born, life is never the same. Everything changes—and for the better, I might add. Our family has changed with the births of each of our children. The ebb and flow of our home has moved and morphed into something more beautiful than we could ever have imagined. For as many bottles as we washed and as many nights as we took turns staying up, there have been just as many belly-laughs at something one of our children has said and just as many turns of the head as one of them has uttered something prophetically profound.

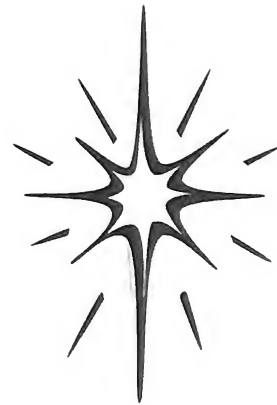
At the moment when each of our children was born I could not help but wonder about the future of the child that rested in my arms. What will this child grow to do? To become? What will he/she proclaim to the world around him/her? These are the thoughts that come to mind and heart when reading today's passage from Jeremiah.

Standing present at the drawing of life's first breath brings a sense of holy wonder, majesty, and glory. The whisper of hope is drawn into the lungs of humanity as life begins anew. God promises to bring

about creative change in the world through Jeremiah. Changes that point the world back to God. Changes that reorient the human life around the call and purposes of God. Changes that announce to all the world that the living and loving God is bringing recreated life into this created world.

Hundreds of years after the life of Jeremiah, there was yet another cry from a baby, and this time it was the sound of God's ultimate recreation. There has never been a birth that so changed the entire world as the birth of Jesus. All of humanity was forever changed at the birth of Jesus. As we read in today's passage from Acts, both Jew and Gentile breathe in deep the air of hope, recreation, and resurrection. Those who have experienced the life changing work of God through the birth of Jesus now live to testify to all the world the good news of recreation.

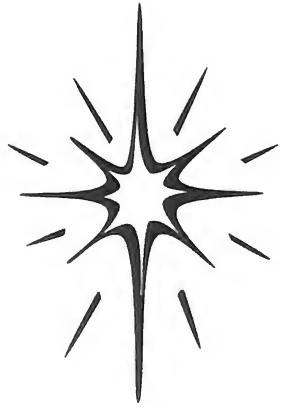
People tried to tell us just how different life would be after the birth of a child. Now having been there, I can tell you it's true. I pray the lives of our children will experience such a change and announce it to the world. May we all experience, announce, and live such change by the power of the Spirit. Amen.



Friday,
December 8

Andrew Rawls
Pastor of
Sandy Run Baptist Church

Jeremiah 1:4-10
Acts 11:19-26



Saturday,
December 9

Scott Shauf
Chair, Department of
Religious Studies and
Philosophy

Ezekiel 36:24-28
Mark 11:27-33

"²⁴ I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. ²⁸ Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God."

When Ezekiel writes these words to the Jews of his day, they have been scattered among the nations as a consequence of invading enemies—but enemies sent by God as judgment for Israel's own unfaithfulness. As Ezekiel provides these words of hope, then, he gives a dual message. Yes, Israel needs relief from the suffering caused by her enemies, needs to be gathered from the far and diverse places to which the people have been exiled, needs to be brought back to the land of their ancestors given by God to be their home. Yes, this will happen! God promises such relief, and the people should hope confidently for it.

But the people of Israel also need relief from their own sins, from the uncleanness for which they have nobody to blame but themselves. They need a new heart and a new spirit. Remarkably, in this passage God's message promises precisely that! "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the

heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (v. 26)! God does not require Israel to get it all together themselves before redeeming them, does not require a self-achieved perfection before restoring them to their homeland. Rather, God's mercy provides everything that is necessary, both the change in their circumstances and the change in themselves.

This is what Christmas is about. God does not wait for humanity to provide a perfect environment before deigning to dwell among us. No, God comes to us while we are still sinners, while we suffer from the problems of the world and from our own deep inner flaws. Through Christ God offers us the indwelling of his Spirit and a heart made new. This is the joy of Christmas.

And yet, we know that in this life such newness remains incomplete. This is the tension of Advent. We know that Christ has come, that in his birth, life, death, and resurrection the conquest of evil, the redemption of humanity has been accomplished. At Christmas we celebrate these things with great joy as we recognize God's great gift to us. But we also know that our world—and we ourselves—are far from perfect. Thus we also look for that next, more glorious, future "Christmas," when our hearts will be made truly pure and we will live completely in God's presence, when we will be his people and he will be our God in ways we can now only imagine.

When people find out that I am a music teacher, they often ask, "What instrument do you play?" I always answer, "It's complicated."

I started playing the violin when I was six. I became a scholarship student at the Cleveland Institute of Music and studied there until college. I knew I loved music, and wanted to perform and teach. Though I learned to play other instruments and sing, the violin was my passion.

I was driven. No impediment would stand in the way of my plan. All I needed to do was work hard. Practice. Practice. Practice.

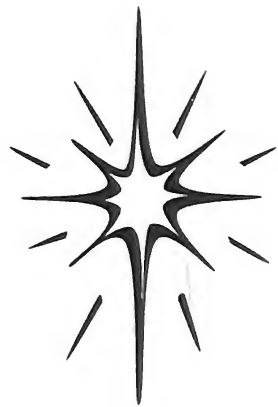
But then, I had to have surgery on my wrist. Nerve damage was done to two of my fingers on my left hand. I would never play the violin again as I had in the past.

Why was God doing this to me? Why would God give me such a wonderful gift, only to take it away from me when I was so close to achieving my goal? I had worked so hard. Was I being punished? What had I done to deserve this?

In 2 Peter 3:14, the Apostle says: "So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with Him."

I was not at peace with God, or His plans for me. I placed my wants, needs, and desires above God's will. When I finally gave over my anger, fears, and uncertainties to God, He helped me understand and use gifts I never knew I had. God was preparing me to help young people navigate a time in their lives that is full of change, and sometimes confusion and discomfort. I am so thankful that I learned to let go and allow the Lord to work in and through my life to serve others.

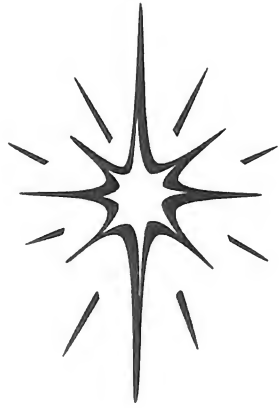
As we prepare for the birth of our Lord Jesus this Advent season, may we give up our selfishness, our stubbornness, and our plans to the Lord so that He might use us for His glory.



Sunday,
December 10

Morgan Soja
Assistant Professor of Music

Isaiah 40:1-11
2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8



Monday,
December 11

Elizabeth Pack
Director of the Degree
Completion Program

Isaiah 26:7-15
Acts 2:37-42

In 1989, I was confronted with the gospel by a customer in a retail store where I was working. It was the Christmas season, and I was restocking batteries for the many toys I was also responsible for managing. I was in “a” Christmas spirit, but not “The” Christmas spirit. If you have ever worked retail during Christmas, you will understand my disposition at the time the woman began to speak. To say the least, I was overwhelmed by her words, to the extent that I took a break. Two years later, I was baptized at Boiling Springs Baptist Church. You could say I was a late bloomer, a reluctant believer. What I came to realize, however, during those two years as I wrestled with those precious words the customer shared with me, is that God is the source.

Isaiah 26 tells us that God is to be recognized as the source of righteousness. “For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness” (v. 9b). Isaiah says that our souls should yearn for God’s righteousness and our spirits should earnestly seek Him (v. 9a).

In Acts 2, Peter told the crowd that Jesus is not only the Messiah on earth but also the heavenly Lord (vv. 34-35). Being “cut to the heart,” they asked Peter what they should do. Peter responded that repentance will lead to forgiveness of their sins and to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the source of

grace, and He freely gives the comfort and power of the Holy Spirit to those who turn from sin and to Him for forgiveness.

Isaiah, in the Old Testament, and Peter, in the New Testament, point us to crucial aspects of our relationship with God. Both tell us we must recognize God as the source of righteousness and forgiveness. God is the source of all that is good in our lives. As Isaiah 26:12 says, “O Lord, you will ordain peace for us, for indeed, all that we have done, you have done for us.” Acts 2:33 says that God is also the source of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who walks with us through the bad times in our lives.

At this time of year, we as Christians focus on Jesus’ coming into the world. He is Emmanuel, God with us. Let us also recognize Him as the source of our lives in this world. Glory be to God.

Let me begin by saying that biblical interpretation is not one of my strengths. But I do my best. On good days I might catch a phrase, or even a single word, that speaks to me or casts new light on a spiritual truth I've heard before.

Both are true for the readings for today. Isaiah 4 begins by speaking of cleansing and letting go; things are being "washed away" and "purged." Then the focus shifts from removal and absence to presence, the arrival of a state of being that's new, sacred and transformative. We hear of the "shining of a flaming fire" as the Lord creates "a tabernacle" that gives "shadow" from the day's heat, a "refuge" from the storms of life. From emptiness comes a profound fulfillment.

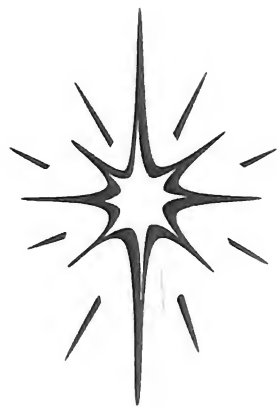
In Acts 11, I see a different dynamic of letting go and transformation in Peter's story of meeting with the Gentiles. The apostles sternly ask him why he shared a meal with Gentiles, people whom they believe are unworthy and outside the love of God.

Peter responds by telling them of his startling encounter with the divine in the city of Joppa. While praying, he said, he had a vision of a large sheet descending from heaven. He then heard a heavenly voice commanding him to arise and dine with a group of Gentiles. But being a dutiful follower of rules, Peter resisted, saying that he is not supposed to eat anything "common" or "unclean." The voice then turned his argument

upside down, saying it is not for us humans to exclude anyone as being "common." God cleanses and loves all.

I love the voice's renegade reminder that we humans sometimes mistake our own attachments to authority—which tend toward narrowness and exclusion—with the powerful, all-embracing love of God. At that moment, Peter finally relented and let go: "What was I, that I could withstand God?" Only when he surrenders his personal attachment to the Law can he truly hear the message of the divine. For the apostles and Peter, the voice transforms the very bedrock of their attitudes about God and His saving grace.

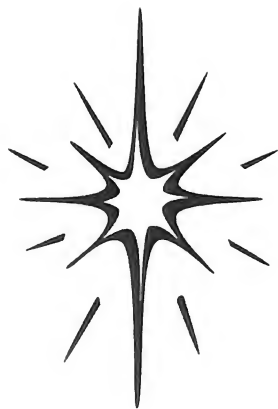
Several years ago, my mother died three weeks before Christmas. Our family grieved, and I knew that the holiday would never feel the same as it once did. During that difficult Advent season, I experienced loss, doubt, and emptiness. Some of what I had believed about life and death simply evaporated. I no longer felt certain about much. I've come to see that as a good thing. I finally had to surrender to a new reality. From that point of zero, I was ripe for a transformation and could experience in new ways the mystery of God's grace. As with Peter, I believe I was right where God wanted me to be.



Tuesday,
December 12

Mary Carlson
Associate Vice President
for Advancement

Isaiah 4:2-6
Acts 11:1-18



Wednesday,
December 13

Timothy Vanderburg
Professor of History

Malachi 2:10-3:1
Luke 1:5-17

A promise, an angel, a child. My wife, Marsha, and I had been married for years and wanted a child. We learned from our physicians that we had about a ten percent chance of having a child. For years praying for a child became a large part of our lives. We ruled out pursuing fertility work and placed adoption in the back of our minds. Eventually we both felt that God had promised us a child. The confirmation of this promise came from events, feelings, conversations, and scripture at key times that gave us a sense that God was working in our lives to become parents. We were delighted when Marsha did get pregnant. Marsha continued to work until one day the promise seemed in jeopardy. While driving home from work, she was in a violent car accident. A transfer truck did not stop and rammed into her at a red light. The force of the collision pushed her into the car in front and to her side. Her car was crushed between the other vehicles. When the motion and noise ceased a state trooper checked on Marsha and moved her to the back of his patrol car. While Marsha waited for the ambulance, a woman who identified herself as a doctor came to check on her. She said she knew that Marsha was pregnant and asked Marsha if she could place her hand on her belly to check on her baby. My wife consented and the woman placed her hand on her belly and pronounced that the child would be fine. She told Marsha she would be in the white van behind her if she needed anything and walked away. While waiting on the ambulance to arrive, Marsha decided to see where the white

van was in case she needed assistance. There was no white van in the line of vehicles behind the accident. No one saw a white van or the "doctor." Other than some bruising, Marsha and our child were fine. A miracle in the days before airbags. The pregnancy progressed and Zachary (Jehovah hath remembered) was born sometime later.

An angel, a promise, a child. In the gospel of Luke, we learn of Zechariah who was a priest of the temple. For years he and his wife Elizabeth prayed for a child. Elizabeth, however, was barren and now they were old. But God heard their prayers and an angel appeared before Zechariah while he was burning incense in the temple. The angel told Zechariah that he would have a son named John who would be great before the Lord, filled with the Holy Spirit, and turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord. Malachi 3:1 states that John would be a "messenger to prepare the way before me" (RSV). John's birth was a fulfillment of a promise God made to Zechariah and fulfillment of prophecy preparing the way for the Messiah.

Waiting (Habakkuk 2:1-5).

Waiting: that frequently torturous space between now and not yet. It is the unfolding of time that connects our anticipations and its fulfillment.

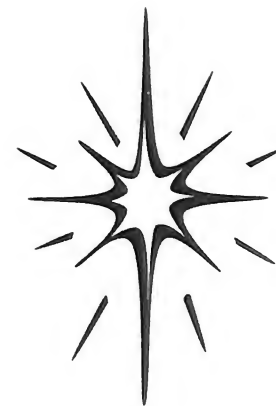
Waiting is a common thread between both the things we longingly hope for and the things we wish away in dread. I think of waiting and I think of traffic jams, the building excitement of soon reconnecting with a friend, hospitals and doctor's offices, and often, living in communion with God. The human mind is drawn to the orderly thinking of linear time. Consequently, to us, a waiting period is simply part of that timeline. It is no more than a transition that must be endured to get from Point A to Point B. In reality, the times in which we feel that we are waiting to hear from God are usually the times in which God is already speaking most loudly.

Habakkuk 2:1-5 gives us a glimpse of a man waiting in his unmet expectations. In the book of Habakkuk, the reader encounters a less than ideal situation. Habakkuk, in a rather accusatory tone, has been engaged with God in a series of complaints and questions. The Babylonians have been a brutal enemy to Judah. As many of us would, Habakkuk has grown tired of this and even more weary of God's seeming failure to defend his people. Often, it is easy to forget that God does

not operate in the confines of our human taste for immediacy. God was working towards justice for the people of Judah, in due time, and encouraged Habakkuk to boldly proclaim this to the people: "The righteous shall live by faith" (v. 4).

This message was for Habakkuk, just as it was for the people of Israel, as it is a reminder we need to hear today. Habakkuk likely wanted to hear a message of immediate and wrathful justice towards the Babylonians. He was probably hoping to soon take a collective sigh of relief with the people of Judah in the face of their enemies. God, however, answered unexpectedly, as answers from God often come. The prophet Habakkuk experienced the exact answer he needed, though not necessarily what he was expecting or hoping for. God spoke Words of Patience, phrases like "Wait for it," and, "The righteous shall live by faith."

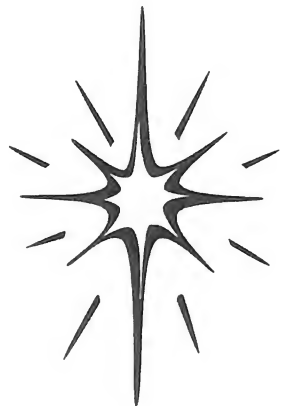
Followers of God are called to wait. Whatever you are waiting for in this season, may your heart be more focused and your ear be more keen to what God is speaking to your life. We are called to patience and trust in the face of the unknown. This is faith: to seek peace, joy, and grace in the waiting time. For the righteous, faith is learning to wait well.



Thursday,
December 14

Savanna Craig
Gardner-Webb University
School of Divinity Student

Habakkuk 2:1-5
Philippians 3:7-11



Friday,
December 15

Bruce Moser
Assistant Professor of Music

Habakkuk 3:2-6
Philippians 3:12-16

There is a whiteboard on our refrigerator with a loving reminder handwritten by my wife: *Tuesday - take out trash and recycling*. I probably see these words no less than a dozen times a day. Last Wednesday, however, I got that sick feeling on my drive home when I saw the line of empty brown and blue bins on our street. Our bins, of course, were sitting peacefully under our carport, full to the brim with enough cat food cans and dirty diapers to make that extra week of festering all the more exciting.

Perhaps the pungent reminder of my forgetfulness will help me remember to take the garbage out next week, but I wouldn't put it past me to forget again.

A student was in my office this week with the same dilemma but in a different guise. How can he remember the important concepts in Music Theory? He's trying to learn them, he said, but they just seem to flit about in his short-term memory and are gone when he needs them. Later that very day, my wife and I had to prepare a list of surgeries our twins had during their NICU stay. At the time of each procedure, nothing in the world was more important to us, yet recalling even half of them just months later turned out to be quite difficult. Why?

As a Music History teacher, I choose certain content to highlight and certain content to gloss over. I decide from a list of musical moments in my own memory—a tiny list compared to the much longer list of moments that have been remembered at all.

How many lectures failed to paint an accurate picture of history due to my poor choices, and much more importantly, how many events integral to our history have already been culturally forgotten?

In his prayer, Habakkuk remembers many events from the history of God's people—all the way back to their deliverance from Egypt. Some of these memories are good, others not so good. In Paul's letter, however, he urges the Philippians to forget what is behind them and focus on what is ahead. Paul is not content with gains from the past; his sight is solely heavenward.

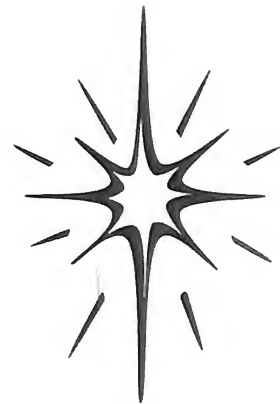
Like Habakkuk, we can find comfort in remembering the blessings from our past while finding guidance from remembering our mistakes. But when memories serve to preserve grudges or withhold forgiveness, perhaps a dose of Paul's advice is in order.

These last few months, our country has been struggling with its own cultural memories—what should we as a country remember, and how should we remember it? Just like the Israelites, some of these memories are good, others not so good. As we remember the birth of our Lord this Advent season, may He help us discern which memories we should never forget to remember, and which ones we should remember to forget.

I don't know what it is about being in the car, me driving, my six-year-old daughter sitting in the back, but something about this situation prompts her to ask challenging questions such as, "Why are people mean?" and "Why does God let people get sick?" She asks these same questions repeatedly, which indicates to me either that I'm not answering them to her satisfaction or that they are difficult questions worth asking again and again. The passage from Habakkuk reminded me of my daughter's questions, which occur to everyone. Why do the "bad" or "wrong" people win? Why does God allow "bad" people to hurt us? Are we being taught a lesson? Suffering, our own and others, commands our full attention, and so it's natural to wonder why, to struggle with these questions. But will we ever know why? And what if focusing on these questions is just a distraction?

I forget how easily something different than suffering can happen, a different story that is an alternative to the struggle between "good" and "bad," the unanswerable why. When I chase after understanding, I forget about blessings. The simplicity of blessings. Faith, for one. A child, for another. The hymn at the end of Habakkuk reminds me to let go of asking why and to rely on faith in the Lord to sustain me, to make me as fast and strong as deer, able to climb to great heights.

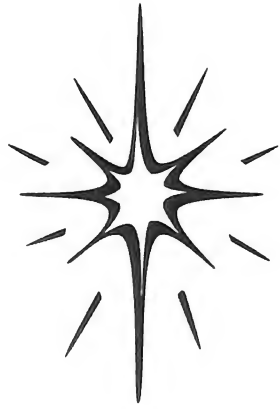
Suffering is unexpected and undeserved but so are blessings. As we go through Advent and prepare for the birth of Jesus, I wonder, were the people of His time expecting Him? Or were they expecting suffering? Were they struggling to understand why the world was such a mess and why God wasn't doing anything about it? And yet, something good and amazing was about to happen. Were they anticipating joy? A blessing, a gift, was given to all, even to those who at first say no but then later change their minds, available even to those we judge as mean or wrong or bad, as the Parable of the Two Sons tells us in Matthew. This blessing is an easy question. All we have to do is answer yes.



Saturday,
December 16

Cheryl Duffus
Associate Professor
of English

Habakkuk 3:13-19
Matthew 21:28-32



Sunday,
December 17

Neal Payne
Associate Minister to the
University for Student
Ministries

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Luke 1:46-55

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Today is the third Sunday of Advent, with the theme being “Joy.” As you notice in our Scripture readings for today, Isaiah and Mary are giving thanks and praising God for who He is and for His righteousness, and for what He has done and will do for the children of Israel. John the Baptist, who rejoices in a different way, points away from himself and to the One who is to come.

When we think of the joy we have experienced ourselves, we (or at least I) often think of times of celebration, the completion of a big task, the end of a difficult time, or the beginning or renewal of a relationship. We may also think of simple, yet profound moments: sitting and holding hands with our spouse on the couch; receiving a genuine “I love you” from our teenage kids; enjoying and being thankful for a really nice meal!

Today, however, we are talking about the joy that occurs from our realization of just how mighty, righteous, merciful, longsuffering, and faithful our God is. It creates joy in us because, like John the Baptist, we recognize we are not worthy even to be in His presence; yet, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!

This joy, not the fleeting imitation the world offers, but true joy that only comes from the Lord, causes us to respond.

Mary responds by glorifying the Lord and rejoicing in God her Savior. It causes us to be grateful and thankful to God and to tell Him that.

John responds by being “the voice of one calling in the wilderness.” He came as a witness to testify about the Messiah and to baptize. This joy therefore causes us to desire for others to know who Jesus is and we are willing to testify about Him.

Isaiah tells us that the Lord’s chosen will respond to His works by working themselves. In 61:4 he says that “They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.” In other words, it causes us to respond to the joy and work of the Lord in every aspect of our lives, including the labor of our hands.

Take a moment today (and every day!) to reflect on and remind yourself of who God is and what He has done for us through sending Christ. That is something, regardless of our circumstances, in which we can always truly rejoice! Remember, “The joy of the LORD is your strength!” (Nehemiah 8:10).

The strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone.

- Henrik Ibsen
Man of the People

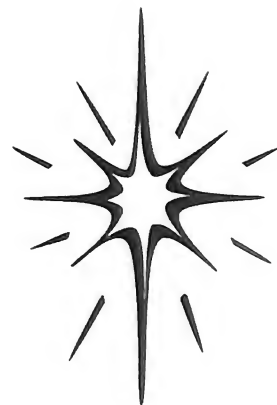
On June 5th, 1989, the world looked on helplessly as Chinese military forces moved in to put down a student protest in Tiananmen Square. All the governments and powers had exhausted their means and could do no more. As the tanks and armored personnel carriers began moving in, a lone man appeared on the scene. Dressed in a plain white shirt and dark pants, he calmly walked out and stood in front of the tanks. The image is stark, a lone man standing against an unstoppable force. He had no chance, but he went anyway. He had only the vaguest hope, but he went anyway. And he lost.

As we face the long dark of Advent we have much more than a vague hope that the light of Christmas is coming; we can rejoice in the knowledge that the Messiah has already come, and is alive again. Even so, we are often forced into situations where we must face the evils of this world alone, for no one else is bold enough, or foolish enough, to face down the insurmountable obstacles. Too often we allow ourselves to take scriptures out of context and convince ourselves that God would never let us fail, that we can face down the tanks and win if God fights with us. In this we forget that Jesus' victory came, not in coming down from the cross, but in

rising from the tomb. And the same is true for us. Though we may be overwhelmed by the forces of this world, our victory is still at hand. Even though we are overwhelmed, we are not overcome.

That young man in Tiananmen Square did not prevail; in fact, no one even knows who he was or what happened to him. He was overwhelmed, but he was not overcome. His victory was won as soon as he stood up, just as ours was won as soon as Jesus stood up out of that tomb. That is what the armor of God is. It is the ability to face impossible odds, knowing that we will fail, because our salvation is at hand. Our salvation may be in this life as it was for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, or we may be asked to face the fire even if our rescue, like Stephen's, lies in the next life.

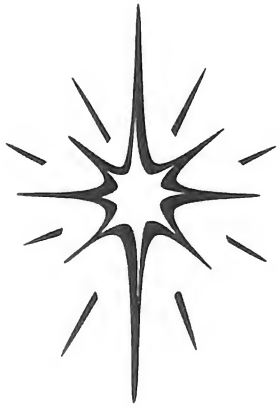
Nevertheless, as winter darkens around us, and hope seems to fall like the leaves, we can cling to the hope that the light has come already. It may be dark now, but Christmas is coming.



*Monday,
December 18*

**Ary Bottoms
Gardner-Webb University
School of Divinity Student**

**1 Kings 18:1-18
Ephesians 6:10-17**



Tuesday,
December 19

David Campbell
Assistant Professor of
Geology

2 Kings 2:9-22
Acts 3:17-4:4

What next?

The Advent season is a time of remembrance and anticipation. We use the prophecies of the Messiah to look forward towards the celebration of Christ's incarnation. But what's next after Christmas, besides cleaning up wrapping paper and paying bills? Both 2 Kings 2:9-22 and Acts 3:17-4:4 record similar times of facing the future after a momentous event closed an era. 2 Kings 2 has Elisha stepping up from assistant to successor of Elijah. Acts 2-3 records Peter becoming a leader in the church after the ascension of Jesus. Both face a daunting task with strong opposition—Peter and John are arrested, and Elisha is about to confront a gang of youths from Bethel, home of Israel's calf idol, in the "Baldylocks and the Two Bears" incident.

Despite these bold beginnings, Elisha and Peter are acutely aware of their own inadequacy. They acknowledge that the work is not of themselves, but of God. Thus, both passages reflect the key role of the Holy Spirit. Elisha requests the Spirit as what he needs most in Elijah's absence. Peter's previous sermon cited the promise of the Holy Spirit. Although the Spirit is not named within Acts 3, the events fulfill the promises about the work of the Spirit in John 16:5-15. But what does it mean to be guided by the Spirit? Not every inclination we might have is of the Spirit. 1 John 4:1 tells us to test the spirits. But this is not a call to inaction unless we feel a special prompting from

God. We should be doing the tasks that God has called us to (such as studying, teaching, and serving), not lounging.

How do we know what God calls us to? Both passages point to the guidance of the past. Elisha was to be in Elijah's place (1 Kings 19:16). Peter cites the fulfillment of prophecy. For both, miracles provide confirmation of the continuity: Elisha parts the Jordan just like Elijah; Peter and John heal the lame beggar, like Jesus' healings. We, too, can confidently move forward if we are firmly grounded in Scripture. Of course, asking properly is part of the issue. We tend to ask "what," but the Bible tells us "why." Instead of containing a secret code that tells me, "Be a paleomalacologist!" what it actually says is how to make decisions ethically and wisely. We are to be creative, making good use of the gifts God has given, but we know what is good through the revelation of the Bible. Peter identifies Jesus as raised by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and as the promised prophet like Moses. We have both opportunity and warning in these promises. The invitation is given to all, including those who previously rejected Jesus, but ultimately we face the consequences of our response.

Thus, in Advent we look forward through Christmas to Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, and on into the present and future, as well as back through the whole history of God's dealings with humanity.

One of my joys in life is to participate in prayer meetings on Wednesday nights at church. We sit around the table, eat supper, and partake of each other's company before prayers and Bible studies are carried out. My friends around the table are twenty plus years older than I but very young in spirit. They combine the best of wisdom and grace. I often wonder why so many persons in the world have such disposition while others are exactly the opposite. Life can be difficult at times but my friends say we are not left unattended, if we tune our ears to hear God, who always seems to redirect our thoughts and invite us toward a way of living that is liberating and rewarding.

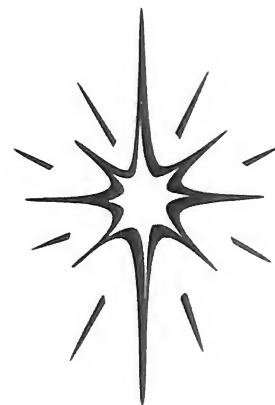
The story in Malachi seems to go in the same direction. People are tired of contemplating why those who are "arrogant" or "evildoers" who have laughter and prosperity while often taking advantage of the meek and weary. It seems so like our world today. How can we nurture wisdom and grace in life when so much around looks dark and corrupt?

It appears that God through Malachi wants to re-direct our thoughts on this and other matters. God sees it all and is a note-taker. One day everything will be crystal clear. The faithful belong to God and will "go out leaping like calves from the stall" (v. 3 NRSV). Only the young in spirit can find joy through hardships. One of my table friends illustrated that for me. So much happened in her

life in such a short time: the death of a husband, letting go of an equipped home, leaving life-long friends behind, adjusting to a new place, and now having to relocate once more. Nothing has taken the joy of her heart, because there is always more to learn, to see, and enjoy in life. She is "leaping like calves from the stall" indeed!

The episode in the Gospel of Mark reinforces the idea that our perceptions are not always clear and need re-direction. The disciples had witnessed the Transfiguration and were wondering if Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Savior. Their minds tricked them. Just as stated in Malachi, their belief was: Elijah had to come first and to their knowledge Elijah had not come yet, but Jesus stated, "Yes, he has come!" (Jesus was referring to John the Baptist as the one who prepared the way for him.) The disciples had to learn a new way of perceiving before they could leap for joy again. Their idea of a Savior had to change from power-hungry to power-giver.

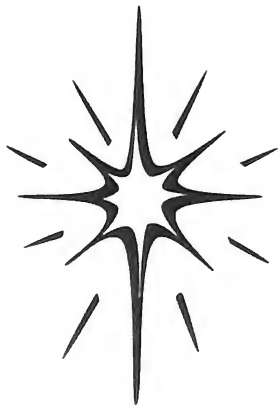
There are five more days before Christmas 2017 gets here. Are we hearing the whisper of God pointing us to a fresh and new reality that changes our thoughts in such a way that we can't help but leap for joy? The invitation is wide open. No RSVP needed. My table friends have said "yes" and so can we.



Wednesday,
December 20

Sophia Steibel
Professor of Christian
Education

Malachi 3:16-4:6
Mark 9:9-13



Thursday,
December 21

Ashley Chapman
Administrative Assistant
School of Psychology

2 Samuel 6:1-11
Hebrews 1:1-4

As far back as I can remember, my family has always been big on traditions. As a child, I saw how important it was for my family to make sure that every year we followed through with at least one tradition. My grandmother was born on December 24th, and it was a given that even though it was the day before Christmas, we dropped what we were doing and celebrated her special day. The older she got, the more demanding she got. We never missed her birthday. She never asked for much: no gifts, no presents, just time spent with family and a birthday cake! I miss her.

I knew one day I may have a family of my own and that I wanted to have a tradition with my kids. Well, thirty plus years later, I have been blessed with two wonderful children, who bring me so much joy, love, and laughter. I had not yet figured out what tradition I could start with my kids that would mean so much to them. One year, a couple of weeks before Christmas, my daughter, maybe around the age of four, and I read the Christmas Story together. While reading, we talked about many things, the birth of Jesus, the three Wise men, Mary and Joseph, for example. One question she asked that stuck in my mind was, "He only got three gifts?" As I continued to explain to her the details, it hit me. This could be the tradition that I start with my daughter and carry on to my son. After the conversation, we wrote out our Christmas list. We only asked for three things, because you see Jesus did not ask for much; all he asked was for us to

accept him into our heart and to love him. That gift is something we can have and show off to everyone we meet and will last forever. Love is far more important than any gift.

The older my kids get, they still surprise me in the best ways. We started doing the Angel Tree, which was my daughter's idea but my son's favorite thing to do. My kids love the fact that they can go buy a gift or two for someone else. Being able to pick out something they like and then giving the gift to someone always brings a smile to their face. I have always told them that it is better to give than to receive. I think they get it.

From that moment and still today, we keep adding new traditions. I love how excited they are when it gets closer to Christmas because they know the traditions start. Just to see them smile is the best. We know we are all so very lucky to have what we have and to be able to share God's love with any and every person we meet; and to know that He will always love us, that has to be the best gift of all.

When you read today's NT lectionary passage, at first glance it's a little confusing. We see the writer of Hebrews quoting several Old Testament passages in regards to who Jesus is to him. When we go back and read Hebrews 1:1-4, however, it not only sheds light on this particular passage, but on the entire book of Hebrews itself. We read "in the past God spoke . . . through prophets . . . at many times . . . in various ways . . . but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son...the exact representation of his being."

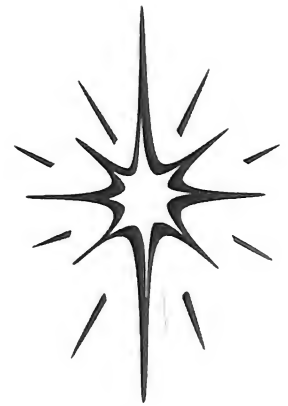
The writer conveys that God revealed himself in all sorts of ways in the past, meaning in the Old Testament (you may have heard of some of them: burning bushes, the sun standing still). Now, the ultimate revelation of what God looks like and who God is can be found in Jesus. Seems simple enough, right? The author of this book goes to great lengths to prove his point. In our lectionary passage for today, we are told Jesus is superior to the angels (Psalm 2:7, 2 Samuel 7:14, Deut. 32:43, Psalm 104:4, and Psalm 45:6-7 are used by the writer as proof). In chapter three, he says Jesus is greater than one of most well-known fathers of the faith: Moses. The writer later says Jesus represents an eternal priesthood in the order of Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18-19). Then he goes on to say that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (13:8).

The author's interpretation of all of these characters, passages, and stories lead to one conclusion: Jesus is greater than _____. If you want to know what God ultimately looks like, look at Jesus. If you want to know what God looks like with skin, look at Jesus. It all points to Jesus, according to the writer of Hebrews.

I desire to have this passion about Jesus. In my life, I long to point to Jesus in how I speak, how I live, and how I love. Yet often, especially during the Advent season, I am easily distracted and pointed elsewhere. Christmas seems to do a better job at pointing us away from Jesus instead of pointing us to Him. What do you think? Do you become burdened wondering how to please all of your friends and family? Perhaps the season is a reminder of painful memories from your past. We all have things that come along and seek to point us away from Jesus.

What are some priorities you need to reset in order to find yourself pointed back in Jesus' direction this advent season? Especially during this time in our country and world, we need to be reminded of why we sing about peace on earth, and joy to the world. The reason the author of Hebrews would give, and I second it, is as follows:

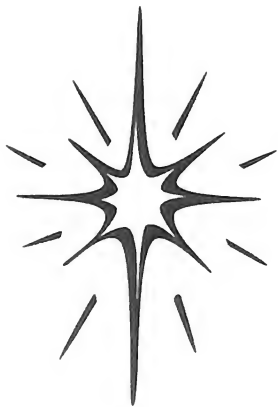
Jesus is what God looks like with skin on. Want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus.



Friday,
December 22

John Miller
Gardner-Webb University
School of Divinity Graduate

2 Samuel 6:12-19
Hebrews 1:5-14



Saturday,
December 23

Marcia Hawkins
Gardner-Webb University
School of Divinity Student

Judges 13:2-24
John 7:40-52

As I reflect on the season of Advent, I think about the love, joy, peace, and hope that I have in Jesus Christ. There was a time in my life when I did not experience this. I was in need of someone to deliver me from the bondage of sin. When Jesus came into my life, he delivered me from the power of darkness and brought me into his marvelous light. The same love that I experienced is still available to each of us today.

Since the creation of humankind, God continues to set us free from the bondage of sin and oppression. In Judges 13:1-24, the Philistines had oppressed Israel for forty years, and Israel was in need of someone to deliver them. The angel of the Lord spoke to Manoah's wife, who was barren and told her that she would conceive and bare a son. Her son, Samson, would be a Nazarite from his birth. He would begin to deliver the Israelites from their oppressors, the Philistines. Samson would not be "The Deliverer," but he would foreshadow the One who was yet to come to be the Savior of the world.

In the Book of John, Israel was still looking for and longing for the long-awaited Messiah that God had promised in His Word. They were looking for the Messiah to come and deliver them from Roman oppression. Yet, in the fullness of time God sent His Son, born of a virgin, to deliver them from the bondage of sin, but many did not recognize Jesus. In John 7:40-52, the people were divided. Some thought Jesus was the

Messiah, while others thought he was a Prophet, and still others, including the religious leaders, did not believe he was either one. Because Jesus did not meet their expectations of who the Messiah should be, they missed their deliverance.

Today, many are still oppressed, hopeless, and burdened with the cares of this world, and they need someone to deliver them. They need to know that Jesus Christ is a burden bearer and can deliver them from their weight of cares. Christ our Deliverer came to set the captives free, to seek and to save those who were lost, and to reconcile them to God. They need to know that God loves and cares for them in spite of their faults and failures, but how will they know unless each of us begins to reflect the love that God has for all people. Will they see the love of Christ in us? What will you do to demonstrate this love? Will you tell them that because God loves them, he has provided for their deliverance from the bondage of sin?

Over two thousand years ago, in Bethlehem Mary gave birth to the Son of God; Jesus Christ, our Deliverer, is God's promised Messiah. The deliverance Samson provided was temporary, but Advent reminds us that the deliverance Jesus provides is everlasting.

According to a reference story on the website of National Geographic (nationalgeographic.com/science/space/dark-matter), one of the most astounding scientific discoveries of the twentieth century was that ordinary matter (also called baryonic matter) makes up less than five percent of the mass of the universe. This ordinary matter is the visible universe and includes the Earth, the sun, other stars, and galaxies. "The rest of the universe appears to be made of a mysterious, invisible substance called dark matter (25 percent) and a force that repels gravity known as dark energy (70 percent)."

Scientists have not observed dark matter directly because it does not interact with ordinary matter. Furthermore, dark matter is invisible to light and other forms of electromagnetic radiation, making it impossible to detect with current instruments. However, "Scientists are confident it exists because of the gravitational effects it appears to have on galaxies and galaxy clusters."

Discovered in the 1990s, dark energy is even more mysterious and was a complete shock to scientists.

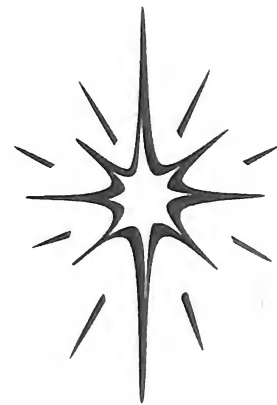
Previously, physicists had assumed that the attractive force of gravity would slow down the expansion of the universe over time. But when two independent teams tried to measure the rate of deceleration, they found that the expansion was actually speeding up. One scientist likened the finding to throwing a set of keys up in the air

expecting them to fall back down—only to see them fly straight up toward the ceiling.

Mysterious. The doxology of Romans 16:25-27 contains none of the elements we typically associate with the Christmas season: no Virgin Mary, no angelic choirs, no tired shepherds, no Magi in quest of a King. In the context of praise, however, the heart of God's purpose in sending Jesus Christ into the world is presented as the revelation of the mystery, one "that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed." Both lowly shepherds and distinguished magi make their way to worship Christ because of the revelation of the mystery.

And so it was with Mary in Luke 1:26-38 when the angel told her she would "conceive and bear a son, and . . . name him Jesus." Mary asked, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born to you will be holy; he will be called Son of God." Mary says, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." This revelation of the mystery.

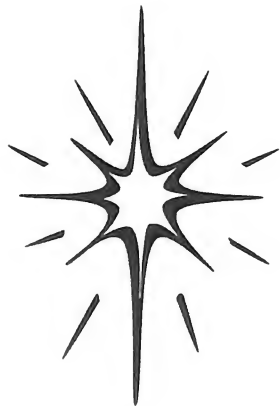
And so it is with us. On this Christmas Eve, we remember the divine revelation of the mystery that not only makes Christmas possible, but also makes possible salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And like the heavenly hosts, we lift our hearts and voices in praise "to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen" (Romans 16:27).



Sunday,
December 24

Tracy Jessup
Vice President for Christian
Life and Service; Senior
Minister to the University

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38



Monday,
December 25

Frank Bonner
President of
Gardner-Webb University

Isaiah 9:2-7
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)

A friend of mine who drove to South Carolina to witness the full eclipse on August 21 described the feeling of awe, and commented that he would have driven five hundred miles to experience it. Many have described the eclipse as an almost spiritual experience, and others stressed a sense of unity with all humankind. Near-total darkness coming rather quickly and then being replaced just as quickly by radiant sunshine brings about a moving experience as well as profound symbolism. Ancient peoples must have been terrified by eclipses—and so would we be, were we not assured that the light would return. But there is a far greater, symbolic assurance of light.

It is no accident that light is prominent in the account of the birth of Jesus—as the glory of the Lord initially terrified the shepherds—and in the prophecy: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (Isaiah 9:2).

Without Jesus, we would indeed live in a land of deep darkness, but we have the assurance of the greatest light—the light of salvation and eternal life. How far would we travel to share it with others?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be a standard notebook page.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be a standard notebook page or a sheet of stationery. There is no handwriting or other markings on the page.

Advent Reflections

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Prayer Requests

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Gardner-Webb University At-a-Glance

- Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University's purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).
- We serve nearly 4,000 students from 40 states and 16 countries.
- A total of five professional schools, two academic schools, and 13 academic departments offer over 80 undergraduate and graduate major fields of study.
- Our 173 full-time faculty (13:1 student-to-faculty ratio) help to foster meaningful dialogue, critical analysis, and spiritual challenge within a diverse community of learning.
- The U.S. News and World Report has ranked Gardner-Webb as one of the Best Universities in the nation positioning it in the top 20% of all universities.
- Recognized as a Doctoral University by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, GWU is one of only six National Universities in the country that reported no classes with more than 50 students in 2015-2016.
- The President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll recognized Gardner-Webb University for the ninth consecutive year for outstanding community service. This national recognition honors our 2,499 students who participated in service-learning or community service opportunities outside of the classroom (for 71,402 hours).
- Gardner-Webb is one of only 25 institutions nationwide to receive an "A" rating for commitment to liberal arts core curriculum standards. 1,100 colleges and universities were studied, and Gardner-Webb placed at the head of the class for the fifth consecutive year in the ACTA study.
- Gardner-Webb was ranked number four in North Carolina for academic quality, affordability, and student experience in online learning by the national Best Colleges organization.
- Gardner-Webb competes in 11 men's and 11 women's sports within NCAA Division I competition as members of the Big South, Southern, and Coastal Collegiate Conferences.

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