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Complimentary
not CONTRADICTIONARY

A look at Jesus' birth narrative in Gospel of Matthew, Luke

A historian named Julius Africanus was among the first Christians to wonder why the stories of Jesus' birth in Matthew and Luke differ slightly.

Around the year 200, Julius apparently sought Jesus' living relatives to ask them why the genealogies of Christ in the two Gospels aren't exactly the same. Was one of the accounts in error?

Jesus' ancient relatives explained, according to the third-century church historian Eusebius, that the lineage of Joseph, Jesus' adoptive father, included a Levirate marriage — the Old Testament practice by which the brother of a man who died childless would marry the widow and father a child who was legally considered the descendant of the deceased man. One of the Gospel genealogies apparently follows the biological line and the other the legal line, Eusebius reported.

Different highlights

Though the Levirate marriage explanation has been debated by scholars at least one thing is certain: for the nearly 1,800 years since Julius' inquiry disciples and skeptics alike have continued to wonder why the Bible's two accounts of Jesus' birth report the story in slightly different ways. In response, three seminary professors have explained that the narratives do not contradict one another at any point and tell the story in different ways to highlight different



"Adoration of the Shepherds" by Gerard van Honthorst

Photo provided by BP

aspects of Jesus' person and work. Matthew and Luke "are complementary and make different points," said Bill Warren, director of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's Center for New Testament Textual Studies.

"For example, in Matthew we can see the temptation of feeling threatened by Jesus and wanting to retain control even at the cost of doing ungodly things like Herod did. And we can see how we need to be sensitive to God's leadership as the magi were, offering their best based on God's message to them," Warren said. In Luke's account God first reveals His Son's birth to "common folks, the shep-

herds. And God still uses common folks to carry His message forward."

The wise men

Matthew's account of Jesus' birth is famous for its presentation of the wise men, or "magi" in Greek; King Herod's murderous extermination of male children in Bethlehem; and the flight of Jesus and His parents to Egypt. Luke omits those details but reports the visit of shepherds following Jesus' birth; Mary's song of praise known as the "Magnificat," named for the first word in the song's Latin translation; and angels proclaiming, "Glory to God in the highest."

Theologically Matthew highlights Jesus' status as King of the Jews while Luke depicts Him as the Savior of all people.

Rob Plummer, chairman of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's New Testament department, said, "If we focus on the different details the Gospel writers report, we may miss the amazing similarities. Both report that Jesus' mother was named Mary and His adoptive father was named Joseph, both report Jesus was supernaturally born of a virgin, both identify Jesus as a descendent of David, both say Jesus was born in Bethlehem, both report that He eventually ended up in Nazareth." (See 'Historical,' page 3)

COMMENT

Those From Whom You Learned It

Can you imagine Timothy's reactions when a messenger handed him the letter scroll from the great apostle Paul? The apostle had been like a father to him. They had traveled together, faced hardship together, celebrated spiritual victories together.

Now Paul was in a Roman prison on trial for his life. Timothy must have thought the letter was like the final words of a dying man. His heart must have raced when he read near the end of the letter his father-in-the-faith's plea to "do your best to come to me quickly" and asked him to "bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas."

Perhaps Timothy received the letter with trembling hands reflecting the sadness in his heart for one who he loved deeply. Perhaps he eagerly tore into the letter's binds so he could read the latest news about this special friend.

Doubtless Timothy's eyes fell on those opening words "To Timothy, my dear son." His heart must have swelled as he read of Paul's conviction that the "sincere faith" of his family "now lives in you" and urged him to "fan into flame the gift of God which is in you."

The letter of 2 Timothy is filled with encouragement and instruction and warning — all designed to help the younger pastor be "thoroughly equipped for every good work." Still the apostle acknowledged "But you know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecution, sufferings." Being traveling companions and co-workers for years has a way of providing those insights.

Learning from Paul

When Timothy read "continue in what you have learned and what you have become convinced of because you know those from whom you learned it," what images came to his mind? Did he think of persecution in Thessalonica or times of spiritual responsiveness in Berea? Did he think of the church fight in Corinth or reflect on those winter months he and Paul spent together when the letter to the Romans was composed?

Paul had to be among the first to which the young man's mind turned when he read "because you know those from whom you learned



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

it." From Paul he had learned more than the truth that Jesus is Lord. Timothy had learned the implication of the full apostolic gospel. He had learned to endure hardship and suffering. Boldness in the faith had been imparted. That boldness would one day result in his martyrdom but that was still in the future.

Committed to the good news

Years of working together, of hearing the apostle's powerful sermons, of being a part of regular teaching in the synagogues had helped form in him a commitment to the good news that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

Others must have come to mind as well. Chief among them were his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Even the apostle Paul mentioned them when he wrote of the "sincere faith which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice."

How these two women came to faith in Jesus Christ is not known. Eunice is introduced in Acts 16:1 as "a Jewess and a believer." Evidently Timothy's Greek father was not a believer. Being in a mixed marriage did not stop the women from teaching young Timothy the sacred writings from infancy.

Timothy learned of God's love, of a promised Messiah, of God's expectations for holiness in daily living. Eventually Timothy learned Jesus was the longed-for Messiah. It was through the study of the sacred writings that Timothy was led to faith in Jesus Christ.

By the time he was a teen, Timothy's commit-

ment to Christ was well known as far away as Iconium, a full day's journey from his home in Lystra. But that reputation would not have been possible without the foundation laid by Lois and Eunice from his earliest days.

There must have been others whose faces flashed across his mind as Timothy thought about those who helped shape him into the man who would become the first bishop of Ephesus. Formal instruction was the tool used by some. Others kindled his mind through a sermon, a conversation, a lifestyle. It is amazing how God uses so many people to stimulate interest and speed understanding of the great things of God.

Who comes to your mind when the Bible tells you to "continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of because you know those from whom you learned it?"

For me one of the first is a Sunday School teacher who regularly made sure all of us fifth and sixth graders mastered our weekly memory verse. I can still see the gold stars pasted on the chart beside the name of each one who could say the week's memory verse. These many years later I still remember most of them.

I remember a pastor who had only completed one year of college. He spent hours in the church office studying and preparing his sermons so he could "rightly divide the word of truth." I remember a First Baptist Church pastor who expanded my understandings and horizons with his kind, gentle proddings.

I remember college teachers and seminary professors, mentors and co-workers God used to teach and train me in the sacred Scriptures and the work of the Church. Like Timothy, I am a part of all those who influenced me through the years.

Lois and Eunice surely were pleased when they learned the apostle Paul wanted Timothy to join his missionary band. They certainly had a sense of parental pride as they watched the group fade from sight as they left Lystra for their next missionary destination.

Thoroughly equipped

Perhaps like Paul as he penned the letter we call 2 Timothy, Lois and Eunice had a deep feeling of satisfaction that they had accomplished their goal. Timothy was thoroughly equipped for whatever lay before him.

Timothy was not a self-made man. None of us are. All are indebted to those who have invested in us — those who have taught us the sacred Scriptures, who have prayed for us, corrected us, trained us and equipped us for God's service.

As God brings to mind those from whom you learned the great truths of God, give thanks for them. If possible, why not give thanks to them? It might help them know their labor was not in vain. 🙏

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

CONVENTION MESSENGERS

Editor Bob Terry wrote about the recent state convention annual meeting in his editorial in the Nov. 20 issue — "Reflecting on the Annual Meeting." In this editorial he gave a personal review of the highlights of the convention but it left me with

some serious questions.

One concern I wish to address is the "impression of a drive-in campaign" Dr. Terry mentions in his column. While he states there were 147 messengers registered on Wednesday morning, the last day of the convention and the day that elections take

place, could we not see this as something that took place because of the official convention sermon and not due to elections alone?

(See 'Letters,' page 9)





"If ye continue in My word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."
John 8:31-32

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Historical and ACCURATE'

Seminary professors say slightly differing stories highlight different aspects

(continued from page 1)

Plummer used an example from his own life to explain why it is unreasonable for skeptics to conclude that Matthew and Luke contradict.

"When my students get hung up on different details in the Gospel accounts I encourage them to consider the complexity of their own lives," Plummer said. "Life is full of surprising coincidences and unexpected turns. My senior year in college I roomed with a young man also named Rob who went on to study at seminary (like me) — but he went to Princeton, while I went to Southern. Later a skeptical historian might wrongly conclude that there was only one original Rob, whom some later followers attached to a 'Princetonian' tradition and other followers connected to a 'Southern Seminary' tradition."

Historical accounts

Plummer continued, "But wait. Imagine that after you read this article you run into someone I knew in college. He says, 'Rob Plummer roomed with a guy named Eric his senior year in college.' Or you meet another former acquaintance who says, 'Rob Plummer had a single dorm room his senior year in college.' Am I a liar? In fact, all of those statements are true. I roomed in a single dorm room half of my senior year and then switched to co-renting a house with two roommates — one named Eric and one named Rob."

Analogous to the various accounts of his college days that are all true but may seem conflicting, Plummer noted, "The biblical authors often choose to focus on part of this historical account and do not give exhaustive details."

The Gospels are "inspired documentaries" that are "historical and accurate" yet "are also written from the vantage point of the inspired human authors," Plummer said.

The different characters included in the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke align with the two authors' doctrinal emphases, according to Thor Madsen, professor of New Testament, ethics and philosophy at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

"Matthew wants us to notice how, by the grace of God, the 'wrong' people can under-

stand who Jesus is while the 'right' ones do not," Madsen said. The magi were "pagan stargazers from the east who see the supernatural star and come a great distance to worship Jesus," but "the locals in Jerusalem" did not recognize the Savior's birth.

Matthew's genealogy of Jesus further demonstrates God's willingness to accept the "wrong" people as His own by including three women — Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba — whose sinful pasts would have caused Jews to regard them as outsiders.

In Luke "God is the ultimate Promise-Keeper whose Word never fails," Madsen said. "Accordingly, John the Baptist becomes everything predicted by Gabriel, being filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb. ... Even the census in 2:1-4 highlights God's promise-keeping power: He will move the whole earth, so to speak, in order to put Mary in Bethlehem on schedule for the birth of her Son. Angels tell shepherds that a time of peace has come, the sign of which is a baby in a manger — a sign that they eventually see, as God had promised. The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would see the Messiah before his death; and he does, just as God had promised. Thus the importance of Luke's characters is their availability to show God's faithfulness to His promises."

Kingly role of Jesus

Warren said the wise men appearing in Matthew authenticates "the kingly role of Jesus."

The magi were "king-makers, almost certainly from the ... Parthian Empire (an Empire that Rome had not yet conquered at that time)," Warren said. "Prior to Herod the Great claiming the throne, he had to battle the Parthians, who were trying to put their own choice of a

person in as the King of the Jews. So they are now coming to do so again it appears ... only this time it would be a different type of king."

Warren proposed a timeline of how the birth narratives might fit together:

▶ "Mary miraculously becomes pregnant (Matthew and Luke).

▶ Joseph decides not to divorce her due to the visit of the angel (Matthew and Luke).

▶ The birth of John the Baptist happens (Luke).

▶ The star appears to the magi and they begin their journey (Matthew).

▶ Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem (Luke).

▶ Jesus is born in a cave where the animals were kept below the house in Bethlehem (Luke) (7 to 4 B.C.).

▶ The shepherds get the notice about Jesus' birth and visit Him in the birth cave (Luke).

▶ The magi arrive in Jerusalem and then go to Bethlehem to see Jesus at the house (Matthew).

▶ Herod realizes that the magi are not going to return to Jerusalem and orders the killing of the babies in Bethlehem (Matthew).

▶ Joseph and Mary flee to Egypt with Jesus (Matthew).

▶ Joseph and Mary return to Nazareth (Matthew)."

However believers think the two accounts fit together, it is illogical to say they contradict, Madsen said.

"Matthew's infancy narrative would contradict Luke's only if, in some respect, Matthew says 'A' and Luke says 'not A,'" Madsen said. "But the two accounts don't differ in that kind of way. What we see ... are differences arising from the standards by which Matthew chooses to include information not given by Luke, and vice versa." (BP)

**"What we see ... are
differences arising from
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and vice versa."**

**Thor Madsen, professor
Midwestern Baptist
Theological Seminary**

Samford trustees approve new purchase, address other items

Samford University's board of trustees gave official approval Dec. 2 to the purchase of the Southern Progress, Inc., headquarters located adjacent to the university's campus. The meeting, held at Southern Progress, included a tour of the facilities for trustees.

The 28-acre property includes three buildings with 398,000-square-feet and more than 1,000 parking spaces. The sale is expected to close before the end of December, Samford officials said.

Harry B. Brock III, Samford's vice president for business and financial affairs, said the new College of Health Sciences will occupy two of the buildings and Time, Inc., the parent company for Southern Progress, will lease the third building and a parking deck for its Birmingham operations under a long-term agreement with Samford.

Brock and Samford President Andrew Westmoreland both emphasized that the purchase would

provide much-needed space for the university's future academic needs and anticipated enrollment growth with both existing and new programs within the College of Health Sciences.

Trustees also approved:

▶ A new Division of Career and Continuing Studies in the Orlean Bullard Beeson School of Education will include the Evening Studies Program, formerly known as the Evening College, and a still-developing online stud-

ies program to be known as Samford Online.

▶ A bachelor of science in psychology degree.

▶ A new master of public health with concentration in nutrition degree program.

▶ A master of athletic training designed to prepare students to be practicing athletics trainers.

▶ A new online master of science in health law and policy in Cumberland School of Law. (Samford)

BAPTIST CAMPUS MINISTRY

Alabama Baptist churches, BCM groups minister to international students

By Amy Jackson
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

New college students experience a plethora of “first experiences” in their initial semesters of college. It is their first time to live away from home. It is their first experience taking classes independently and navigating a new city on their own.

While some of these experiences might seem a bit daunting for U.S. college freshmen, they can be downright terrifying for international students. Imagine experiencing all of these things in a foreign country where people speak a different language and have different cultural customs. A place where you are multiple flights and time zones away from the nearest family member.

The number of international students on Alabama college campuses continues to rise. And as more international students begin to study in the state, Alabama Baptists and Baptist Campus Ministries (BCM) have an opportunity to encourage, engage and walk alongside these students as they experience these “firsts” far away from home.

One of the most practical needs many international students face is the need to learn English. Many universities offer conversation clubs and conversation partners, which gives BCM students and local churches the opportunity to build relationships with international students while meeting a tangible need.

Global Café at Auburn University serves such a purpose, and BCM students are able to connect with international students. They meet with internationals twice a month to practice English and conversational skills.

Spiritual conversations

Steve Thompson, senior campus minister at Auburn, explained that meeting this practical need for international students often leads to developing and deepening friendships as well as opportunities for spiritual conversations.

Brad Bensinger, campus minister at Troy University, agreed that helping with conversational clubs is a great way to build relationships with international students.

“We have tried different things as far as [programs] for international students are concerned, but I think it all just comes back to spending time with them, practicing English, showing interest in their culture — you’ve got to invest the time in it,” Bensinger said.

Dustin Edwards, student pastor at First Baptist Church, Livingston, said the church has developed a partnership with international students by offering Bible study options and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.



Photo by Caroline Summers

Several universities in Alabama including Samford help pair up international students like the ones pictured here with local families.

First, Livingston, became involved with international students through a Chinese Bible study they started offering twice a month at a local Chinese restaurant. The church also offers an ESL class on Tuesday nights and they have seen some of these students develop deeper relationships with church members.

Chad Hess, student minister at Woodmont Baptist Church, Florence, shared a similar story about his church’s relationship with a Chinese student, Sami.

Sami was first introduced to Woodmont Baptist through a progressive dinner in partnership with the BCM at the University of North Alabama in Florence. Since then Sami has become involved in the ministry at the church and recently joined the choir and participates in Bible study.

Another way Alabama Baptists have been reaching out to international students is by introducing them to American life and culture.

Shannon Hughes, associate campus minister at Auburn and Southern Union State Community College in Opelika, said some of their events are solely for the international students to experience American culture. Taking a trip to the Coca-Cola Museum in Atlanta or going ice-skating gives them that experience.

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions also helps support cultural connections

through an event known as the International Friends Retreat. The retreat, held each fall, allows international students to spend a weekend at WorldSong Missions Place in Cook Springs, where they have the opportunity to spend time outdoors taking part in American recreational activities, engage with American students and hear more about Christianity. In October, 130 students participated in the retreat.

“The retreat opened doors to talk about the gospel,” Hughes explained.

Tea for Troy is another organization that aims to help internationals learn about culture focusing not solely on American culture, rather creating an environment where internationals and Americans can learn about many different cultures.

Tea for Troy

Graham Pierce, a student at Troy, is the 2014 Tea for Troy leader. The organization hosts bimonthly presentations on tea rituals practiced in various countries. Some countries they have spotlighted include Sudan, Vietnam and Egypt.

“Our goal is to create a place where internationals feel at home and can be friends with Americans — where they can start seeing the way we live, which begs the question of why we live that way,” Pierce explained. “It’s a different opportunity to share the gospel.”

While international students can learn

much about culture through campus events, many would say the most helpful place to learn about American culture is in the home.

Three Plus One, a program at Troy, connects three international students and one American student with a local family. Several local churches have partnered with Troy’s BCM to help build community among internationals through Three Plus One.

Samford University in Birmingham has a similar program called Friendship Partner Program. The program is organized by the English Language Learner Institute (ELLI) at Samford and is designed to assist local families connect with international students.

Anna Ralston, coordinator for enrollment and cultural education at ELLI, said churches can easily serve internationals by being a friend to them and plugging into a program like this at a local university.

Sitao Chen, a Chinese student at Samford, arrived in the U.S. in August 2011. Before arriving he was connected with a local family, Lee and Catherine Allen. The Allens are members of Mountain Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham, which has a partnership with a church in China. The Allens had visited China several times and offered to host Chen because of a housing shortage at Samford.

Over the course of the past three years Chen and the Allens have developed a close relationship. Chen spent his first American holidays at their home and experienced Thanksgiving and Christmas, where they introduced various holiday traditions to him. While with the Allens, Chen also was introduced to Christianity.

Catherine Allen recalled, “Chen did not have any Christian background or knowledge. But when he was living with us, we said, ‘On Sunday, we go to church,’ and he said ‘Okay, I’m for it.’”

The Allens introduced Chen to Christianity, helped him plug in to their church and encouraged him as he learned about American life and about Christianity. Chen is now a Christian and is involved at Mountain Brook Baptist where he sings in the choir.

Dongmei Ma, known by her American name “Echo,” is a Chinese master’s student at Auburn. She got involved in a Chinese Christian Bible study where she became a believer and joined First Baptist Church, Opelika.

Echo has been discipled by a couple from Lakeview Baptist Church, Auburn.

Hess said, “One of America’s advantages we need to leverage is that sometimes the nations come to us. And that’s what you see on a college campus — that the nations are right down the street. We have the opportunity to make disciples of all nations.” ☞



MINISTRIES

continue to make an impact across the state

University of North Alabama student shares about her love for international students

By Carley Hall
University of North Alabama

I started college three years ago at the University of North Alabama (UNA). The indescribable love God has given me for international students started at the Baptist Campus Ministries (BCM) Halloween party my freshman year. I met a Chinese girl who would later celebrate Thanksgiving with my family. Praise the Lord that she was able to be among a family who loves Jesus. During the drive back to her dorm, God led me to share the gospel with her. Her response left me absolutely speechless. She had never heard of the name of Jesus. I was absolutely broken and the thought struck me that if she had never heard the name of Jesus, another student at UNA might not have either. I had to reach out to the international students; I had to tell them about Jesus.

That Christmas I held a party at my house for international students with the intentions of sharing the reason why Christians celebrate Christmas. A friend and I went to the BCM to pick up students expecting around 10 or 15 to show up. To my surprise, there were 50 students waiting on us. Tears flowed from my eyes because there was no other explanation besides Jesus. The whole night was a display of God's glory. My parents and I felt like we experienced the feeding of the 5,000. When the time came for the birth of Jesus to be shared I was overwhelmed by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our house. The result of that night was a Chinese girl making the decision to follow Jesus and later follow in believer's baptism. Many, many prayers have been sent up from my room and my biggest request — salvation — was answered in the same place. I knew from that moment that God was up to something in my life and at UNA.

'No one's told them'

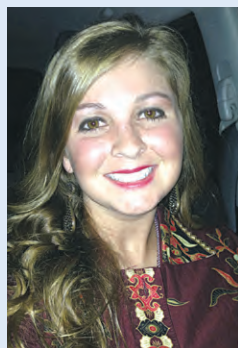
Months later I went to the movies with the girl who had spent Thanksgiving with my family. As we were driving back to campus listening to our local Christian radio station, she turned my radio off

and said out of nowhere, "Carley, the reason people in China don't believe is because no one's told them ... they need you over there." I was speechless and shocked to hear this coming from an unbeliever. I couldn't move, couldn't speak, couldn't blink. Staring at her, I slowly nodded my head in agreement. God spoke to me after I dropped her off and said, "Carley, they first need you here."

Blank check

I was desperate for God to show up and show out. My blank check was on the table and I was ready for God to spend the days He gives me however He saw fit. Last semester God led me to start a weekly international girls Bible study called "Discovery." The purpose of Discovery is to have a few international girls grouped with one American girl who simply helps them discover for themselves what Christianity is and who Jesus is by walking through God's Word. Through Discovery last semester, we saw two of the girls — one Vietnamese and one Chinese — come to faith and follow through in believer's baptism. God has been faithful to not only bring girls who are hungry to us but to ultimately save them. What I learned through last semester was how to truly live like Jesus did. He loved people unconditionally and met them where they were at in life.

After serving my Father this past summer in Southeast Asia for two months through Nehemiah Teams, I came back to UNA with unbelievable opportunities presented before me to serve international students even more. I am one of 10 students who serve as a Navigator, or student ambassador, for the Office of International Affairs (OIA). The Lord provided me with a job at the OIA as well as the awesome privilege to teach an international Sunday School class at my church. The opportunities became endless once I came to the end of myself. God has done nothing short of working out every single detail for my life to be spent reaching the nations right where He has me. To God be the glory. 🙏



HALL



Photo by Chris Mills

Students participate in the International Friends Retreat through Auburn University's BCM.

Christmas perfect time to reach internationals

By Chris Mills
Alabama State Board of Missions

When I reflect on the stories I hear from across the state related to international student ministry, I can only smile. My heart beats with excitement as I think about God's work in bringing the students to us from some of the hardest-to-reach places. I am filled with joy as I think about American students and Alabama Baptist churches coming together to connect with internationals that call Alabama home for a time.

I can remember as a young boy I had a great interest in learning about people from all over the world and my heart still skips a beat when I get to connect with someone from a different part of the world. I think God gives me that opportunity to see a glimpse of His heart — a heart that is big enough for all people. My wife and I have personally sought to plug into the unique opportunity of reaching the nations that have come to Alabama. We love the international friends that we get to hang out with and study the Bible with. We love having these students and scholars come to our home to learn about their culture and teach them about ours.

Yet when I hear statistics like 75 percent of international students will never enter an American home while in the United States (www.isionline.org), I'm filled with sadness.

I am sad because this is an easily fixable issue. I am sad because hospitality is one of the greatest ways to literally open the door to spiritual conversations. We can do something about this. Alabama Baptists can make this statistic much lower in our state.

I challenge you to see how you might welcome the nations that call Alabama home. During this holiday season consider having a special meal for internationals in your community to tell them about the reason for Christmas. And do not let it stop there. Invite them to church with you, invite them to learn about your community by taking them to various events throughout the year or plan nights with your family and international friends.

Churches can put together special meals with a holiday focus to minister to the internationals in the community. Local churches can look for other ways to connect with internationals — English as a Second Language classes, culture exchanges, etc.

Research the parts of the world that your international friends are from. Learn about how to best connect with them. Go build relationships with these students and see how God works in their life and yours.

Contact me if I can help you think through the best ways to be obedient in making disciples of all nations — in your neighborhood.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Email Chris Mills at cmills@alsbom.org. 🙏



MILLS

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

To submit news items, email news@thealabamabaptist.org or call 205-870-4720, ext. 100, at least three weeks prior to the event.

AUTAUGA

► **Ernie Willis** is the new pastor of **Wadsworth Church, Deatsville**. His first Sunday was Dec. 7. He previously served as pastor of The Community Church, Springville. He also serves as a regional hospice chaplain and bereavement coordinator for the Southeast Hospice Network. He holds a bachelor's degree in pastoral theology from Southeastern Bible College in Birmingham and a master of divinity from Beeson Divinity School of Samford University in Birmingham. He and his wife, Michele, have three children.

BESSEMER

► **The Church at McAdory, McCalla**, will have a "Candles and Carols" special service Dec. 21, 6 p.m. There will be hundreds of outside luminary candles. During the service there will be Scriptures and songs announcing the Messiah's birth. Bill McCall is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► The sanctuary choir of **Westmont Church, Birmingham**, will present "The First Noel" on Dec. 21, 11 a.m. Tim Shivers will direct. A celebration of the Lord's Supper will follow. For more information and direc-

tions call 205-788-6811 or visit the church's website at www.westmontbaptist.org. Nathan Daniels is pastor. ► **Leon Miller** is the new pastor of **South Roebuck Community Church, Birmingham**. Miller attended the University of Alabama at Birmingham and earned a bachelor's degree in business management from Birmingham-Southern College. He also holds an associates degree in divinity and a bachelor's degree in biblical studies and religion from Samford University in Birmingham. Miller has 18 years of pastoral experience and most recently served as associate minister for Greater Shiloh Church, West End. He and his wife, Aimee, have two children and two grandchildren. His first Sunday will be Dec. 14.



MILLER

CHEROKEE

► **Rock Run Church, Piedmont**, will hold its annual community Christmas parade Dec.

20. The event begins at 3 p.m. but floats should line up at 2 p.m. at the church. There will be food provided. Any entry is welcome as long as it moves. The parade begins with prayer and the Cherokee Association van will lead the parade. For more information contact Tonya Pike at 256-447-2097 or dAVpl02@aol.com. Lewis Conaway is interim pastor.

ETOWAH

► The chancel choir of **Twelfth Street Church, Rainbow City**, will present "The Song of Christmas" on Dec. 14, 5:30 p.m. Craig Carlisle is pastor.

LIMESTONE

► **Clements Church, Athens**, will host "Refreshed" Ladies Conference with Sheryl DeTellis on Jan. 10. Brunch will begin at 9 a.m. and the conference will follow from 10 a.m. to noon. For more information and to register for this conference call the church office at 256-729-1328 or email carolyn@clements baptist.org. The registration deadline is Dec. 18. Tim Anderson is pastor.

MONTGOMERY

► **First Church, Montgomery**, will hold a Living Christmas Tree on Dec. 12-14. The program will begin at 7 nightly and there will be an additional 4 p.m. performance Dec. 13-14. For more information and to purchase tickets visit www.the-livingchristmastree.org. Jay Wolf is pastor.

PINE BARREN

► Friends and family of the former **Bear Creek Church** will hold the annual Christmas service Dec. 14, 1:30 p.m. with carols and the telling of the Christmas story. Refreshments will follow. For more information call 334-682-5000. John Marks is director of missions for Pine Barren Association. ► **Enon Church, Camden**, will hold a special Christmas service Dec. 21, 5 p.m. There will be communion and a candlelight service. Refreshments will follow. Michael Yancey is pastor.

TUSKEGEE LEE

► **Pepperell Church, Opelika**, and the Happy Hitters senior adult ministry will host Christian humorist/musician Billy Bob Bohannon on Dec. 18, 2 p.m. ☞

ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

FBC Prattville's Coleman honored for 25 years

"Love God first, love your family second, love the Church third." This is what Travis Coleman Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church, Prattville, has learned in his 25 years as pastor of one church.

"I never thought I'd be in one place 25 years. I just wanted to be faithful wherever God had me."

Before First, Prattville, Coleman served as associate pastor at First Baptist Church, Gulf Breeze, and as pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church, Enterprise. He earned a bachelor's degree from Palm Beach Atlantic College (now University) in West Palm Beach, Fla., a master of divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and a doctor of ministry degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Coleman currently serves as president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and is on *The Alabama Baptist* board of directors.

First, Prattville, honored Coleman in an evening service Oct. 19 that included testimonies from church members and leaders who have worked with him.

Special guests included Rick Lance, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions executive director. The church gifted Coleman and his wife of 45 years, Arlinda, with a love offering, an engraved tray and two iPads.

The couple has three children and six grandchildren. (Maggie Walsh)



COLEMAN

Limestone Association DOM Fullerton to retire

Robert Fullerton, who has served as Limestone Baptist Association's director of missions (DOM) for more than 15 years, will retire Dec. 31.

Fullerton earned a bachelor's degree from Samford University in Birmingham and later a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and a doctor of ministry degree at a Luther Rice Seminary extension center.

After his calling to the ministry in 1968, Fullerton became pastor of Unity Baptist Church, Fayette. He later served as pastor of Maurepas Baptist Church, Maurepas, La., while in seminary and of two Mississippi Baptist churches. He served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Livingston, and later as minister of administration and education at Hillwood Baptist Church, Hunstville.

After his retirement Fullerton will remain on staff as an interim DOM until the association finds a replacement.

Fullerton said he learned to be diligent and "keep on striving to accomplish the things God has led you to do."

"Have some endurance and don't give up on things," he said.

He and his wife, Ann, will remain in Athens after retirement. They are members of First Baptist Church, Athens, and have one daughter and three grandchildren.

Ann retired in the fall after having served as Fullerton's administrative assistant since he took on the DOM role in 1999. (Neisha Roberts)



FULLERTON

Sulphur Springs Assoc. ministers through stockings

Although Sulphur Springs Baptist Association hoped to collect 150 filled Christmas stockings this year for its missions project Stockings for Kids, area churches and individuals pulled together to donate 250 stockings to a food bank in Warrior.

The food bank, a ministry of Cane Creek Baptist Church, Warrior, will provide food for those in need Dec. 20 and also will distribute the gift-filled stockings to the families with children.

Kristi Turner, who serves as secretary/treasurer/clerk for Sulphur Springs Association, said the stockings are "absolutely filled" with anything from toys to socks to candy to toothbrushes.

The association also collected and donated new and used toys to Mission of Hope in Dora, a food bank and clothes closet ministry that also will distribute the gifts Dec. 20. (Neisha Roberts)

REFLECTIONS

"GONNA CUT ME DOWN ONE OF THEM SINGING CHRISTMAS TREES I HEAR SO MUCH ABOUT."

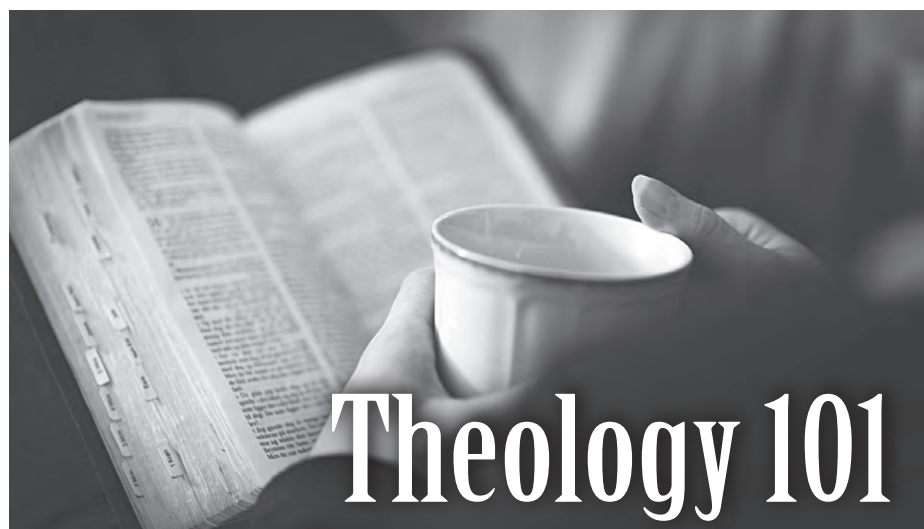


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The Alabama Baptist newspaper.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Songs of Christmas

Benedictus: Zacharias' Song

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Another “song of Christmas” was voiced by the father of John the Baptist. Zacharias’ song, found in Luke 1:68–79, has become known as “The Benedictus” and is based on its first word in the Latin version. The background for his song was the birth of his son, John. Zacharias was performing his priestly temple duties when an angel announced that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would become parents. Being childless throughout their marriage the news sounded too good to be true. Being hardly able to absorb such news the aged priest asked for proof but was rewarded with a sentence of silence. God’s act had two parts: the promise of a son in his old age and a nine-month period of silence supernaturally imposed on him until the baby’s birth, at which time Zacharias was instructed to give his son the name of John.

When the infant was presented for the official naming ceremony everyone presumed the baby would be named after its father. In careful obedience to his prior instructions the new father asked for a writing tablet upon which he wrote emphatically that the baby’s name would be John. That act of obedience occasioned the lifting of the divinely imposed inability to speak. His last spoken words before the silence engulfed him had been those of doubt. Now at the lifting of the silence the first words out of Zacharias’ mouth were those of praise, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel” (Luke 1:68).

Divided in two parts

Zacharias’ song was in two parts. The first part was praise while the second part was prophecy. His praise was offered by the enablement of the Holy Spirit (1:67). Expressed in poetic language, the Spirit-inspired praise was laced with Old Testament quotations and allusions. It also was filled with figures of speech. Zacharias’ words of praise had to do with what God was about to do in sending the promised Messiah (Luke 1:68–75). He who was

beset with doubts when the angel visited him was so sure that God’s promise would happen that he praised God in advance in the past tense, “For He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us” (1:68–69). Obviously the praise part of the song was about the coming Messiah, who would be a descendant of David.

Words about John and Jesus

The second part of the song was prophetic and directed toward his infant son, John (1:76–79). Zacharias’ prophetic utterance intertwined words about John and words about Jesus the Messiah. John would grow up to become the forerunner of the Messiah. As forerunner John would have a prophetic ministry, being called “the prophet of the Most High” (1:76). In the role of forerunner John’s mission was to prepare the way for the Messiah. That preparation involved announcing salvation through the forgiveness of sins. That salvation was to be because of the “tender mercy” of God. Zacharias’ prophetic utterance also referred to the coming Messiah as “the sunrise from on high” (1:77–78). Using the imagery of sunrise the prophetic portion of Zacharias’ song looked toward the coming of light to those who sat “in darkness and in the shadow of death.” The promised salvation would guide the people’s feet “into the way of peace” (1:79).

Grateful songs of praise often followed great acts of God. Such was the case with Mary’s song and then with Zacharias’ song. Will this holy season find us lifting songs of praise to God for His gracious and mighty work in our lives? 🙏

Jerry Batson,
retired associate
dean of Beeson
Divinity School at
Samford University
and professor at
several schools of
religion, is pastor
of First Baptist
Church, McCalla.



‘Be a Blessing’

Alabama Baptists continue blessing others

During the 2014 annual meeting of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, *The Alabama Baptist* handed out dollar bills at its display booth at Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham, on Nov. 11–12. Messengers were challenged to “Be a Blessing” — to take a dollar and touch a life. Below are personal stories of how the dollars were used to bless someone’s life. Share your story with us. Email pr@thealabamabaptist.org.

I invested the dollar by giving it to a person who distributed gospel tracts to buy more tracts. This was a blessing!”

Faye Bonner

I decided to give my dollar to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO). Let me explain. We were already going to make a gift to the LMCO — always have, always will. What if every Southern Baptist gave one more dollar than they were going to give? That would be about \$10,000,000 more to international mis-

sions to reach a lost world. I also plan to challenge lots of other Southern Baptists to give one more dollar this year to Lottie Moon.”

David George

I was anticipating finding someone to share my dollar with. The Lord opened my eyes to a developmentally challenged person I had seen before. I shared that dollar and some others with him with a brief gospel witness. Thank you.”

Mark Wakefield

The lady who cleaned our motel room spoke very little English. [My wife] and I shared our dollars and a few more with her. We trust our ‘tip’ was a witness to her of Jesus’ love.”

Larry Patterson

I gave my dollar back to *The Alabama Baptist* for all the many blessings they give to me with each issue. I could not think of a more fitting way to use it.”

Gladys Luker

CP giving 2 percent above projection

Year-to-date contributions to Southern Baptist national and international missions and ministries received by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee (EC) are \$31,959,358.96, or 2 percent more than the year-to-date SBC Cooperative Program (CP) Allocation Budget projection and are 6.35 percent above contributions received during the same time frame last year, according to a news release from SBC EC President and CEO Frank S. Page.

The year-to-date total represents money received from Oct. 1 through Nov. 30 for distribution through the CP and is \$1,909,105.56 more than the

\$30,050,253.40 received through the end of November 2013. It also is \$626,025.63 more than the \$31,333,333.33 year-to-date budgeted amount to support Southern Baptist ministries globally and across North America.

Designated giving

Designated giving of \$7,315,431.74 for the same year-to-date period is 5.90 percent, or \$407,785.80, above the \$6,907,645.94 received at this point last year.

However, November’s CP allocation receipts for SBC work totaled \$15,940,178.11 — \$498,641.15 less than November 2013. (BP)

Former youth minister Davis pleads guilty

Mack Allen Davis, former minister at Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham, pleaded guilty Dec. 1 to six charges of sexually abusing minors in Jefferson County. The 74-year-old still faces charges involving the same victims in Cherokee and St. Clair counties.

Davis is accused of molesting two boys over the course of a decade from the late 1970s to the late 1980s in various locations.

Davis began serving at Lakeside Baptist in 1977 as minister of youth and recreation and the following summer also was named director of the church’s camp. He retired in 1999 at age 59 after his wife filed for divorce.

Sentencing for Davis is scheduled for April 9. (BNG)

Alabama Baptist GIVING



Year to Date through Nov. 30, 2014

NOVEMBER

CP Challenge Budget Goal\$3,475,000
CP Challenge Budget Gifts.....\$2,457,522
Under Goal for Month.....\$1,017,478

YEAR TO DATE

CP Challenge Budget Goal ..\$38,225,000
CP Challenge Budget Gifts...\$35,910,621
Under Goal for Year.....\$2,314,379

The monthly and year-to-date totals include CP base, CP state causes and SBC causes.

Religious curriculum

School district drops plans for Bible course in Oklahoma public schools

An Oklahoma school district has dropped plans for a pilot project by Hobby Lobby President Steve Green aimed at adding Bible study to the curriculum of public high schools nationwide.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU) said Nov. 25 that superintendent Sean McDaniel of Mustang Public Schools near Hobby Lobby's corporate headquarters in Oklahoma City responded in an email that implementation of a Bible course "is no longer a discussion item nor is there a plan to provide such a course in the foreseeable future."

McDaniel reportedly added the final decision came after the district requested that Hobby Lobby agree to pay its legal expenses in the event of a lawsuit and Green refused.

AU Executive Director Barry Lynn said, "Education officials in Mustang (schools) did the wise thing."

"Objective study about religion in public schools is permissible, but this curriculum was essentially an extended Sunday School lesson," said Lynn, an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ.

The Mustang school board voted in April to beta-test the first year of the Museum of the Bible Curriculum, an ambitious four-year public school elective on the narrative, history and impact of the Bible.

In July the nonprofit started by Green announced it was postponing the August introduction of the curriculum after church-state groups reviewed some of the book and complained that it was biased toward a particular religious perspective — biblical inerrancy — and would likely be declared unconstitutional.

Ayesha Khan, AU legal director, said, "There is a right way and wrong way to teach about the Bible ... in public schools. The

Hobby Lobby curriculum is an example of the wrong way."

Green said the curriculum would teach that the Bible is literally true.

"The book that we have is a reliable historical document, and we are going to point that out time and time again." (BNG)

One-fourth of American families turn to church food pantries for help

Nearly one-quarter of Americans say they have received help from a church-run food pantry in the past, according to a survey by LifeWay Research.

In an online survey of 1,158 adults in September, 22 percent said they are in families who have received food from a church-run food pantry in the past. Among churchgoers, the percentage is 26 percent while just 18 percent of those who never attend have gone to a church for help.

More than one-third of African-Americans (37 percent) answered "yes," compared to 19 percent of whites and 25 percent of Hispanics. Americans with no college degree are more than twice as likely as college graduates to say yes.

Thirty-five percent of those who say they have used a church-run food pantry identify as evangelical Christians.

Scott McConnell, vice president of LifeWay Research, said while churches have a reputation of providing coffee and donuts and covered-dish suppers for church members, they also are supplying food to many people in need.

According to Bread for the World, about 1 in 7 American households is not always sure where their next meal is coming from.

Feeding America, a nationwide network of 200 food banks, provides food assistance to an estimated 46.5 million Americans a year.

"There is an abundance of food in the U.S., but plenty of people still go hungry," McConnell said. "Many churches respond by faithfully following the biblical principle of being open handed to the poor and needy." (BNG)

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A Certain Trumpet

Sermons by Alabama Baptists

LETTERS

(continued from page 2)

The convention sermon was given by a pastor loved by his congregation. Many of his members were present to show support and appreciation for his good work in an area church. We also need to take into account the potential that some messengers were only able to attend the convention on Wednesday due to schedule conflicts. With these two stated situations alone, I could come up with at least two-thirds of these registered messengers on Wednesday, leaving almost the number referenced from the 2010 convention.

With my concerns aside, I am thankful for a productive, peaceful, passionate convention meeting of Alabama Baptists. I am thankful we are Southern Baptist and are leading in Cooperative Program giving within the national convention. I am grateful God is blessing us as we reach the world and that our churches are attempting to serve in troubled times. I'm also grateful we are united in great work through the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries, our colleges and universities, and the retirement homes — to name a few of the missions and ministries impacting the state and the world for Christ. Lastly I am thankful for the leadership of Dr. John Killian for the last two years as our state convention president.

Therefore let us give thanks for Alabama Baptists and ask God to give us an attitude of "no surrender" as we stand "recognizing our Bible is true, our gospel is eternal and our cause will prevail."

Jeff Fuller
Rockford, Ala.

EDITOR'S NOTE — *The church of the pastor who delivered the convention sermon was entitled to a maximum of 25 messengers. If all 25 registered, this still would not account for the three-fold increase in messenger registration during the last session compared to the last time the convention met in Birmingham.*

'WAR ON POVERTY'

Within the article "War on Poverty" Mr. Craig Baab from Alabama Applesseed advocated for Medicaid expansion in our state. He stated that we are missing out on \$9 billion over the next five years. However, no emphasis is given to the fact that the federal government covers Medicaid cost of new enrollees only through 2016. At that time the federal government will begin to phase down its support. I find that to be an especially troubling situation potentially allowing our state to be in a financially precarious position.

While I support the idea of health care for all, the reality of cost remains.

Chantay McClain
Toney Ala. ☪

The Gospel of Christmas — 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

In a world full of bad news we celebrate the greatest good news the world has ever heard or will hear at Christmastime. The gospel of Christmas is good news. This good news in the heart of God from eternity was revealed and announced that first Christmas Day.

The angel of the Lord declared to the shepherds that first Christmas: "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

What awesome news for each of us. "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4-5).

'Word of reconciliation'

In God's Word the gospel of Christmas is clearly revealed in this verse: "That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19).

As I reflect on the gospel of Christmas this truth rises in my heart. Christmas is a new beginning. Adam and Eve were created in the image of God to be an extension of the life of God, an expression of the character of God and an exhibit of the power of God (see Gen. 1:26). However, Adam and Eve sinned. Their sin separated them from God. So God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not charging their sin against them.

Jesus, the "last Adam" came to reconcile fallen, sinful man to the Holy God who created him.

I have read a lot of poems in my life but there is only one

By Fred H. Wolfe

Fred H. Wolfe is pastor of Luke 4:18 Fellowship, Mobile. He has served as a pastor for more than 55 years and has held leadership positions at the Alabama Baptist State Convention and Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) levels. He also preached the 1990 SBC convention sermon. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Mobile.



that I have never forgotten titled "The Land of Beginning Again" by Louisa Fletcher. In a real sense this is the gospel of Christmas:

I wish that there were some wonderful place

In the Land of Beginning Again. Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches

And all of our poor selfish grief Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door and never put on again.

The gospel of Christmas is such a place. God began again when Jesus, the last Adam, came into this world to reconcile us to God so we could have a new beginning.

Second Corinthians 5:17 says it so beautifully and completely, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." In Christ there is a new beginning.

As I examine 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 there are three truths that speak the gospel of Christmas clearly.

I. The Price of Reconciliation

The penalty for sin had to be paid. The Bible teaches that sin had separated us from God. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). We were all lost in our sin and estranged from God.

The good news of Christmas is found in these words: "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21a). The Father placed our sin on Jesus; Jesus is the propitiation (sin-bearer or substitute) for our sin.

The Word of God makes it clear that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross paid in full for our sin debt so we could be reconciled with and restored to God as our Father.

The promise of God concerning our sin is so clear in these words: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Rom. 5:10).

II. The Power of Reconciliation

The Word of God is clear that on the cross all our sin was on Jesus Christ. But God also took the righteousness of Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God, and placed His righteousness on us. God robed us in the righteousness of His Son. "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21a).

The gospel of Christmas is that God no longer sees us (His children) in our sin. He sees us clothed in the righteousness of His Son.

Paul said he gave up all his righteousness and counted it as garbage that he might have the righteousness of God in Christ (see Phil. 3:7-9).

There is great news in Romans 5:17, "For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one (Adam), much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ."

The words of the great hymn, "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less," has these words: "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus'

blood and righteousness. ... On Christ the Solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand."

The glorious good news is that in Christ we are washed in His blood and robed in His righteousness.

III. The Purpose of Reconciliation

No longer separated from God by our sin and now robed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:17 becomes a reality in our life. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."

Liberating words

The words in Christ are powerful words, liberating words. We are in Christ and Christ is in us. The Word of God says it so clearly in Colossians 1:27b: "Which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Jesus Christ comes to live in us in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that Christ is our life.

The Christian life is Jesus Christ living in us and through us in resurrection power.

In 1 Corinthians 1:30 the Scripture makes clear that "you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

The gospel of Christmas is found in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

The gospel of Christmas is good news we can share with a lost world. "We are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20) proclaiming the gospel of Christmas.

I love the words of the great song, "Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born."

And that is the gospel of Christmas. ☪

"And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?" 1 Cor. 14:8

CAMPUS News



JUDSON COLLEGE

► **Windham to Be Inducted into Alabama Women's Hall of Fame:** Kathryn Tucker Windham will be inducted into the Alabama Women's Hall of Fame (AWHOF) in March 2015.

A native of Thomasville, graduate of Huntingdon College and lifelong resident of Alabama, Windham is well-known as a master storyteller, author of 29 books, playwright, photographer and popular public television and radio personality.

Windham began her writing career at the age of 12 when she became movie editor for her cousin Earl Tucker's weekly newspaper, *The Thomasville Times*. After graduating from Huntingdon College, she went to work as a reporter for *The Alabama Journal*.



WINDHAM

In 1942 she moved to Birmingham and in 1944 joined *The Birmingham News*. She married A.B. Windham in 1946 and they moved to Selma where their three children were born. She joined the staff of *The Selma Times-Journal* in 1956 and won several Associated Press awards for writing and photography.

Windham died at age 93 on June 12, 2011, shortly before the publication of the last of her 29 books — "She: The Old Woman Who Took Over My Life."

► **Judson College Equestrian Teams Compete at Berry College:** The Judson College Equestrian Teams competed in

three shows Nov. 1–2 at Berry College in Rome, Ga.

The Huntseat team started Nov. 1, with senior Katelyn Vanhoozer, of Waco, Texas, placing first in Beginner Walk/Trot/Canter. Junior Veronica Primavera, placing second in Advanced Walk/Trot/Canter; freshman Sara Alsabrook, of Centreville, placing third; and sophomore Alex Huber, of Mechanicsburg, Pa., placing reserve. Freshmen Tiffani Pitts of Montgomery, placed third and Candace Paige, of Gadsden, placed sixth Novice Equitation.

The Western team also competed Nov. 1: Junior Mary Kilpatrick, of Dothan, placed first and Huber placed third in Advanced Western Horsemanship; junior Katie McQuaig, of Cumming, Ga., placed fifth in Novice Western Horsemanship; sophomore Emily Dickerson, of Madison, placed fifth in Intermediate II Western Horsemanship; and senior Daphne Arrington, of Roanoke, placed first in Beginner Western Horsemanship.

On Nov. 2 the Huntseat team competed again and Primavera placed fourth; Huber and sophomore Sheila Palmer, of Hoover, both placed fifth in Advanced Walk/Trot/Canter; Paige placed sixth in Novice Equitation, and Pitts placed fourth in Novice Over Fences.

► **Judson Students, Faculty Perform 'A Christmas Carol':** Christmas came early to Judson College with the theatrical production of the holiday classic, "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens. Four performances were given in Judson's Alumnae Auditorium on Nov. 13–15.

The show included an all-female cast of 24 student actors and choristers as well as a live band of student and faculty musicians.

Following the performance Nov. 15 a Dickensian dinner was organized by students in the Judson English Club. The play was

directed by Billie Jean Young, associate professor of fine and performing arts and artist in residence at Judson.

► **Judson Hosts Christmas Tea and Vespers Program:** Christmas Tea and Vespers is one of Judson College's most festive annual traditions. The Dec. 6 event "Mary's Journey," was directed by Camilla Horne, assistant professor of music. Judson Singers and FAITH ensemble, Judson Ringers handbell ensemble, and an instrumental ensemble and a string trio performed.

► **Judson Athletes Named to the National Christian College Athletic Association:** Two Judson Eagle student athletes were named to the National Christian College Athletic Association (NCCAA) South Region All-Tournament soccer team. The Judson College soccer team also won the South Region Sportsmanship Award.

Mary Milliron, of Alabaster, and Breele Hunter, of Richland, N.C., were both named to the all-tournament Team; Milliron also was selected for the all-regional team.

SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Samford Board of Trustees Approve New Faculty:** During a Dec. 2 board of trustees meeting, Samford University in Birmingham, approved two new faculty members.

William Lance Day was approved as assistant librarian. Day has been the interlibrary loan assistant for Samford's Harwell G. Davis Library since April. He has a master's degree in library and information science from the University of Alabama.

Alan Blankley was approved as chair and professor of accounting and management information

systems. Blankley currently is associate professor at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. He has a master's degree and doctorate from Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas.

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **UMobile Soccer Coaches Named Conference Coaches of the Year:** Both the University of Mobile's men's and women's soccer coaches have been named conference coaches of the year and their teams are headed for the NAIA national tournament.



WHELAN

Men's soccer coach Daniel Whelan and women's soccer coach Brian Person were each named Southern States Athletic Conference Coach (SSAC) of the Year. Whelan is in his first season as head coach after serving as assistant coach for the men's soccer team for the past five seasons. This is the second time Person has been named SSAC Women's Soccer Coach of the Year, having earned the honor in 2011.

Men's soccer won the SSAC regular season championship with a 13–3–3 record and women's soccer won the SSAC regular season championship and tournament championship with a 15–2–3 record. 🏆



PERSON

Want to know GOD?

Pastor John Carney
Blue Ridge Baptist Church

The other night I took my dog, Bentley, for a late night walk. Since the season is changing and moving toward winter the constellations in the sky are changing too. On the eastern horizon the big man with the belt and sword named Orion is climbing higher in the sky. Orion is huge and it catches your attention. Even those who can't recognize the Big Dipper can point out Orion.

Every time I see Orion my mind goes back to a star that caught the attention of those wise men from the east.

Once they saw it they knew something big was going to happen in Palestine. That star signaled that a new King was to be born who would change everything and they wanted to be a part of it.

For centuries men and women had dreamed of the chance to know God face to face and at Bethlehem that dream came true. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Many folks think that Christianity is just a bunch of rules to obey. They couldn't be more wrong. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:17, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through Him." God sent His Son, Jesus, not to bring rules but to bring life.

This life is available to everyone who believes and receives the Savior born in Bethlehem. We understand believing, accepting Jesus as the Son of God who died on the cross and rose from the grave but what does it mean to receive?

The perfect picture of receiving is the wise men from the east. Once they found the baby born in Bethlehem they, "bowed down and worshipped Him" (Matt. 2:11). To receive means to yield to, to follow and to let Jesus take over your life.

There is no better time than the Christmas season to kneel and receive Jesus as your Savior. "Yet to all who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). 🏆

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Bob Dewhurst, VP, Ministry Development

Just recently, I received a call from a stockbroker to inform me that a retired couple who were regular supporters of the Children's Homes would like to make a gift of stock. I was told that they normally make a gift like this in December, but this year they want to give earlier so we could put it to use. A few days later, the stock appeared in our account at The Baptist Foundation of Alabama.

This situation reminded me of how often I have talked to those who have a passion to help children and families in need but are discouraged because they believe the only way they can give is cash. This is not true. We realize that a great number of people have limited income, but over the years they have accumulated considerable assets which they can use to make charitable gifts. Some of these assets have appreciated in value and if sold could result in a capital gains tax liability. However, if appreciated assets like stocks, bonds and real estate are given to an IRS recognized charity, there is no income tax liability.

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If you are considering a gift of appreciated assets such as those mentioned, don't hesitate to call me. (205-982-1112) I can share with you how to make a transfer of stock or other securities, as well as the process for making a gift of real estate or other non cash assets. Just give me a call.

As we approach the end of 2014, we encourage both cash and non cash gifts. Gifts given now will help us determine how many children and families we will be able to serve in 2015. On behalf of the hundreds of children and families we have served already in 2014, I want to thank you in advance for your prayers and financial support.

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Gardner, Lee, Demopolis: Margaret Carter
Gilmer, Willie Mae ("Bill"), Birmingham: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
Gray, Gloria, Brewton: Christine Eiland
Hough, Buster, Grove Hill: Lloyd & Catherine Gaddy
Luker, Kenneth "Loonie": County Line BC of Pine Hill
McManus, Virginia Thomas: County Line BC of Pine Hill
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'Music has a power'

IMB missionaries use music to break barriers in Sweden

Good values weren't enough for Linda Hamfors of Stockholm, Sweden. Hamfors, who grew up in an atheist family, believed Jesus was "a really amazing guy" and learned values from her parents like forgiveness, acceptance and love.

But good values couldn't sustain the singer/songwriter through the tumultuous years when her parents began drinking more and pursuing materialistic gain.

Feeling "left alone with my good values, I wasn't feeling good," Hamfors said.

Struggling with addiction, Hamfors searched for God. She found a church. She began singing in church and the gospel songs moved her to tears.

Then she heard church planters Eric and Anissa Haney — also musicians — perform at an event in her city. They sang songs Anissa had written about life, hope and love.

"(I write songs) about the value of life," Anissa Haney said. "All the songs I've written in the last few years (are) about the value of life, how valuable you are to God

and that He has a purpose for your life."

The second time Hamfors heard the Haney's play during a street performance she "came over to me in tears," Anissa Haney recalled. "She had all these questions and she wanted to get together sometime."

Hamfors explained, "My mind was going, 'Oh this is too much about Jesus and God,' but my heart was saying, 'Yes.'"

"Yes" is an answer the Haney's know all too well. Eric describes the initial calling to international service as "a hurricane in our souls" — a deep stirring that drove them to pray. The young musician told his wife, "Whatever this is, the answer is 'yes' to God."

That "yes" eventually led the Haney's and their three children to Stockholm. As the first Inter-

national Mission Board (IMB) church planters in Sweden they help start churches within a culture steeped in secularism and post-modern thought. They are funded through the Lottie Moon

Christmas Offering (LMCO) for International Missions and the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' provision for missions and ministry.

Charles Kridiotis, a church planter with the Simple Church network who partners with the Haney's, estimates that 3.5 percent of

Swedes attend church. Of that he said about 1.5 percent could be considered evangelical Christians.

Because Stockholm is a secular society and Swedes "just don't talk about God," Kridiotis and Eric Haney agree a small group approach to church planting is necessary.

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IMB photo
Eric Haney (right), an IMB church planter in Stockholm, Sweden, uses music and media to connect with Stockholm's artistic community.

"The resistance is not (toward) Jesus," Kridiotis said. "The resistance is (toward) what church is perceived to be in this nation."

The strategy is simple: listening that leads to relationships that lead to biblical community and authentic small group worship.

Eric Haney said, "We really care about their stories. So their story leads to our story, which is God's story."

Approaching conversations about God through music has the ability to "cut through walls," Anissa Haney explained, noting the countless times people have approached them after a song

and shared a piece of their story because the music moved them.

"Music has a power ... to bring about healing ... and to bring purpose and hope," she said.

"We play a lot of music in pubs and during open mics so a lot of times we are the only believers there, the only little piece of light in the darkness."

Read more about the Haney's songwriting at bpnews.net/41998/singer-shares-story-behind-set-her-free. Hear Anissa's music on her SoundCloud page: soundcloud.com/anissarose.

Go to imb.org/offering for resources to help promote the LMCO in your church. (BP)

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MUSIC

By Rick Sharp

Loftland

I Don't Want To Dance
Dream Records

Loftland's first CD on Dream Records is billed as a dance record. It makes a reasonable attempt to nail the genre but falls far short. I would call this pop but even here it evokes little of the good feelings that good pop should engender. It's certainly not hard enough to be called rock. While listening I couldn't help but think of the bubblegum music I so despised during the 70s. So this isn't a record I can recommend to anyone older than 11 or so. To quote Roger Gelwicks from his review on Jesusfreakhideout.com, "'I Don't Want to Dance' is more descriptive of the listener than the album."

The song "Lovesick" almost makes the mark with its moving synth bass line, but even here there's nothing else in the song to keep us listening past the first several bars. Lyrically there isn't a strong or consistent Christian message through the CD. Clean and encouraging perhaps but nothing deep enough to lift the record out of the mire.

Here's one I'd stay away from. If they make it to a second effort for Dream Records let's hope they've found their voice.



Aaron Shust

Unto Us
Centricity Music

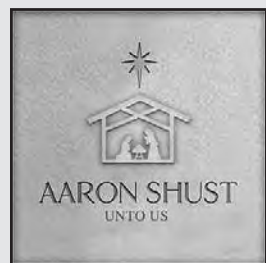
Aaron Shust's new Christmas record, "Unto Us," could easily get lost in the rush of "me too" Christmas records that batter us this time of year. Let's hope that doesn't happen.

"Unto Us" is that rarest of Christmas releases that points continually to the wonder of the birth of our Savior. It does it in such a beautiful and cohesive way that we may just forget for a few moments all the hype, presents, hustle and bustle, and overwhelmingly commercial slant that Christmas has taken. For the first time in a long time here is a Christmas record that from beginning to end conveys the glory, majesty and wonder of that night 2,000 years ago when God became man and came to earth to be with us.

The record has a definite flow. The first five tracks are the proclamation heralding, "Christ has come."

The next three tracks are described by Shust as the sanctuary, recounting the nativity scene, Christ's birth, Mary's lullaby and shepherds kneeling in adoration. Shust then finishes with what he calls the "party," the joyous exodus of the shepherds as they run through the Bethlehem streets screaming the news of the miracle they've witnessed.

Much of the music was recorded in the Czech Republic with the Prague Symphony Orchestra. The music is at times breathtaking and the message is timeless. Recommended for your Christmas playlist. 📖



Meet the reviewers

Rick and Martine Sharp are writers and musicians who are members of Central Baptist Church, Decatur, where Rick plays guitar in the praise band.

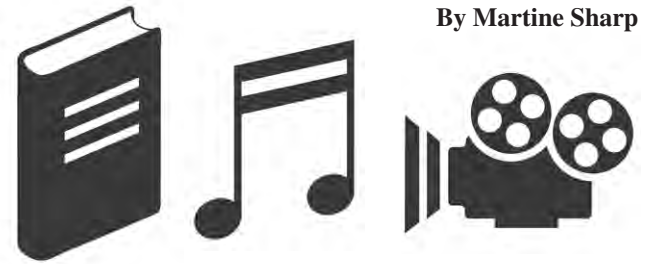


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BOOKS

By Martine Sharp

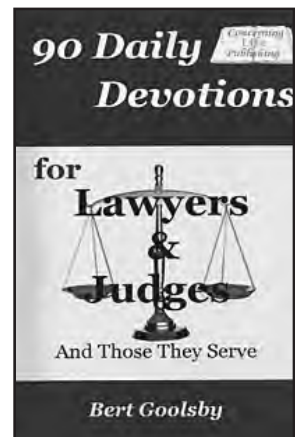
Media reviews



90 Daily Devotions for Lawyers and Judges (And Those They Serve)

Bert Goolsby. *Spring Lake, Mich.: Concerning Life Publishing, 2013. 181 pp. (Paperback).*

I will preface this review with an assurance that it will include no lawyer jokes; I will restrain the impulse even though it may be as difficult as an Alabama fan holding back Auburn jokes. I won't comment that most lawyers I know certainly need a book of devotions, partly because that would be rude and partly because it honestly isn't true.



But I will leave you to make your own comments.

This book is as the title says a collection of 90 devotions, each with a legal twist. The devotions are not feel-good little platitudes but deep and evangelistic, revealing the author as a serious Bible scholar.

For example one devotion discusses the practice of plea bargaining, then points out that after death "there will be no plea bargaining or negotiated deals. ... The time for entering into an accord with the Father is now." What follows is a short description of how to be saved.

If you have a lawyer or a judge on your Christmas list then this might make a good gift. Especially if he or she needs a book of devotions.

Three Little Words: God's Truth in Simple Terms

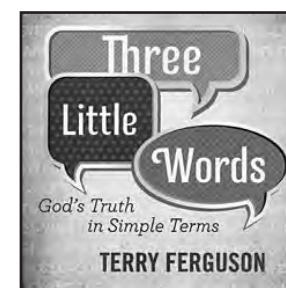
Terry Ferguson. *Grand Rapids, Mich.: Discovery House Publishers, 2014. 256 pp. (Paperback).*

But you think the "Three Little Words" are "I love you," don't you? That's what I thought — and the author does say that those are the words that form the underlying message of the book, but there are more than 250 three-word phrases throughout this book that are used to convey God's truth.

Each page of the book is headed by three words then followed by three verses from the Bible that support that concept.

Since the book was written primarily as a tool

to share biblical truths with the author's children, the phrases are clear-cut and simple: "Put God First," "God Doesn't Change," "Keep Your Word,"



and of course "Obey Your Parents." Simple and easy but also solid little reminders directly from God's Word. Great for kids but it seems to me the book would be equally useful and effective for adults. If you are looking for a small but meaningful gift or

stocking stuffer for Christmas, then "Three Little Words" would be a good idea.

The author, Terry Ferguson, is a member of Ezra Baptist Church, Bessemer.

Whole Again: Living the More Abundant Life

Bura Randolph Freeman. *Samantha: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013. 221 pp. (Paperback).*

I get many autobiographical works for possible review that hold little interest for me and I expect would not be of interest to anyone who does not know and love the author. Some are badly written and poorly edited and some simply have no content that engages my interest. "Whole Again" is not one of those books.

I do not expect this book to zoom to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list but it is a story that is well written and engages the reader as it relates the story of the author's second marriage after he was widowed. I can relate having been widowed and remarried, but I think the interest engendered by "Whole Again" goes deeper than that. The story is told humbly and (it appears) honestly by a man who is not seeking justification or accolades but simply wants to show "God is working in our lives every day."

In my opinion he succeeds. 📖



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Call for racial reconciliation

Southern Baptists react to grand jury decision

African-American brothers and sisters, especially brothers, in this country are more likely to be arrested, more likely to be executed, more likely to be killed."

It's the kind of statement that's often cited by black clergy and civil rights activists. But hours after a grand jury Dec. 3 chose not to indict the New York City police officer who put Eric Garner into a fatal choke hold on Staten Island, those words came from none other than white evangelical leader Russell Moore.

With back-to-back grand jury decisions that white police officers will not face charges in the deaths of unarmed black men, white Christians, including evangelicals, have grown more vocal in urging predominantly white churches to no longer turn a blind eye to injustice and to bridge the country's racial divides.

"It's time for us in Christian churches to not just talk about the gospel but live out the gospel by tearing down these dividing walls not only by learning and listening to one another but also by standing up and speaking out for one another," said Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

Other white evangelicals issued similar pleas.

Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, tweeted, "I weep & pray for his family," the day before he led a prayer for justice at Southeastern in Wake Forest, N.C. "I beg our God to bring good out of this tragedy."

Scott Slayton, a white evangelical pastor of Chelsea Village Baptist Church, Chelsea, tweeted, "Love your neighbor as yourself" means you picture yourself being choked and surrounded by five men while you say, 'I can't breathe.'"

Don't just speak but listen

Alan Cross, a white pastor of Gateway Baptist Church, Montgomery, said the publicized video of Garner's choke hold has moved some white Christians to speak when they might not have after officer Darren Wilson was cleared in the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo.

Cross is encouraging them to not just speak but listen to black people's perspectives instead of only considering their own.

"What often happens when white evangelicals try to speak into this is that we continue to think first in terms of our own position," said Cross, author of "When Heaven and Earth Collide: Racism, Southern Evangelicals, and the Better Way of Jesus."

"We should consider what people in the black community are saying, what are they going through, what is their experience," he said.

Cross and others went online in the hours after

the Garner decision to share how blacks were reacting. Author Barnabas Piper chose to post what others were saying about Ferguson and Garner on his blog, saying as "a young white man" he wasn't in the best position to explain it all.

'Immerse yourself'

"Put yourself in the shoes of the authors and immerse yourself in the experiences they describe," he wrote. "You and I need to do so if we want to contribute anything to stopping injustice and closing the racial gap that exists."

Barbara Williams-Skinner, co-chair of the National African-American Clergy Network, sees a growing interest among white Christians and others to speak up about the "pile on" of events capped with the Garner decision.

"It just so offends the human spirit of people of every race that it compels them to act," she said. "We don't have to ask young white students and young white adults anymore to act. They understand ... if the system will so violate the rights of people of color today, they will violate everybody's rights tomorrow."

She had already witnessed an interest across races in the Ferguson events when her network's planned letter on justice from black church leaders took on a more interracial feel.

Even before the Garner decision, the progressive Christian group Sojourners had gathered 50 leaders, including black clergy and white evangelicals, for a retreat Dec. 2-3 that included a "historic pilgrimage of racialized St. Louis" and a discussion of theological implications for "our nation's broken justice system."

Jim Wallis, founder of the Washington-based social justice group, said, "There were white evangelicals in the room in Ferguson who were weeping when the Garner decision came down."

White Christians beyond evangelicalism added their voices to the outcry about the ruling.

Serene Jones, president of New York's Union Theological Seminary, said, "The degradation and demeaning of black life must stop. What ... kind of country do we live in?"

Moore, noting some of the reaction after he called for racial reconciliation in the wake of the Ferguson strife, said some white Christians see no reason to speak up for better race relations.

"I have gotten responses, and seen responses, that are right out of the White Citizens' Council material from 1964 in my home state of Mississippi, seeing people saying there is no gospel issue involved with racial reconciliation," he said in a podcast.

He doesn't agree with them.

"Are you kidding me? There is nothing that is clearer in the New Testament than the fact that the gospel breaks down the dividing walls that we have between one another." (RNS)



MOORE



Police in Sudan attack worshipping congregation

NORTH KHARTOUM, Sudan — Police in North Khartoum, Sudan, beat, arrested and fined 38 Christians worshipping at Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church on Dec. 2, sources said.

After nearly two weeks of raiding and demolishing church property, officers armed with guns and batons arrived at the church compound at 6:30 a.m. on two trucks accompanied by seven smaller vehicles and broke through the main gate, beating whoever they found in the church complex. Security personnel surrounded the complex preventing people from entering or leaving.

Police then started to beat worshippers and arrested 38 for refusing to surrender the property.

"We have enjoyed worshipping and praising God in prison," one of the arrested Christians said. "The power of God was present among us. Let the name of God be praised and glorified from now and evermore."

Police severely beat church elder Daud Bashir and tore his clothes. Officers also beat a female member who was rushed to the hospital for treatment.

Police took the Christians to Khartoum North Police Station before they were transferred to Khartoum North Court. The charges against them included Article 77 of the notorious Public Order Law of 1991, which gives police broad powers to arrest Christians and others without cause, for creating a public disturbance.

The Christians were released Dec. 3 after being sentenced to pay a fine of \$250 each, sources said.

Christians beaten nearly unconscious in India

NEW DELHI — Hindu extremists in India summoned a Christian family Oct. 25 to a public meeting for a "compromise" on religious conflict but instead beat them nearly unconscious.

Irma Markami and four members of his family received hospital treatment for eight days after the attack which came 10 days after nearly all their neighbors beat them for refusing to renounce Christ.

The Hindu extremists who summoned the Christian family to the "compromise" meeting told them they were "not to talk and to promise to do whatever they were asked to do." Soon after the meeting started at noon the Hindu extremists attacked Markami, his wife and three sons.

As they assaulted the family, which belongs to the Calvary Gospel Mission Moment Church, the Hindu villagers shouted that there was no place for Christians in the village and that they were going to wipe them out.

"The attack lasted for about one and a half hours and by the time they were rushed to the hospital the Christians were barely conscious," said area church leader, Narendra Gachha.

About 10 area Christian leaders at the meeting managed to escape and ran to the Potteru police station. Officers arrived at the site followed by two ambulances. The five severely injured Christians were rushed to the district hospital.

They sustained injuries on their heads, faces and hands and abrasions and bruises all over their bodies. ☩

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