



Christmas

AT FIRST BAPTIST GAINESVILLE
ADVENT DEVOTIONAL





Welcome to Advent!

As we enter this season together, we here at First Baptist know these weeks can be full of joyful gatherings, warm traditions, but may also include grief-filled moments of missing loved ones. Through all of it, we invite you into allowing the sacred rhythm of Advent to guide your days leading to the birth of Christ. We hope this book will help you in that process.

Advent is the start of the church calendar and guides us to preparing our spiritual selves to celebrate the advent, or arrival, of Jesus, who was humbly birthed in a manger to two scared young people. Through the busyness of the season, Advent worship is important as each Sunday travels us along the journey of hope, then peace, then joy, and arriving at love, the sole reason God sent his Son.

I invite you and look forward to being with you at the many opportunities for worship and community offered here at FBC this Christmas season. From my family to yours, I wish you a Merry Christmas!

With Love,
Pastor Tony





Closing the Distance: An Advent Reflection

Pastor Christopher

Throughout the Old Testament, God can seem distant and cold. He primarily operates through messengers giving his commands to his people. When they do approach God's presence death comes to any who arrive with anything less than perfection. Sacrifices and prayer are always at the forefront to keep the holiness of God from destroying the sinfulness of those he interacts with. Even the prophets and priests are held to the highest standards of ritual purity and holiness before they can approach God. The might and power of God is shown to be so great that even the best of the best cannot ever quite be good enough. The greatest kings fall into sinful destruction and the wisest prophets still stagger at the finish line. God is so great that pleasing him seems impossible. He appears remote and distant from day to day worries. Many back then and today struggle with this seemingly distant God. The hike to reach him appears to be impossibly difficult.

Advent is God's answer to this distance. Jesus Christ comes and lives among us as a human being. He takes on the frail, mortal body of a baby in order for that distance to be crossed not with us going up but him coming down. When the adult Jesus interacts with people, he touches them and heals them. He loves them where they are and understands their problems. The great reveal is that God is not distant because he is cold and does not want to be around us. The truth is that God loves us and wishes to be close to us. Jesus' birth is the beginning of God's master plan to defeat sin and death and bring us into life with himself. At his birth his first title is Emmanuel: God is with us. Light has come into the world and the darkness cannot stand against him.

As we celebrate Advent, remember that God is nearer to us than our own breath. Jesus has made the way forward. We have access to God through his work on the cross. We have a God who loves us and is working his good will in our lives. Amen.



CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

December 24
5:30 PM: Sanctuary

WHAT THE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE MEANS TO ME LEANNE VANLANDINGHAM

During the holidays, families have traditions that represent what is important in their lives. Christmas Eve Service is something Jason and I attended with our families growing up, and we have continued this meaningful tradition with our own children. Christmas Eve candlelight service celebrates this monumental time in our history and in our faith. Attending as a family re-centers the true meaning of Christmas amidst the chaos of secular activities. It's a time for us to remember that, "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given" (Luke 2:6). I walk away each year with a sense of hope, peace and love as we celebrate Christmas and begin a new year. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Merry Christmas!



LIVING CHRISTMAS TREE



What the LCT Means to Me

Ken deVries

I well-remember being awestruck when I first walked into the Sanctuary to help Jerry Johnson, Richard Weaver and others begin building the Living Christmas Tree. And how, with the concerted effort of the many experienced volunteers, it quickly went up! Many brought their own tools and ran the gamut of skill sets, from professionals to learners like me. It's a hard-hat area under and around the tree, with falling nuts and bolts, but thank God I know of no injuries. It's been heart-warming to look out in the Sanctuary during construction and occasionally see folks watching it all come together.

This is my 7th year to help build the tree and then sing in it. The music program under Mark Green is what drew us in. After Lynn and I married July 1, 2016 we initially planned to visit at least 3 churches in the area before choosing one. But after being welcomed by so many, hearing the traditional choir and orchestra, and Christ-centered sermons, we decided we'd found our church home! The music ministry and pastoral staff who lead us every week have all inspired us to want to be a part of this dynamic ministry. Thank you, First Baptist Church, for being our spiritual home these past 9 years.

PERFORMANCES:

December 11

7:30 PM

December 12

7:30 PM

December 13

4:30 PM

December 14

4:00 PM & 6:30 PM

SCAN HERE



Request Tickets

THIS IS CHRISTMAS!

LeAnne Richardson

As this season begins, I welcome it with open, loving arms—grateful for the true meaning of Christmas—yet carrying the deep ache of the greatest void: my Mom’s absence in body. Mom and I celebrated Christmas in the most meaningful way, giving our time to rehearsing and sharing the message of love through song with our community and beyond. The Living Christmas Tree was the start of the season for us, a tradition that wrapped our family in joy, purpose, and togetherness.



Mom and I often discussed how we appreciated the warm feeling that we received every year in September when practice began, the love that we felt in the choir room, and the blessing that we witnessed through every single performance! Mom and I have been a part of this ministry for 20+ years. She only missed two years from my recollection. If you ever asked Mom about her love for the Living Christmas Tree, her response was always “THIS IS CHRISTMAS.” The more mature and wise that I have become over the years, I too agree with her that THIS IS CHRISTMAS! No running around in search of the perfect material gift to buy, no fighting the crowds for the sales, no stress of being spread too thin, no anxiety around the comparison in items given or received...simply sharing the Gift of Jesus through dedication and passion for His love for us!

At high school age, Mom began serving at her home church, First Baptist Church Flowery Branch, as their pianist. She served for 25+ years. This was when Flowery Branch was barely a dot on the map and was just a sweet little country town. As a child, I remember every Wednesday night going to my grandparents for “supper” and Dad and I visiting with them while Mom went to choir practice. Every Sunday, we packed a bag with a change of clothes, left early for church so Mom could warm up, sat on the same pew for years with my grandparents, and had family lunch after church every single Sunday. Mom always had a heart for music and loved to share joy through music with others.

As I reflect on the Living Christmas Tree, especially this year, I treasure the years that Mom and I were able and blessed to enjoy this ministry together. I loved nothing more than witnessing her excitement when she received her music binder in September! It brought her such joy to be doing what she loved and I always looked forward to this cherished time together. When I think back to years past, I can still see our family sharing a pew to witness the message of “The Gifts We Give,” “Look to the Light,” and “God with Us, Emmanuel,” just to name a few. Even though Mom and our loved ones now worship in heaven, their memories linger tenderly here with me. Christmas was their joy as much as mine, and the moments we shared remain the sweetest highlights of the season.

Whether you are joining me in a season of changing family traditions due to the loss of a loved one, the darkest grief of the unexpected health diagnosis, job loss, addiction, infertility, financial instability, marital challenges, or in a season of waiting, I remind you that you are not alone. Matthew 1:23 is our reminder that “God is with us.” Even in our grief, even in our longing, even in the memories that fill this season with both joy and ache—He is with us.

I encourage you to pause and know that “THIS IS CHRISTMAS.” Advent reminds us that even in our darkest seasons, there is hope. Christmas is the promise that Light stepped into our world—Emmanuel, God with us. When life feels heavy or grief draws near, we remember that Christ came to give us more than comfort for today; He came to give us eternal life. Because of Jesus, we live with the assurance that heaven is real, death is defeated, and our loved ones in Christ now worship in glory. This is the unshakable hope of Christmas – a hope that no darkness can overcome. I rejoice in knowing that this year, Mom is singing from the top of the Heavenly choir, joining the angels in praise.

Lord Jesus, Light of the world, thank You for coming near to us. In this season, remind our hearts that because of Your birth, Your cross, and Your resurrection, we have a hope that death cannot touch. Strengthen us with the promise of heaven and the gift of eternal life. Be with us in our longing, comfort us in our grief, and fill us with Your peace as we wait for Your coming again. Amen.



THE ADVENT WREATH



Each Advent, our Flower Committee prepares the wreaths used in our Chapel and Sanctuary services. These wreaths are lovingly handcrafted from fresh greenery—much of it gathered from members' own yards—and arranged around the four Advent candles. Their quiet work helps create a beautiful, worshipful space for this season.

WHAT IS AN ADVENT WREATH?

The Advent wreath is a traditional symbol used by Christians to prepare their hearts for the coming of Christ. Its circular shape—without beginning or end—reminds us of God's eternal love. The fresh greenery symbolizes hope and the everlasting life we have in Christ.



HOW WE USE IT IN WORSHIP

Each Sunday of Advent, a different family from our congregation is invited to light the candles during worship.

- Hope
- Peace
- Joy
- Love

With each candle that is lit, the light grows brighter, reminding us that the coming of Christ brings light into a dark world. On Christmas Eve, the Christ Candle is lit, celebrating the birth of Jesus, the Light of the World.

Through the artistry of our Flower Committee and the participation of our families, the Advent wreath becomes a living symbol of our shared faith—guiding us with hope, peace, joy, and love as we journey toward Christmas.



Take Hope

Rhonda Thompson



HOPE, as defined by the Webster dictionary, is to cherish a desire with anticipation or to expect (something or someone) with confidence; to expect, to hope, to look, to await an occurrence or an outcome. So, what are you hoping for right now? School to be out, things to take place or be different, healing or a cure, a new baby or grandbaby, a visit, or a phone call.

As we light the Candle of HOPE during this first week of Advent, may we shift our focus, not on our circumstances, but a confident expectation of God's faithfulness, looking forward to His promises fulfilled. It is a time to prepare room in our lives for the coming of Jesus, the light of the world and for the time when Christ will return, our ultimate HOPE.

Living in hopefulness is about perspective. Our point of view, our way of looking makes a difference. When we look down, our view is limited. We begin to feel overwhelmed by the tensions of life. Turn your head, take your eyes off this earth, and look up. See that your all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving God is in control, and he cares for you. TAKE HOPE.

You have heard about runners "hitting the wall." Runners in life's race often "hit the wall" as well. Struggling with setbacks and sorrows, you can feel like giving in or giving up. That is when you need to look ahead to your goal. God has a future for you. In faith look ahead, trusting in his goodness and love. TAKE HOPE.

Every day for me brings fresh reminders of my mortality: the slower step, the aches, the glasses, the hearing aids, and pills! But I am reminded there is a greater reality – this life is not all there is. Beyond the grave is another life for the believer – life with God. May we look beyond. God promises eternal life to all who belong to him. TAKE HOPE.

Look Up – Look Ahead – Look Beyond, until "a thrill of HOPE, the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!!"

*Those who HOPE in the Lord will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles... (Isaiah 40:31)*



A Prayer for Peace

Adam Koskovich



Gracious God,

In this holy season of Advent, we come longing for Your peace. Our world is restless, our hearts are hurried, and our minds are pulled in many directions. But You, O Lord, speak stillness into our lives.

As we light the Candle of Peace, calm the noise within us.
Quiet our fears.
Heal the places that feel divided or weary.
Teach us to trust in Your presence more than our own understanding.

Prince of Peace, draw near to every home, every hurting heart, and every corner of our community. Make us peacemakers—gentle in spirit, courageous in compassion, and faithful in hope.

Let Your peace, which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and guide our steps.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Bring Your peace to us and through us.
Amen.





Joy! Lynn Fletcher

“But the angel said to them, “do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people.”
(Luke 2:10) (NIV)



When I was a child, and especially during my teen years, my very wise mother helped me to understand the difference between happiness and joy. Rather than allowing me to have my very own pity party over a hurt or a disappointment, Mother simply handed me a sheet of paper and a pencil and told me to sit quietly and make a list of all the good things, the blessings, in my life. Her reason for the exercise, as she explained, was for me to realize that sadness and disappointment were only temporary and would never take away or diminish our true joy that comes only from Jesus and His blessings. But, at a time when I felt like my life was ruined, all I could think about was wanting a miracle cure for my situation. I was not interested in anything except getting what I wanted and restoring my happiness. I had many such opportunities to make my lists of blessings and to learn this lesson. Each time, I obediently carried out my mother’s directions, but always believed it to be a punishment, not a learning experience.

As an adult, I have experienced the heartache of loss, and the hurts, fears, and disappointments that are all a part of life. I have felt the emotional sadness that accompanies each situation and that is often overwhelming. But, interestingly, at some point, I began to notice that after an initial reaction of sadness to a specific situation, my thoughts turned to the things that were still good in my life—my blessings. In fact, I realized that I was actually looking for the good in every circumstance. It seems that all those waste-of-time exercises were working after all! My Mother knew that I needed to understand that sometimes we have to be intentional about finding the joy in the midst of our sadness, and just maybe, looking for joy will become a habit, an automatic response.

On that starry night so many years ago, the angels told the shepherds that Jesus, the true source of joy for all people, had been born. I am thankful that my Mother knew Jesus and the joy that can only be found in Him. And I am grateful that she taught me, through her words and her joy-filled example, that even in my deepest sorrows, JOY is always present.



Light!

Pastor Kellie

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.” (Isaiah 9:2)

Light. We are fascinated with it. We look with awe at the countless dots glowing in the night sky and are captivated by the sunlight coming through the tree branches. When I was a child, I used to take off my glasses when I looked at the Christmas tree lights so I could see the soft “warm and fuzzy glow.” It looked as though there were tiny sparkling jewels of light all around the Christmas tree.

As Christians, we understand light isn't confined to Christmas trees or nature ... light is a very powerful symbol representing God's presence, truth and goodness. During the four weeks of Advent, we light the candles on the wreath representing the values of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. On Christmas Eve, we light the fifth candle representing Christ the Light of the World. Christians are called to be “people of light” (Matthew 5:14) to live in a way that reflects God's grace and goodness and truth. Our actions and interactions are meant to glorify God so light is, in fact, our very calling. Henri Nouwen described "people of light" as, “People” who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it. They claim that the light that shines in the darkness can be trusted more than the darkness itself and that a little bit of light can dispel a lot of darkness. They point each other to flashes of light here and there, and remind each other that they reveal the hidden but real presence of God.”

How can we actually “Be the Light”?

We can actively be the light and make the world a brighter place by doing our best to love others and live each day purposefully and in a manner that is pleasing to God. Show kindness and compassion to ourselves and others. Lift others up and find ways to be encouraging with words or actions. Do you know someone who needs to feel loved or encouraged today? Write an encouraging note or text or better yet call them.

Make your home a "place of light": Foster a welcoming and loving atmosphere where you treat each other with kindness, show forgiveness, and practice gratitude. Play a game, read a Christmas story, spend time as a family. Light a candle before dinner and pray reflecting on the Advent values of hope, peace, love and joy or pray for someone who may be having a difficult time this season or a family member who is far away.



Give children and teens practical ways to shine: Encourage them to serve or help others. Involve them in service projects no matter how small. Let them help plan the project to foster creativity and a sense of purpose. Go caroling at a nursing home, bake and decorate cookies to give to someone, pick out and wrap a toy for a toy drive etc.



Point out and acknowledge “flashes of light”: or times when you see others doing something good like helping another person, holding the door open, showing respect, being patient or letting someone else go in front of them while waiting in line. In this busy season we can tend to focus on ourselves and our needs. Being the light means focusing on others and their needs and reflecting the love of Christ.

Explore light itself: Use simple tools like glow sticks or flashlights to teach your children or grandchildren about how light shines in the darkness. This can be a great opportunity to discuss concepts like shadows and reflections, and to introduce concepts from bible verses like Matthew 5:16 or John 8:12. Bringing light into the darkness can help guide others to good things and help point others to Jesus.

Talk about their calling: Help children and teens understand they have specific gifts and callings, even in small, everyday things like obeying parents, sharing or being kind to others, standing up for what’s right and modeling integrity through their actions. Empower teens to be leaders giving them opportunities to teach or mentor younger children.

Give thanks even during life’s challenges: At Christmastime we remember that Jesus came to earth to bring light to the world and the light of Jesus shines even when things are dark and difficult. Being grateful during life’s challenges can be hard...but it can also lead to a deeper relationship between you and God. God is always by your side even during the most challenging times. The next time you are feeling lonely or disheartened, take the time to write a list of things or people to feel thankful to God for.



Love

Jack and C.J. Wehmiller



Love Never Fails
God Is Love

We have heard these sayings from the pulpit and in Bible Studies our entire lives, and we believe them to be true. So there is no time like the Advent Season to ponder them.

But what does love look like? It can take on many forms.

It can look like a new puppy.

It can look like fixing your spouse a cup of tea every night.

It can look like taking the kids for a walk, giving your spouse a break.

It can look like taking flowers and a meal to a sick friend.

It can look like donating an organ to someone you have never met.

It can look like forgiving someone who has hurt you.

But love, in its purest form, is God sending His son to the earth to rescue us. He is our example as we try to love others as God loves us.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

This is truly the love that never fails.

This is truly the love we can always count on.

This is truly the love that always wins.

Amen



WHAT CHRISTMAS MEANS TO ME AFTER SERVING AT THE HALL COUNTY CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTE (HCCI) BY JIMMY MCGOWAN

It is not Christmas until I have shaken the hands of all 100+ convicted felons at Hall County Correctional Institute (HCCI) and wished each man a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. First Baptist Church Gainesville (FBCG) continues to conduct a Christmas celebration at HCCI as it has done for over 40 years. In recent years, leading the FBCG prison Christmas celebration at HCCI has reshaped my understanding of Christmas in ways I could never have anticipated. Each visit behind those gates, each handshake, each Christmas carol sung in a concrete-walled room has slowly peeled back the layers of what I once assumed Christmas was about, revealing instead what it has always truly been: the relentless, boundary-breaking love of God. A God who sent His Son into this world to die on a cross to save us from our sins.



I have learned that Christmas is not defined by where we celebrate, but by whom we bring with us into the celebration. Each year, when we stand before the inmates and speak the same message of hope that we share from the pulpit, I am confronted with the beautiful truth that Christ's birth was for them just as much as for anyone sitting in a pew on Sunday morning. And somehow, when we sing "Joy to the World" together, surrounded by razor wire and cinderblock, the joy feels purer—born not from circumstance but from the stubborn promise that Emmanuel, God with us, truly means with all of us.

Leading these celebrations has taught me that Christmas is, at its core, a story of light entering darkness—any darkness. In that prison, I have seen light spark in places the world prefers to ignore. I have watched hope flicker in hearts that thought they had been forgotten. And I have felt my own faith deepened as Christ's message becomes clearer: no place is beyond His reach.

What moves me most is the transformation I witness in those gathered men when they realize they are seen—not as case numbers or sentences—but as souls created in God's image. For many, our presence is the only Christmas gift they receive, and year after year they remind me that presence is more powerful than any present. The simple act of showing up becomes an offering. The exchange of smiles becomes communion. And the message of God's redeeming love becomes not a theological concept but a lived reality.



Join us on Tuesday, December 16 at 4:00 PM in the Banquet Hall Hallway to bring a dessert and/or prepare Christmas sandwiches for the HCCI inmates. We will travel to HCCI at 5:00 PM to conduct our Christmas Program and serve the meal. Contact Jimmy McGowan to sign up or for more information at 678-485-1942 or jem@sterileworks.com.



Family Christmas Program

DECEMBER 7 – 11:00 AM WORSHIP SERVICE

The Music Ministry is buzzing with Christmas activity... That's right; preparations begin months ahead of time for all our musicians, from preschoolers through adults! Sunday, December 7th at 11:00 AM is the annual Family Christmas Worship. This is always a celebrative kickoff to the Christmas/Advent season. All three children's choirs, preschool through fifth grades, are working weekly on the music each of their groups will sing. In addition, the Children's Beginning Handchime Choir will ring for the first time this year.



The Sonlight Youth Choir will present two great anthems – “Do You Hear What I Hear?” and “The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy.” The Sanctuary Ringers (adults) will also play an arrangement of a traditional carol.

This is a festive occasion you will not want to miss as we begin the absolutely most wonderful time of the year at First Baptist Gainesville!



Children's Ministry



What is the best gift you have ever given to anyone?

I made a necklace for my sister.
Wilkes, Age 7

Who in your family is most excited about Christmas?

My dog Maggie because she runs around the Christmas tree knocking off the ornaments.

Lyla Kate, Age 8

ME!

Carolyn, Age 7

What is your favorite Christmas Tradition ?

Riding around town looking at Christmas lights.

Collins, Age 7

Baking Cookies with my sister.

Virginia, Age 8

Who from the Nativity Story would you invite to dinner?

JESUS!

Caroline Grace, Age 5

What is one thing that puts you in the Christmas Spirit?

My Mom and Dad
Durham, Age 8



Children's Devotional

Ok, FBC Kids, let's talk about Advent. The word Advent means “preparing or coming.” But what are we preparing for? What or who is coming? Spoiler alert...SANTA CLAUS is NOT the answer I’m looking for! Advent is preparing for the birth of Jesus!

Think about all of the work you do to prepare for your birthday party or a trip to the beach or the first football game or dance recital. All of that takes a lot of planning. You make lists of people you want to come to your party. You make lists of things you want to do on vacation. You go to practice for weeks and weeks preparing for your game or performance. You think about it a lot. You talk to your families about it...a lot. When the big day finally comes, you are so excited and you have a great time doing whatever it is...as you should! You have been looking forward to this! But, this is not how we should prepare for the birth of Jesus. YES, we should be excited, but there is something else we need to do.

We need to prepare our hearts for the birth of Jesus. We need to prepare our hearts for the birth of the baby who will grow up and die on a cross to take away our sins. We need to prepare our hearts to live our lives like Jesus taught us to. We need to be willing to give joy to others rather than only expect joy for ourselves. But you know what? That is not going to be very hard for you. You are already doing it! You ALL know what the birth of Jesus did for you and for all of those that accept Him into their hearts. You show me and your families that you know by the kind things you do for others and the way you participate in Sunday School, worship, choir, and missions. You show us by showing up!

I am very proud of how hard you work to learn about Jesus. It shows! You are very prepared!

Merry Christmas FBC Kids! I love you all very much!
Elizabeth Wiley





Preparation Elizabeth Wiley



Over the next few weeks, we will spend a lot of time “preparing.” There is the preparation of our houses. Decorations will be placed on every surface and in every window. Some may even spill out onto the lawn! Our kitchens will certainly be a place of preparation. Sweets, treats and savory items that fall into the “once-a-year” category...all which will be consumed with and by those we love. In all likelihood, we have been preparing our bank accounts for this season since July!

We are filled with the anticipation of that feeling we have when the preparation is done and we can enjoy the fruits of our labor. It is a lot of hard work. We will completely work ourselves to the bone at the risk of being too exhausted to even enjoy it. Don't get me wrong...I wear myself out doing all of these things, as I am sure you do, too. But, when we step back and think, is all of this preparation what was spoken about in Isaiah?

“Prepare a road for the Lord through the wilderness, clear a highway across the desert for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain and hill brought down;

The rugged place shall be made smooth and mountain ranges become a plain.
(Isaiah 40:3-4)”

I'm also not sure the preparations in Isaiah would be any easier to accomplish. In reality, preparing our hearts for Jesus can be an insurmountable task (much like lifting up mountains and making rough places smooth.) The fact that God's Son was born in the simplest, most undecorated place on the planet lets us know that it all might be a little over-the-top...but it sure is fun!

During this Advent season, remember that the preparing of our hearts and minds for the birth of Christ is what God means for us to do...even if it is in front of our beautifully adorned Christmas tree.

“Heavenly Father, help us to remember that our hearts and minds should be focused on the coming of your Son this Advent season. Let us not be distracted. Let us rejoice and celebrate preparing our hearts as much as we do our homes. Let us prepare a way for Him. Amen”



Much More Than a Baby

Susan Eernisse



The older children's choir had begun rehearsals for the anthem they would be singing in the annual Living Christmas Tree. The children loved the rhythm and energy of "Tiny Little Baby"*. I decided to talk about the song's meaning and the baby it described: "Jesus was the baby born in Bethlehem." This, of course, was old news to most of the children. But then I said, "We'll be singing this song right after the baby playing the role of Jesus appears in the program." Wide-eyed with disbelief, one boy, jumped up and exclaimed, "Wait! What? There's a real baby???"

That little outburst pretty much ended any hope of continuing the rehearsal as I explained that indeed we would have a real baby, and that the baby would be born in the next few days. This amped up the enthusiasm and created quite the buzz over the impending birth of First Baptist's tiny little baby. Four days later, the baby was born indeed – not in Bethlehem, but in Atlanta. And he didn't go from the hospital to Egypt or even Nazareth, but to Flowery Branch!

The eager expectation of these modern-day children harkens back to the first century as the people of Israel had long awaited the promised Messiah. Prophets had foretold his coming and everyone waited in hopeful anticipation for the Child, a King who would come and save them.

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah...from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. (Micah 5:2)

There has long been a fascination with Jesus, the baby. Most of us fell in love with that baby long before we fully understood the implication of Immanuel, God with Us. Jesus was to be our Savior, the Prince of Peace. But his reign would come at a high cost that we could not comprehend as children, and still struggle to understand as adults. From his birth to a childhood in Nazareth, to his baptism and subsequent temptation, to countless miles of teaching and preaching, to his ultimate death on a cross leading to the incredible joy of Resurrection Sunday...we began to fall in love with Jesus on an entirely different level. Then and now, there are those who would rather leave the tiny little baby right there in Bethlehem as a lovely vision, a children's tale, something mysterious and timeless. But as wonderful and amazing as babies are, Jesus was to become so much more.



For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

Isaiah's prophecy was more than just a promise. The angels' message was more than a song. The shepherds found more than a baby. May we never outgrow the story of Jesus, the tiny little baby born in Bethlehem, nor Jesus, the Savior born in our hearts anew this Christmas.



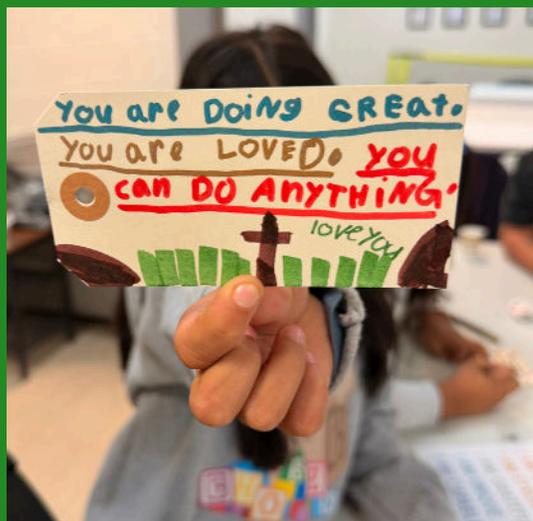
*Tiny Little Baby, words & music by Tom Eggleston;
arr. Sean Paul; Daybreak Music, 2024.

PROMISING FUTURES: COMPASSION

MONICA RAMIREZ LEON



At Promising Futures, our students are learning what it truly means to celebrate Christmas with compassion. This year's mission focus invited them to look beyond the gifts they might receive and instead think about what they could give. Together, we explored the joy of donating to others in meaningful and practical ways—especially to young moms, ages 18–24, who are experiencing homelessness while raising their children. Through this project our kids learned that even small acts of kindness can make a big difference.



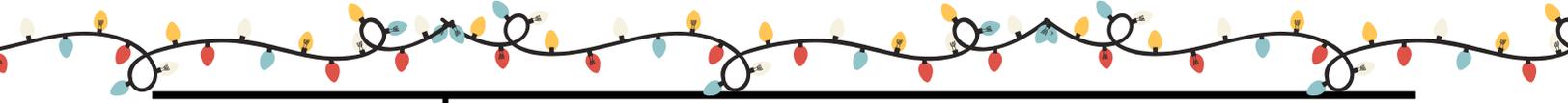
Promising Futures collected reusable grocery bags, baby wipes, and blankets for these young mothers through a partnership with Hope Thru Soap, a nonprofit serving the homeless community throughout the greater Atlanta area. Once the donations were gathered, the students helped add a personal and heartfelt touch to the project.



To do this, the kids created “Encouragement Tags.” They selected uplifting affirmations, wrote them by hand on small tags, and decorated them with care. Each tag carries a message of hope, strength, and encouragement to accompany the donated items. Through this activity, our students learned that compassion isn't just about giving things—it's about giving love, dignity, and a piece of your heart to someone who needs it most.

CALENDAR

DECEMBER 2025



07

FAMILY CHRISTMAS PROGRAM
11:00 AM WORSHIP SERVICE

07

CHRISTMAS ON GREEN ST
2:00 PM: PETTING ZOO, KONA
ICE, HOT CHOCOLATE

11-14

LIVING CHRISTMAS TREE

24

CANDLELIGHT SERVICE
5:30 PM: SANCTUARY

28

UNIFIED FAMILY WORSHIP
11:00 AM: SANCTUARY



Advent Word Search

Find the hidden Advent words.

C A L E N D A R U C D C
H X E P N E L N C A A O
R M W H G C V A E N R U
I I Y W R E A T H D P N
S D E M I M U I E L A T
T N A T N B B V B E R D
M I R E I E A I R S T O
A G F O U R L T A Y Y W
S H S U N D A Y T I O N
K T R A E I O F E R I S
C H U R C H O C R O W N
C H O C O L A T E N E L

SUNDAY

FOUR

CHURCH

CROWN

CHOCOLATE

NATIVITY

DECEMBER

WREATH

COUNTDOWN

CALENDAR

CHRISTMAS

CANDLES



ADVENT Challenge



| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| Pray for a Missionary or Mission Partner | Wear an Ugly Christmas Sweater | Invite Someone to Church | Share a Photo of a Favorite Christmas Memory | Let Someone Go Ahead of You in Line |
| Take a one day social media break | Thank a church volunteer or staff member | Donate socks or blankets to a shelter | Share one way you have experienced God's love today | Thank a caregiver: nurse, teacher, EMT |
| Listen to Christmas Music | Go for a drive and look at Christmas Lights |  | Leave a cheerful note for someone | Read the Christmas Story (Luke 2) |
| Call or Text someone you haven't talked to in a while | Send a Christmas card to someone who may be lonely or Grieving at Christmas | Watch a favorite Christmas Movie with family or a friend | Read a Christmas book or Devotional | Bake cookies for someone |
| Leave a generous tip for someone | Do something that brings you joy | Share a favorite bible verse | Light Advent Candles | Attend a Living Christmas Tree Performance |



Kolachy Cookies



Recipe provided
by Jan Hensley

These Kolachy Cookies are delicious.

Prep Time - 20 minutes

Cook Time - 15 minutes

18 Cookies

Ingredients:

3 oz cream cheese

4 oz unsalted butter (4oz = 1 stick)

1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups all purpose flour plain flour

6 tablespoon jam (choose flavors of your choice, see notes)

1 teaspoon confectioner's sugar (for dusting, approx) icing sugar

Instructions:

Cream together the cream cheese and butter until smooth and slightly fluffy. Mix in the flour, around a third to half at a time, until combined. Form into a ball, wrap with cling wrap/film and refrigerate overnight (or at least a couple hours).

When ready to bake:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Roll out the dough on a lightly floured surface into a relatively thin layer, approx $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick. Trim the edges off the dough and cut it in to squares approx 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

Put approx 1 tsp of jam in the middle of each square and fold over opposite corners. Seal them together by pressing with one finger inside, one over, using a little water to help them seal if needed.

Place the cookies on a lined cookie sheet and bake for approx 15-18 minutes until lightly golden around the edges.

Leave to cool a minute before carefully transferring to a cooling rack. Dust with confectioner's sugar before serving.

Notes:

You need a thick jam for this so it doesn't spread and leak too much during baking, some prefer to use a type of pie filling that holds its form.



Breakfast Casserole

1 Can Crescent Rolls

1-1 ½ lbs Sausage

5-7 Eggs

12 oz. Mozzarella Cheese

Salt & Pepper

Use 9 x 13 pan. Grease bottom and cover bottom of pan with Crescent rolls. Spread cooked and drained sausage onto rolls.

Beat eggs with salt & pepper and pour over the sausage. Sprinkle with cheese.

Bake at 325 degrees for 30 minutes.

Recipe provided
by Sandra Perry





*“And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at His birth”
Luke 1:14, RSV*

In this slice of the gospel of Luke, Zechariah and Elizabeth learned that they were to have a child and they named him John. Later in this chapter; Joseph and Mary heard from the heavenly messenger that they were to become parents of a son- the baby Jesus. What a remarkable couple of events-- a messenger of joy and goodness to God’s people long ago!

Soon we all will be caught up in the joy, the glory, the awesomeness of these exclamations of joy long ago! What was proclaimed to these two couples about future births of their sons brightened history and uplifted humanity in magnificent fashion!

The ripple affect of the births of John and Jesus changed the world, and human lives would never be the same. In the Sanctuary of First Baptist Church, each time we read the Christmas story we feel a stir of the Holy around us! Each time we hear the anthems of Christmas, our hearts beat a little faster! Each Christmas Eve when we put our children to bed and pray with them, we are aware of a warmth around us that is not our spouse turning up the thermostat, but the intensity and warmth and closeness of God!

As you read this booklet, we hope the Holy Spirit used each writing to prepare you, your families, and those around you to realize God’s closeness, God’s care, God’s mercy and God’s Grace.

Merry Christmas!
Ron Grizzle



NOTES

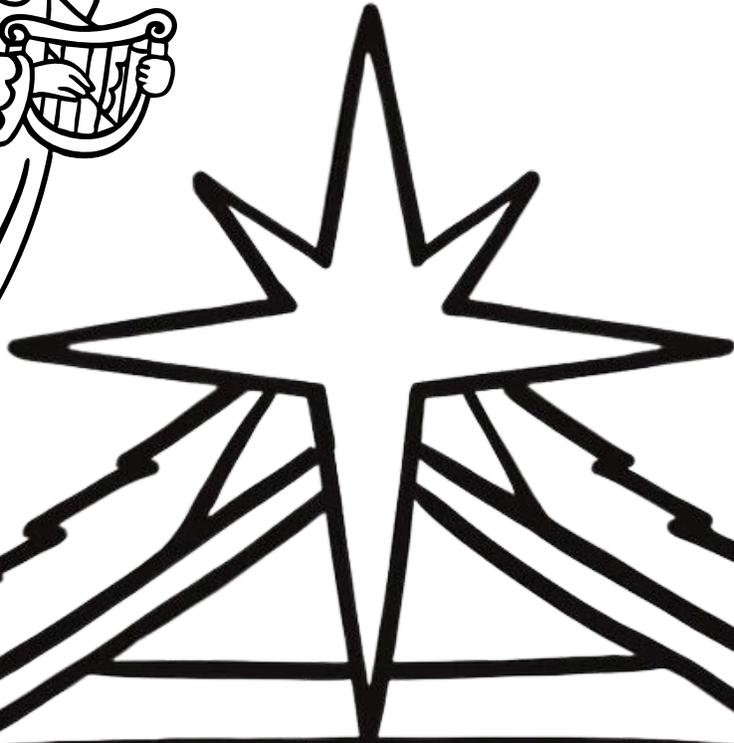


A series of horizontal dotted lines spanning the width of the page, providing a guide for writing notes.



Isaiah 9:6 (NIV)

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”



Merry CHRISTMAS



FIRST BAPTIST
of **GAINESVILLE**

751 Green Street
Gainesville, GA 30501
www.fbcgainesville.org