

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST



DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
2019 CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

Included in the beautiful art on the cover is a modern Hebrew phrase, which can be translated as “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased” (Luke 2:14). These praises to God were exclaimed by the heavenly host at the glory of Jesus’s birth.

Dallas Theological Seminary’s 2019 Christmas devotional collection, *Glory to God in the Highest*, was inspired by the glory that is displayed in our Messiah, Jesus. In these devotionals, DTS faculty members focus on attributes of our Savior—characteristics that illustrate why Jesus is worthy of all praise and honor. As you prepare to celebrate Jesus’s birth, it is my hope that these devotionals give you the opportunity to reflect on why He was sent to be our Savior and why He is to be glorified.

At DTS, our mission is to glorify God by equipping godly servant-leaders for the proclamation of His Word and the building up of the body of Christ worldwide. First and foremost, we desire to glorify God. For ninety-five years, DTS has stayed true to this mission. Your prayers and encouragement have been instrumental in our past—and are essential for our future.

There is still a reason to take the glory of God to a watching, waiting world. And because of your support, we are able to continue training men and women to understand the importance of glorifying God and proclaiming His Word to the world.

On behalf of the faculty, staff, and students at DTS, I wish you a Merry Christmas!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark L. Bailey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Mark L. Bailey, PhD
President

MERRY CHRISTMAS



FROM THE BAILEYS

Standing: Emily, Josh, Fiona, Gavin, and Jeremy Bailey

*Sitting: Barby, Oliver, Mark, Rowan, Callie (holding Beau)
and Finn Bailey*



Then Moses said, "I pray You, show me Your glory!"
EXODUS 33:18

*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us,
and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten
from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

JOHN 1:14 NASB

THE EXPRESS IMAGE OF HIS GLORY

The revelation of God's glory moves from one level of understanding to a whole new level between the time of Moses and Jesus. When Moses asked God to show him His glory as recorded in Exodus 33:18, the Lord's response was very instructive. God defined His glory as a manifestation of His goodness, the proclamation of His name, and the expression of His grace and compassion. Moses was privileged to witness a visualization of the glory of God but was restricted from seeing "the face of God" (Exodus 33:23).

When the Word, Jesus, became flesh and dwelt among people, John 1:14 states, "we beheld His glory, full of grace and truth." All that was true of the glory of God the Father is true of the Son, with the exception that Jesus was able to be seen by virtue of the Incarnation. So when Philip asked Jesus to show him and the other disciples the Father, Jesus said, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father" (John 14:9).

In Jesus we have the visible and physical representation of the glory of God. He is the personal manifestation of the goodness of God's character. He is the One who bears a name that represents all that God is and does. And through His willingness to go to the cross in our place, Jesus expresses and extends a grace and compassion that invites us into a relationship that allows us to bring attention to God's glory in a physical and visible way by all that we say or do that adequately and accurately reflects Him.



Dr. Mark L. Bailey
President
Senior Professor of Bible Exposition

Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am.”

JOHN 4:26 NIV



I AM

It's the middle of the day in the Near East. Jesus has walked all morning with His disciples, and they've worked up an appetite. So, while the twelve go off to buy bread, Jesus rests at Jacob's well. And there He meets a woman who has lost five husbands and is now probably a concubine so she can eat. This woman has experienced much devastation; it's unlikely she initiated divorce five times, as legal action depended on men—more likely, she's an older woman, widowed and/or abandoned. Yet she waits in hope for the Anointed One. She tells Jesus, “I know that Messiah”—called Christ—“is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us” (John 4:25).

In response, Jesus comes right out with it: *ego eimi*—“I AM.”

And she runs to tell the world!

Four chapters later, John quotes Jesus using the same expression: “Before Abraham was, *ego eimi* (I AM)” (8:58).

The fourth-century church father John Chrysostom noted that Jesus, in saying *ego eimi*, identified with God's self-revelation to Moses when God said, “I AM THAT I AM” (Exodus 3:14). Chrysostom said, “As the Father uses this expression, I AM, so also does Christ; for it signifies continuous Being, irrespective of all time.”

The Son of God is the eternal one: He has existed from eternity past. He created all things, both in heaven and on earth (Colossians 1:16). And He “is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come”—stated in chronological order (Revelation 4:8). Interestingly, in writing Revelation, John more often switches up the order, though—perhaps to emphasize the Resurrection or maybe to link the statement with what God said to Moses. John usually says Christ is the one “who is and was and is to come” (1:4; 1:8).

Whatever order we use, the one who is and was and will be has come to us in human flesh and will soon return to earth. Let every heart prepare Him room!



Dr. Sandra Glahn

Associate Professor of Media Arts and Worship



"Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations."

ISAIAH 42:1 NASB

RIGHTEOUS RULER

It's hard to imagine what our world would be like if it were ruled in complete righteousness. Is such a thing even possible? Could a world now ruled by Satan (Ephesians 2:2) ever again see the righteous rule of God?

In Creation, the will of God was unchallenged. As He spoke the world into existence, each part of the cosmos came into being perfectly and immediately (Genesis 1:3–25). Although the world was directly created by the Word of God, He chose to have the earth governed by a humanity made in His image and empowered to rule on His behalf.

When creating man and woman, God bestowed on them a creation blessing through which He imparted the fullness of life enabling them to manifest His righteous rule on the earth (1:28). This act was not a mandate containing commands they could pursue—or should attempt to pursue—apart from the gift blessing given to them. Instead, they were to operate out of this gracious gift as they mediated God's earthly rule.

Unfortunately, the man and woman fell from blessing when they chose to obey the serpent (Satan) rather than God (Genesis 3). Without the fullness of God's life, His gracious gift of blessing, humanity could no longer represent God's righteous rule. If God's reign were to be reestablished on the earth, it would need to be done by One who shared the fullness of God's life.

Eight hundred years before Christ, Isaiah spoke of an individual, a Servant chosen by God, upheld by God, and empowered by the Spirit of God to bring justice to the nations. This Servant would mediate God's righteous rule over Israel and the nations of the earth.

As you reflect on the manger this Christmas, remember that Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, is God's chosen Servant. He is the One who is upheld by God the Father and empowered by God the Spirit to rule in complete righteousness over God's kingdom. As we celebrate His first Advent, let us long for His second!



Dr. Nathan N. Hoff

Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition

*"From this man's descendants God has brought
to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised."*

ACTS 13:23 NIV



PROMISE KEEPER

A perpetual college football powerhouse, the University of Michigan Wolverines have built a culture of champions on the gridiron. One season, the coaching staff all took note of a unique athlete on the team who carried himself in every area of his life with an indescribable charisma.

One of the assistant coaches couldn't shake his curiosity and talked to this athlete. With an infectious cheer, this collegiate invited the assistant coach to a meeting, where a speaker gave a testimony of his faith. That assistant coach, Bill McCartney, eventually accepted Christ as his personal savior and went on to be the head coach of the University of Colorado Buffaloes, ultimately winning a national championship. More important, he founded the astounding ministry of Promise Keepers. Promise Keepers has impacted millions of men around the world. With God's help, this throng of men have vowed to become Promise Keepers—to keep their promises as husbands and fathers.

The phrase "promise keeper" is powerful because it evokes character traits of trustworthiness, truthfulness, and faithfulness. These traits are revealed in the perfect promise keeper, our Father in heaven. Our Heavenly Father promised to give the world a Savior, His own unique Son, Jesus Christ.

Luke recorded this truth in Acts 13:23. This verse is from Paul's first recorded sermon, which took place in Pisidian Antioch. After selections from the Old Testament were read in the synagogue, leaders invited Paul to share a word of encouragement. Paul took the opportunity to survey the history of Israel. He traced this history from Egypt to the Resurrection of Jesus. Couched in the middle of the story, Paul gave central recognition to David. This illustrated David's connection to the Savior, Jesus, who was born from David's lineage. Paul's sermon clearly demonstrated that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's promise to provide a Messiah. The Father and the Son are promise keepers. Their Word can always be trusted.

Christmas is a blessing of the promise-keeping God and His Son, our Savior, whose birth we celebrate during this special season. Merry Christmas!



Dr. Bruce W. Fong
Dean of DTS-Houston
Professor of Pastoral Ministries



*Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down
... to make Your name known to Your adversaries,
that the nations might tremble at Your presence!*

ISAIAH 64:1–2 NASB

WORD MADE FLESH

In May 1996, the Hale-Bopp comet burst through the clouds and into the Northern Celestial Hemisphere and the newly born Internet was awash with excitement. This was for good reason: it was a rare occurrence indeed for such a spectacular sight to be visible to the naked eye. Normally, telescopes are required to view a comet. But Hale-Bopp was different. It astounded astronomers and stargazers alike as this flying ball of dust and ice was bright enough to be seen by anyone, even those living in heavily populated cities.

The prophet Isaiah also knows what it's like to look toward the skies in hopeful expectation. Crying out in the midst of exile, after receiving word after word from the Lord about YHWH's future plans to save, Isaiah begs the God of Heaven and Earth to act. Perhaps nothing is more painful when God seems distant and when prayers appear to go unheard and unanswered than to know that God's redemption is not too hard a task for Him. Yet and still, Isaiah prays, in no uncertain terms, for God to do something mighty, something unexpected and awesome. He begs God to crack the sky apart and come down.

Few could have imagined that Isaiah's prayer would be answered in a manger in Bethlehem. But it is here, in the arms of Mary and Joseph, that God does indeed crack the heavens apart and come down to visit His people in the Word made flesh. The Incarnation is a resounding answer to Isaiah's plea. No, God will not keep silent. No, God will not abandon His people. Yes, the nations will fall on their knees before the God who saves. And yes, God is for us in Christ Jesus. Indeed, as the author of Hebrews makes clear, "God . . . in these last days has spoken to us in His Son" (Hebrews 1:1–2). At Christmastime we join the prophet in looking toward the heavens as we long for our Lord's return. And as we wait, we delight in the God who speaks.



Dr. Daniel Hill

Assistant Professor of Theological Studies



The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. . . . For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things.

COLOSSIANS 1:15, 19–20 NIV

MIRACULOUS MIRROR

When the eternal Son of God took on flesh and blood, He became the miraculous mirror in two significant ways. First, He became the visible reflecting the invisible. All the fullness of God dwelt in Christ and was miraculously reflected in Christ. In Christ, we see the character of God. Second, He became the mirror that miraculously transforms those who fix their gaze upon Him. As we grow in beholding Christ, we grow in our love of Christ and progressively and miraculously in our mirroring of Christ. Christ is both the mirror and the image seen in it.

In the Garden of Eden, we lost the face of God. In Christ, we may again behold the face of God positionally, personally, and experientially. The face of Christ is the relational gate. The beatific vision involves beholding Christ's glory. This is more than mental assent. This is being swallowed up by the glory of God in the visible mirror of Christ through the mysterious working of the Spirit.

Paul identifies this two-fold miraculous mirror effect of Christ in 2 Corinthians: *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit"* (2 Corinthians 3:18, NASB). Paul is looking at Corinthian followers of Christ and he explains their process and outcome. Through Christ, the Spirit of God transformed the lives of those who beheld God the Father in the miraculous mirror in which Christ the Son is beheld.

During this season, when we hear the Christmas story, we may focus on what we *believe* about our Savior's birth. But let us not miss our opportunity to *behold*. Let us gaze deeply into the two-fold miraculous mirror of Christ revealing all of the fullness of God, transforming us to mirror Christ.



Dr. Gary Barnes
Professor of Biblical Counseling



"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

REVELATION 22:13 NIV

NEWBORN AND COSMIC LORD

When little children act out the Nativity scene, we are usually content to let them pass around a plastic baby Jesus. A real human infant? Well, that's a bit too dangerous.

The mystery of our Lord's full humanity fascinates us all. But holding together the baby Jesus's humanity with His full deity is far more challenging.

When Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds gazed on the newborn Jesus, what could they have known? While still pregnant Mary had cried, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46–47). But now nestled in her arms lay her helpless, hungry little baby—the one promised to save Israel. Could anyone have understood the cosmic immensity of this tiny infant?

Later, by the Spirit, John writes, "the Word was with God and *was* God" (John 1:1). Paul adds, "all things have been created *through* him and *for* him. He is *before* all things, and in him *all things hold together*" (Colossians 1:16–17). As the finale of all the Bible, Jesus Christ Himself declares, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End" (Revelation 22:13). Everything ever made exists *through* Him and *under* Him and *for* Him.

Herein is the mystery. If the newborn in Mary's arms is God, then was He at the same time sustaining all the universe? Scholars puzzle as to how this could be. An early champion of the doctrine of the Trinity, Athanasius wrote, "The Word was not hedged in by His body, nor did His presence in the body prevent His being present elsewhere as well. ... The marvelous truth is, that being the Word, so far from being Himself contained by anything, He actually contained all things [in] Himself. In creation He is present everywhere, yet is distinct in being from it; ordering, directing, giving life to all, containing all, yet is He Himself the Uncontained" (*On the Incarnation* 3.17). As Athanasius, so throughout Christian history, Jesus is proclaimed both babe in the manger and infinite Cosmic Lord.



Dr. Scott Horrell

Professor of Theological Studies

But [Jesus] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form.

PHILIPPIANS 2:7 NRSV



OUR VULNERABLE LORD

We naturally desire control and security. Unfortunately, our lives often involve uncontrollable chaos. This chaos is intensified at this time of year. Whether it be family issues, finances, or other concerns, we are not alone.

When we read Philippians 2:5–11, we naturally focus on Jesus's Incarnation. However, we often do not consider the implications of the Incarnation for Jesus Himself. Interestingly, Philippians 2:7 informs us that the manner in which Jesus emptied Himself was not by subtracting or removing anything. Rather, He *added* humanity. Paul reflects on Jesus's lowly status. The incarnate Jesus is described as a “slave,” the lowest of the lowly. Jesus is voluntarily assuming the weaknesses of the most vulnerable among us. Essentially, Jesus became human, and thus He became vulnerable and acquired all of the messiness that is part of the human experience.

When we think of God, we consider visible glory, strength, and power. This is certainly true. However, the Incarnation involves realities not usually associated with the divine. Jesus is not some insulated deity who one day ventured out of heaven to act on our behalf and then retreated back to His clean, safe home. No, Jesus was as vulnerable in that manger as we were in our cribs. He was as frail as we are today.

Thus, Jesus had to fully depend on God, His Father, right from the beginning. Let us follow His example. Trusting anyone so completely is difficult. However, trust in God is our safest bet. It is easy to forget this. Only in God, who protected Jesus in His most vulnerable state, can we truly rest securely. Our Father is faithful.

This Christmas, when we are encouraged to focus on Jesus, let us consider our own vulnerability and take comfort. While here, Jesus had to depend on the same Heavenly Father as we do. Thankfully, God is faithful.



Dr. Joseph D. Fantin

Professor of New Testament Studies



"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

REVELATION 5:12 NIV

WORTHY

In the Book of Revelation, the apostle John gives us a peek at the thousands and thousands of angels surrounding the throne of God and praising the worthiness of Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain for the sins of mankind. Picture in your mind this amazing sight.

Now imagine that Christmas night, eighty to ninety-five years before John witnessed his vision in heaven. The dark sky is filled with a myriad of twinkling stars, and shepherds quietly tend their sheep. Suddenly an angel appears and announces the Savior's birth. As the frightened shepherds ponder this good news, the sky explodes with a multitude of angels singing: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:14).

After the angels return to heaven, the shepherds quickly go to Bethlehem to see the Christ Child. They find the baby swaddled in a manger with Mary and Joseph nearby. Imagine what it would be like to have just heard a sky full of angels praising God, and then soon after to look into the face of the long-awaited promised Messiah. What would you do? Luke records that the shepherds returned to their flocks "glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen" (Luke 2:20). Even as a tiny baby, Jesus was worthy of honor and praise for He is God come in the flesh to rescue and redeem mankind.

As you anticipate Christmas shared with family and friends, there will be words of thanksgiving expressed at the opening of each gift. Smiles and laughter will fill the room as colorful wrapping paper is removed from each package. In the midst of all the joy and excitement, take a moment to reflect on the greatest of all Christmas gifts revealed over two thousand years ago.

The baby Jesus is worth so much more than any earthly gift. Christmas presents are enjoyed for a little while; Jesus will be enjoyed for all eternity. Remember this season to sing praises to Jesus, as the angels and the shepherds did. Jesus is worthy of all honor and glory.



Dr. Joye Baker

Adjunct Professor of Educational Ministries and Leadership

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

2 CORINTHIANS 9:15 NIV



INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

Before kids have consumed their Halloween candy, stores launch their Christmas hype, hoping to arouse your gift-giving appetite. Where did gift-giving originate anyway? Historians suggest that in the fourth century Roman world, Christian leaders created a winter festival to celebrate Jesus's birth. Gift-giving symbolized the Magi's gifts to the Christ child. Through the ages, gift-giving has waxed and waned. The pilgrims banned Christmas, but when the holiday was legalized in the 1680s, gift-giving exploded, morphing into today's commercialized Christmas. Not everyone applauded. In 1904, Margaret Deland wrote in *Harper's Bazaar*, "Twenty-five years ago, Christmas was not the burden it is now. There was less haggling and weighing, quid pro quo, fatigue of body, wearing of soul; and most of all, less loading up with trash." These sentiments resulted in organizations like SPUG, the Society for the Prevention of Useless Giving.

In 2009, Joel Waldfogel, author of *Scroogenomics*, found that two months after Christmas one-third of Americans still haven't paid their debt and 18 percent of gifts are "deadweight loss," sweaters never worn and books never read. He insists that all this spending goes against the very spirit of Christmas. Yes, and no. Thoughtful gifts uplift and express love to friends and family, but for many of us a shift is worth considering—a shift from focusing on gifts to celebrating the indescribable gift that God gave the world two thousand years ago. Jesus is that indescribable gift, and "whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

God's gift of Jesus shows us how much God loved the world. So as you enjoy the Christmas season, consider how traditions that minimize your focus on self and turn your attention to others can honor the teachings of Jesus, God's gift. For example, join together with friends or family to purchase a goat, cow, or sewing machine to help someone in a third-world country start a business; volunteer at a shelter; or pool your money and together give to a worthy cause. And the day after Christmas, instead of random boxes and scattered toy parts, you might just find you've created an indescribable Christmas.



Dr. Sue Edwards

Professor of Educational Ministries and Leadership



And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” LUKE 2:8–11 ESV

SAVIOR

On that first Christmas evening, the shepherds in the fields heard the angels from heaven describe the baby in Bethlehem as a *Savior*. While in the Old Testament God is referred to as Savior thirteen times, this was the first use of that title for the Messiah, the Christ (Luke 2:11). New Testament writers will go on to use this title nineteen times to describe our Lord, Jesus Christ.

He is our *Savior* because He saves us from death: “But now has been revealed by the appearing of our *Savior* Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10, NASB).

He is our *Savior* because He delivers us from the wrath that is coming. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 reminds us that Jesus “delivers us from the wrath to come.”

He is our *Savior* because He is the creator and sustainer of the church, the delivered ones of this age: “Even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its *Savior*” (Ephesians 5:23).

He is our *Savior* because He is coming again to save us from this fallen, evil world. Titus 2:13 reminds us that as believers we are “waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and *Savior* Jesus Christ.”

When we contemplate all that Christ has done for us, as described in these verses and in many others too, the depiction of Him as our *Savior* is so fitting. This Christmas, let’s proclaim wholeheartedly to ourselves and others: Jesus is our *Savior*!



Dr. Stephen J. Bramer

Department Chair and Professor of Bible Exposition

"She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

MATTHEW 1:21 NASB



GRACE

When I was 12, I scraped together every cent to purchase a small, discounted, used motorcycle. What a buy! My internal mechanic ripped it apart in order to rebuild it. Following a month's work, one late Saturday afternoon I put it back together and blazed a trail down the road. For 300 yards it was phenomenal. With wind in my hair, I was flying free as a bird. But a loud pop stopped everything. After coasting to the curb, I looked at the motor casing. My fears were confirmed. I saw a gigantic hole in the engine. The engine had thrown a rod, and it was ruined.

Dejected, I pushed the cycle back to my house through tears.

My father saw the entire event happen. Unbeknown to me, he jumped on the phone to look for a replacement engine. Somehow in that late hour of the evening, he found a shop that would stay open for our purchase. Not telling me where we were going, we headed out to "see something" on the other side of town.

Upon arrival at the small-engine retailer, I was shocked. Assuming we were there to look at an engine, I whispered, "Dad. I have no money. I can't buy anything. I'm broke. And even if you loan it to me, I could never earn that much to repay it." I will never forget his response.

He winked and said, "I got ya covered." And there it was. A real-live picture of grace. Undeserved. Unmerited. A purchase I could never make. A payment I could never repay.

That's the story of Christmas, isn't it? As the angel said, "call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). There it is. He paid the price for our sin. The babe in a manger is our gift of grace (Ephesians 2:8–9). Unmerited. Undeserved. We simply trust in His completed work that started in the cradle, and led to the cross.

Revel in it. But don't just sit there. Strap on your new motor. Ride with the wind in your hair.

You're free as a bird.

Grace.



Dr. Mark Yarbrough

Vice President for Academic Affairs

Professor of Bible Exposition



In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

JOHN 1:4 NASB

LIGHT AND LIFE

John begins his narrative with an apostolic testimony concerning Jesus, his intent in writing being rooted in an intense desire to make known the person, claims, and accomplishments of the man he met one day on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

John begins by telling us that this Jesus sustained intimacy with God, being very God Himself (John 1:1) before coming among them. In fact, by describing Jesus as the “Word,” John is making known to us that Jesus revealed God to us (1:18). Simply put, Jesus is the outward expression of the thoughts of the Father. Further, John tells us the man he came to know was the divine creator of everything (1:3). Before Jesus came to us He was God, and so as God He was the grand architect of the universe.

In coming to us, Jesus is described as “light” and “life” (1:4). The Word was light; that is, He, by His words and works, dispelled the darkness that enshrouded our lives. The content of the light, the substance of His message, was about life. Of the thirty-seven times John uses the word “life” in the Gospel, seventeen times it is preceded by the word “eternal.” Clearly, the life the Word disclosed was eternal life!

Perhaps a personal poem will capture the thought of our passage.

*There came one who has always been.
He came to a world, once pure, now blighted with sin.
The creator of all things came to restore.
To shine into our darkness and bring us renewal.
Perfect in all His ways, there was no problem with Him.
It was our blindness that caused our ignorance of Him.
The story, however, does not end with this.
For today, He shines to scatter your darkness and end all that is remiss.
This light, this Word, God wants us to know.
And that is why John wrote about Him so.*

May you turn to the Word, the Creator, the Light, the Life to scatter your darkness forevermore in this the most wonderful of seasons. Welcome Him anew into your heart today! Let His light flood your soul with peace and comfort!



Dr. John D. Hannah

*Distinguished Professor of Historical Theology
Research Professor of Theological Studies*

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

REVELATION 4:11 NIV



CARPENTER CREATOR

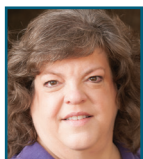
Each Christmas my parents gave my four siblings and me gifts that we'd use to create something. A cross-stitch kit, a model car kit, a sewing machine. Working with our hands, we created keepsakes, gaining skills and confidence that carried into our adult lives. My brother builds beautiful homes and restores classic cars. My sisters and I have sewn curtains, made quilts, knitted scarves, crocheted blankets, and made crafts. There is great satisfaction in creating something and bringing it to life.

Humans are inherently creative because we are created in the image of God, our Creator (Genesis 1:26–27). As part of the Trinity, Jesus was right there bringing our world to life: "It is I who made the earth and created mankind on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts" (Isaiah 45:12). And in those same starry heavens, angels proclaimed Jesus's birth (Luke 2:8–14).

As the son of a carpenter, Jesus had many opportunities to create with His hands. From the trees He created, He now carved and crafted the wood into wonderful creations. As He began ministry, Jesus created wine from water (John 2:1–9). Like the dust from which He formed Adam (Genesis 2:7), He put mud on a man's eyes giving him sight (John 9:13–15). Jesus crafted miracles from His creation.

But the great news is Jesus didn't just come to Earth to walk among the world He created. First John 4:10 explains, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." And to all who trust Christ as their Savior, we receive eternal life!

Let's celebrate our Creator this Christmas season: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Revelation 4:11).



Dr. Jerry Lawrence

*Adjunct Professor of Educational Ministries and Leadership
Alumni and Career Services Counselor*

"These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation."

REVELATION 3:14 NIV

SUPREME AUTHORITY

Think of the ways Jesus is portrayed in Christmas greetings mailed this time of year. Baby Jesus sleeps in a manger. Mary cuddles Him in her arms. Donkeys and sheep huddle around Him. These common images remind us that Jesus was truly born in our own grubby world, with all its limitations and hardships. They represent a central truth—that “the Word became *flesh*” (John 1:14).

Yet another vital truth is often portrayed on these greetings, usually in the form of a bright halo, a star in the sky, or a gentle radiance lighting the scene—that “the *Word* became flesh.” That tiny baby, swaddled in humility, is none other than God the Son (John 1:1, 18), the visible image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15), the One through whom God created all things (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16), the supreme authority over all creation (Colossians 1:15, 18; Revelation 3:14).

About a hundred years after His birth, Jesus reminded us of this truth in Revelation 3:14. As the God-Man, He is the “Amen”—that is, the embodiment of truth itself. Therefore, we can trust Him completely. And because He conquered death and brings us life, He is the ruler of God’s creation (Revelation 3:14). That baby in a manger is God over all, the supreme authority over heaven and earth and over every aspect of our lives.



Dr. Michael J. Svigel

Department Chair and Professor of Theological Studies

"This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

LUKE 2:12 NASB



A SIGN

Steve Brown tells a story about the ugliest car he had ever seen. It had a large gash down one side; one of the doors was barely hanging on with bailing wire; large patches of metal were rusted out. The muffler was dangling down to street level. The car had been painted over so many times with so many colors it was impossible to tell the original color. But the most fascinating thing about the car was the bumper sticker. It read *"This is not an abandoned car."*

We live in a rusty world. It can be ugly and depressing. Hurt and heartache abound. A new shot of paint here and there can make things look brighter temporarily, but the daily Niagara of bad news jolts us back to reality. On top of that, our own personal sorrows and sin can sometimes leave us feeling guilty, isolated, and fearful. At times we can wonder if God really cares. But a long time ago, a baby was born and laid in a manger. He was born for us. He was a sign to us. His sign read *"This is not an abandoned world."*

When God visited our planet in human flesh, He gave us the assurance that He had not abandoned us or our world. What the angel said to the shepherds is the same thing God is saying to us today—a Savior has come. Even though we're often shocked and saddened by events in our world or our own lives, we can know that He has not abandoned us. God cares, and God is in control. You have not been deserted or forsaken. The best news is that someday Jesus will come again, and all the ugliness of sin will be removed forever. He will make all things new. His coming again will be His final sign to us that *"This is not an abandoned world."*



Dr. Mark Hitchcock

Associate Professor of Bible Exposition



"Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen; My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased; I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel, nor cry out; nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering wick He will not put out, until He leads justice to victory. And in His name the Gentiles will hope."

MATTHEW 12:18–21 NASB

OUR LIVING HOPE

"That's not right!"

It's the cry that screams from the heart that feels mistreated. This cry longs for things to be made right. We have all uttered this cry—whether as a child receiving the hidden gut-punch from the school bully on the playground, or as the new high schooler being ostracized by the in-crowd because differences are deemed as threats, or as the spouse receiving unexpected divorce papers after twenty-five years of marriage, or due to some other item on the never-ending list of possible misdeeds that occur in this world. When a misdeed happens, one way or another we all hope for someone to make things right.

Enter Jesus—God's loved, chosen, and well-pleasing servant who did not argue with nor trample the weak but vocalized His provision for our heart-deep need, securing hope that our hopeless situation will be made right. He's not what the religious elite expected two thousand years ago, but He's what was needed. He came to proclaim "This is right," "That is wrong," and "Look to Me."

Whether we are an individual pursuing social justice or a parent practicing kitchen-table diplomacy, we must realize that neither money nor possessions nor home-spun wisdom is the answer. The answer is Jesus. All of our noble efforts to make the world a better place must be anchored in Jesus because in HIS name the nations will hope.

One day Jesus, who came before as a baby and grew proclaiming justice to the nations, will come again announcing the same and fulfilling our anticipation as our Living Hope. When He returns, our hearts will cry in response, "This is right!"



Dr. Scott Harris

*Director of Doctor of Educational Ministry Studies
Associate Professor of Educational Ministries and Leadership*

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

JOHN 1:14 NIV



GRACE AND TRUTH

Divine attributes, like human characteristics, can be vague, abstract concepts. If, for example, I say that I love my wife, but spend no time with her, ignore her desires and wishes, reject her requests for my time, criticize her at every opportunity, and pursue relationships with others, she has every right to suspect that my profession of love is empty, meaningless, and worthless. On the other hand, if I make time to be with her and give her my undivided attention, praise her for her incredible giftedness, and forsake all others, as I promised on our wedding day, she will likely think that my profession of love is authentic. My love for her will never be perfect or complete, but it is genuine and is evidenced by what I do.

John declares that Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, is full of grace and truth. Elsewhere Jesus claimed to be the Truth (John 14:6) and that He demonstrated that He was the Truth both by what He said and did (John 10:37–38). Jesus never claimed to be grace; He never used the word. But He incarnated grace—He lived it so consistently that people who recognized their need flocked to Him. And they found in Him a gentle, loving, compassionate, merciful help in their time of need. They walked away changed by their interaction with God in flesh. He was perfect and complete grace and truth.

The God of holiness so wants to be known that He came to us, took on flesh, and lived among us so that we could know what grace and truth looks like. Not grace without truth, which would be false. Nor truth without grace, which would be merely a concept. And not partly grace and partly truth. But full of grace and truth. In flesh. For us. So that we could know God. And for our salvation.



Dr. Glenn Kreider

Professor of Theological Studies

Editor in Chief of Bibliotheca Sacra



Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

PHILIPPIANS 2:8 NASB

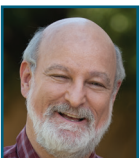
POWER AND HUMILITY

Power is an interesting attribute. Often in our world, power is used in ways that are designed to underscore the one who holds it. However, Philippians 2:5–11 shows that this is not God's way. Despite being divine and having all power and authority, Jesus emptied Himself and took on the form of a human being. He did not seek to hold onto His power but chose to use it to serve others.

That is what we celebrate each Christmas: God taking on flesh in order to deliver people who had turned their backs on Him. This act is described as an emptying and as a humbling in Philippians 2:7–8, as verse 8 looks to the ultimate sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. The Father honored Jesus's act by exalting and giving Him a name to which all will bow as He is shown to be Lord. It is the great reversal—in humility comes greatness.

It is common at Christmas to think about Jesus as a babe in swaddling clothes and to marvel at God becoming flesh. But just as amazing is how He handled His power. His life is an example with humility at the forefront. Paul exhorts the Philippians to imitate Christ, and this text urges us to have the same attitude which was also in Jesus.

Christmas is about an emptying, a humbling, and an example to follow. It is about how much God loves us to become like one of us. In the greatness of His service, the path from the manger leads into a way of life that honors God...and that reflects His heart. Jesus's incarnation is a stunning example of a different kind of power; it's power wed to humility.



Dr. Darrell L. Bock

*Executive Director of Cultural Engagement
Senior Research Professor of New Testament Studies*

*"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart!
I have overcome the world."*

JOHN 16:33 NIV



PROTECTIVE PRESENCE

This was going to be a very different Christmas. It was December 8, 1941—just one day after the attack on Pearl Harbor. President Roosevelt with full congressional support declared war against Japan even as its Imperial army stormed the Philippines.

My father-in-law, a child living in Manila during the Second World War, recalls four years of God's miraculous protection. As the battle raged between General MacArthur's forces and the unflinching Japanese, Dad and his family sought the Lord's guidance in fervent prayer. Henry and Julia Tan and their young sons followed the Lord's prompting to find shelter in the hills of Montalban. After months of intense combat, the American forces were pushed back by the enemy and finally surrendered their headquarters on the island of Corregidor in May 1942. Meanwhile, MacArthur retreated to Australia on orders of Roosevelt. Dad and his family then moved back to Manila, now under Japanese occupation. Three years elapsed. The liberation forces returned, intensely fighting to retake the Islands. Again the Tans prepared to take refuge, this time in the mountains of Baguio.

However, a visiting evangelist-friend became deathly ill. At great risk they canceled everything to care for their guest. The Lord mercifully protected them, for it was reported that their destination in Baguio had been destroyed in a bombing raid.

Earnestly praying for continued safekeeping, Dad's family resettled near the presidential palace. They never imagined a Japanese officer would become their new neighbor and friend. God remarkably used the officer as a shield from another Imperial official who sought to forcibly take the Tan's home as his own. As the enemy was defeated and the war ended, that Christmas of 1945 was a special one for Dad. Indeed, the Lord had graciously protected him and his family during those difficult years.

Whatever seen or unseen battles you face this Christmas season, remember Jesus's wondrous birth, His loving sacrifice for sin, and His powerful resurrection. He has demonstrated His salvific power, and He is worthy of your trust. The Lord is with you, and He will see you through.



Dr. Scott Barfoot

Director of Doctor of Ministry Studies



*And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

ISAIAH 9:6 ESV

PEACE

Only a fool prefers war to peace. And yet, our world remains marked by what seems to be an unending stream of conflict—national, social, and personal. Such tedious sets of circumstances can weigh down even the sturdiest among us. Our world needs to see another way. Christ's birth lights that path.

The incarnation of Jesus provides an answer to myriads of conflicts that scar our world. Hundreds of years prior to Jesus's birth, the prophet Isaiah declared that a child would be born, a child we would know as the Prince of Peace. When Mary birthed Jesus into the world, the infant brought with Him a peace that surpasses all of our own best efforts at healing conflicts. On that first night of Jesus's life, the angelic announcement echoed Isaiah's expectation, declaring "on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased" (Luke 2:14). The Prince of Peace truly dwelt among us.

Jesus's entrance into our world by taking humanity upon Himself provided a way for peace between God and human beings (Romans 5:1). No longer would we be doomed to persistent rebellion against God. Rather, through Christ, we could live at peace with our Maker. But beyond pointing us to right relations with God, the message of Jesus's birth points us to right relations with the rest of creation. Jesus taught on this in His Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). Indeed, the call of the Incarnation prompts us toward the hard work of peacemaking. We are not at war with our fellow human beings but rather with principalities and powers in the celestial realm (Ephesians 6:12). May we leave warmongering language and conflict-oriented action behind as we seek, by the power of the Spirit, to make peace with humanity and with the entire created world a reality in our lives.



Dr. John A. Adair

Assistant Professor of Theological Studies

"This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed."

LUKE 2:34–35 NLT



JOY

Roman soldiers were patrolling the streets of Israel and the known world, enforcing their brand of peace. King Herod was acting like a ruler elected for life. Government edicts, taxes, and laws were being imposed on poor couples like Mary and Joseph, who had to return to their home city of Bethlehem. Sad events were happening in families and in the community, as hope for a better tomorrow slowly faded to a whisper. But in the midst of all this chaos, the most wonderful event in all of history occurred, bringing inexpressible joy to a sad and lonely world. But as we read the words of Simeon in Luke 2:34–35, we learn that in the first century, and still today, Jesus's coming causes great joy or great opposition.

When I lost my wife to cancer in 2017, I didn't think I would ever be joyful again. However, God called me to "live on." He began healing my broken heart by encouraging me to be faithful in what He had called me to do: walk with Him and serve others. Brothers and sisters prayed for me faithfully and, over time, the joy of the Lord returned and God sent me a new relationship with a godly woman. "Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5b).

What are your deepest thoughts about Jesus's coming? Do they cause you to rejoice or do they cause you to stumble? This Christmas, don't let materialism, greed, power, or ambition cause you to stumble over the humble way that Christ our King entered into the world. Rather, by faith, choose joy as your response to His coming. Let us learn from Simeon and Anna who waited joyfully for years for the Messiah's coming before they were rewarded. May we all celebrate our Lord's coming to earth with great joy.



Dr. Rodney Orr

Dean of DTS-DC

*Associate Professor of World Missions
and Intercultural Studies*

But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

GALATIANS 4:4–6 NASB



FAMILY

At its best, Christmas is a celebration full of family gatherings and giving. Because of our obligations, the Burnses rarely assembled from distant places to express our mutual love. However, Christmastime was “required attendance” for everyone. My father reminded us constantly of how wonderful those memories were.

In the “fullness of time,” the Father so loved the world that He sent His Son to gather His family of believers in the Spirit. Galatians tells us that our faith in the incarnate Son gives us the highest privilege of membership in His family with an intimate “Abba, Father” relationship and shared inheritance (Galatians 4:6, see also Romans 8:14–17). The Son was sent from the Father as a coequal and coeternal member of the Trinity. He was “born of a woman,” the fully human “seed” of God’s promise to overcome sin, and its curse, through Eve (Genesis 3:15, Galatians 3:13, 19). The promise continued through the chosen offspring of Abraham, the “man of faith” (Galatians 3:10, 16). And the Son was born “under the Law,” which had been a tutor and guardian that pointed to Him as the One who would redeem us from the curse by becoming a curse in our place (Galatians 3:13, Hebrews 2:16–17). Before the Son’s incarnation, Old Testament believers were in “slavery” under the care of God’s Word as they anticipated their Messiah. In the fullness of history, the Father placed His most precious gift in a human womb. The Father decreed the coming of His Son, so that by faith we can be adopted into His family, becoming full members of the family and its inheritance, and indwelt by the “DNA” of His Spirit.

Christmas celebrates the greatest gift ever given to believers, so our joyous family celebrations should remind us of joy in God’s family. We as children should unceasingly praise our Father for His graciousness to us. “Joy to the world,” we annually sing, “for the Lord is come ... let every heart prepare Him room.”



Dr. J. Lanier Burns

*Senior Professor of Systematic Theology
Research Professor of Theological Studies*

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

ISAIAH 53:5 NIV



SUBSTITUTE

Our Christmas season is filled with many special traditions we enjoy together as a family. Decorations fill our home, Christmas movies play on repeat, hot chocolate is gulped (and spilled) while looking at Christmas lights, and we spend time around an Advent wreath reading parts of God's great story. But my favorite Christmas tradition happens on Christmas morning.

Before we do anything else, we start our Christmas morning with a family Christmas pageant. Our Christmas morning pageant comes with assigned roles for each family member given by our elementary-school-age director(s). As you can imagine, the morning is filled with squeals of laughter and delight. We have had a grandparent-age Mary and, three years ago, we even had a true newborn lying in the trough built by my husband and daughter.

As we draw the Christmas pageant to a close, we then celebrate Jesus's birthday, complete with birthday cake, candles, and a special gift. The cake is always a highlight, especially since we get to eat it before the sun has even come up. But by far, the most special part of the morning is when we give our children a special gift to open. Inside the box is a plastic, Fisher-Price baby Jesus figurine. This reminds us all of the small gift, wrapped in the cloak of humanity, sent to the world in the most vulnerable state. This is the means by which we find ultimate healing. Christ, our substitute, the one and only who is sufficient to stand in our place, to take the burden of our sins, is God's gift to a broken and hurting world. May your Christmas season be filled with traditions that point back to the ultimate substitution at the cross that began with the birth of an infant Savior.



Dr. Andi Thacker

Assistant Professor of Biblical Counseling



After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, in the time of King Herod, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem saying, "Where is the one who is born king of the Jews?"

MATTHEW 2:1–2 NET

WONDER CHILD

The Wizards of Babylon had been certain they would find the king of the Jews in Jerusalem. They anticipated bowing down in wonder and worship before the newborn monarch.

And yet, in Jerusalem all their wanderings had ended not in delight, but in a dull thud of disappointment. Grizzled old Herod was anything but newborn. And he wasn't even a legitimate king of the Jews. Herod didn't evoke wonder, but woe.

Herod told them they should look for the king in Bethlehem. And off they went, with a spark of hope rekindled. But if the king wasn't in Bethlehem, then the long journey would have been for nothing. And when they returned home, they would be the laughingstock of Babylon.

The first mile along the road to Bethlehem nobody spoke, but then... "Wait, look!" said one. "There it is!"

The shining light had appeared again, moving ahead of them toward the south. Toward Bethlehem. The light stopped over the roof of a small home. The light was so bright they had to shield their eyes.

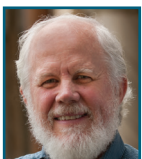
"What's this, then?" asked his companion.

"We aren't in Babylon anymore," said another.

They heard a child's laughter coming from inside the home. Then, suddenly, the toddler appeared in the doorway, His eyes wide. The light above the home faded. A woman, His mother, ran up behind the boy and caught Him up in her arms, laughing—then she followed her Son's gaze to their visitors—

Bowing to the ground, in wonder.

Are you hoping for a little wonder this Christmas? Don't count on the gifts under the tree. They will leave you feeling as empty as a Christmas stocking with a hole in it. The Wonder of Christmas is a Person. Look to Jesus Christ this Christmas to fill your heart. And discover the Wonder you've been hoping for.



Dr. Reg Grant

*Department Chair and Senior Professor
of Media Arts and Worship*



Merry
Christmas
and
Happy
New Year

FROM
DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



We are grateful to Wes Talbott
for allowing us to use his
beautiful artwork, Nativity,
in this devotional.



WWW.DTS.EDU/CHRISTMAS

Glory
TO
God
IN THE
highest
AND ON EARTH
peace
AMONG
MEN
WITH
WHOM
He IS PLEASED.

 LUKE 2:14



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