



INSIDE



Jefferson County orphans receive Christmas gifts through 'Christmas in the City'

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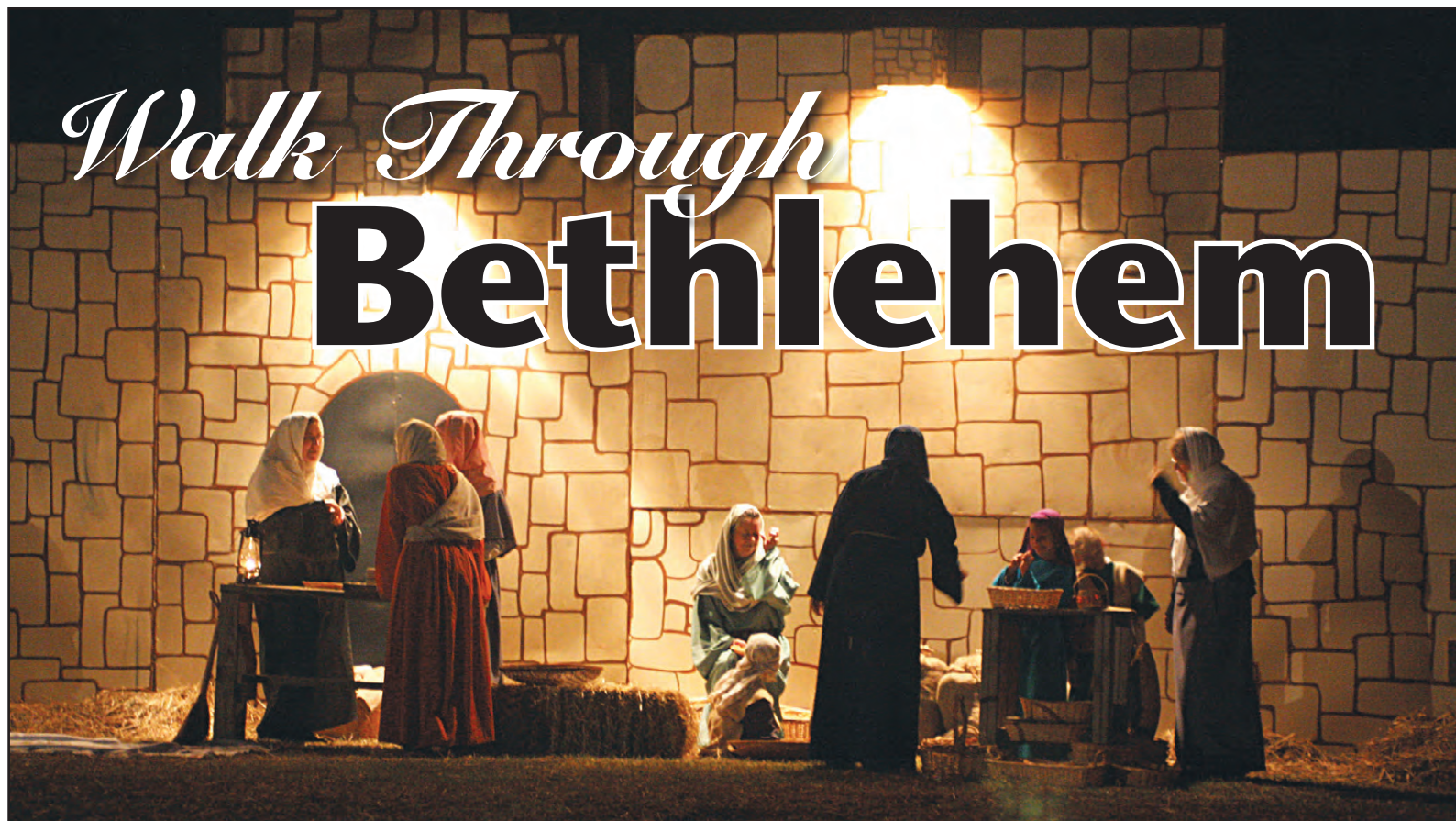


Photo courtesy of Harvey Earls

Walk Through Bethlehem

Christmas program unites Robertsdale's Bethel Baptist, community

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The smell of the stable, the voices of the angels, the baby lying in the manger — this imagery in the biblical account of Jesus' birth has sparked readers' imaginations for hundreds of years.

Eleven years ago, members of Bethel Baptist Church, Robertsdale, had their own spark of imagination, and Walk Through Bethlehem, an outdoor Christmas program where visitors could experience the sights and sounds of that historic night, was born. It was an idea that has united the Baldwin Baptist Association church and the community in celebration of the Savior's birth ever since.

"Walk Through Bethlehem is as much a part of us as our building and our pews," said Pastor Harvey Earls. "Beginning in October it becomes

our ministry vision to share the gospel with those who come."

This year's program, which ran Dec. 11-14, marked the 10th anniversary for Walk Through Bethlehem. Though counting people isn't the priority for the free event, Earls estimates that at least 2,000 people took the walk this year. In fact attendance grows each year even though the church's only advertising is a float in the local Christmas parade. For many families Walk Through Bethlehem is a Christmas tradition.

Dennis Stastka, a Bethel Baptist deacon and volunteer at the event,

said, "A lady who came through last year said she had never missed a year. She said it always gets her ready for Christmas."

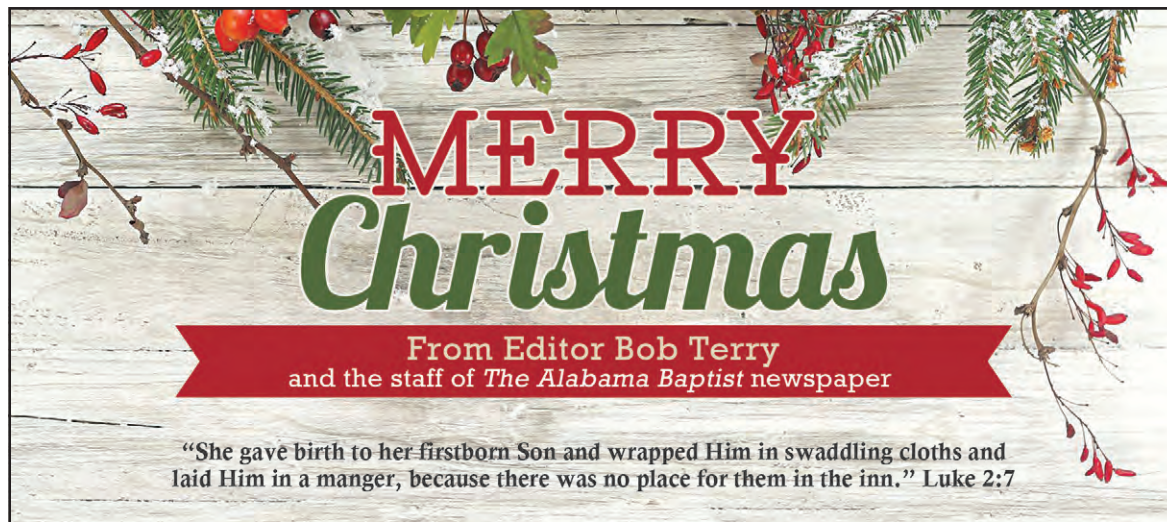
Realistic program

The realism of the program is a big part of the excitement, Earls said. Each group is taken through Bethlehem by a shepherd who leads them in a search for the baby Jesus. As the group moves through Bethlehem they are counted for the census. Along the way they encounter a woman drawing water from a well, merchants selling their wares,

angels singing praises to God and wise men searching for the child.

As the group nears the end of their journey they find the baby in the manger and hear a gospel presentation. Each year several commitments are made and knowing that people are being saved and are rededicating their lives to Christ encourages the volunteers.

Stastka said, "Outreach is one of our main goals and we have been blessed to have touched a lot of lives in the past 10 years. If we can touch just one life, someone (See 'Unity,' page 11)



"She gave birth to her firstborn Son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." Luke 2:7

COMMENT

Glimpse of the Gospel

What was in Joseph's heart as he tossed and turned in his bed that fateful night? His world had been shattered, his heart broken. The woman who had agreed to be his wife was pregnant and Joseph knew he was not the father.

Can you imagine the feelings of betrayal? Can you understand his sorrow and disappointment? Did he think he had been played the fool? Her condition confirmed that she did not love him, at least in Joseph's mind.

Long into the night he must have wrestled with the hobgoblins of anger, doubt and fear. How easily we all seem to fall prey to such enemies in the loneliness of the dark. Would Joseph insist on the full measure of the law as outlined in Leviticus 20 where Mary could be stoned under certain circumstances? Would he strike out in anger and do her as much physical hurt as the emotional and mental hurt she had done to him? Would he get even?

A choice

For many that is the choice. Motivated by self-centeredness we strike out at people, even people we claim to love, whenever we are hurt.

Yet Mary was the woman Joseph loved. He had asked her to marry him. How would Joseph balance his love for God, love for God's law and his personal sense of morality with his feelings for Mary?

Joseph must have prayed long into the night. Finally he rejected making a public spectacle of his betrothed. Instead he would invoke a provision of the law found in Deuteronomy that allowed him to "put her away quietly." He would divorce her.

Only after Joseph reached his decision did he find enough inner peace that he could sleep. And it was only after Joseph revealed what was in his own heart that God revealed the great



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

mystery of redemption of which Joseph would play such a critical role.

How often God waits to see what is in our hearts before sharing with us what is in His. Our minds and hearts must be attuned to God's mind and heart before we can hear His message.

Joseph rejected anger and vengeance in favor of love and mercy. Now God revealed how He rejected anger and vengeance toward humankind even though "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

To Joseph God sent an angel to announce that Mary's Child was not the result of some sex act. The Child was a Holy Creation of the Spirit of God who hovered over her in a similar way that the Spirit hovered over the face of the deep at the beginning of time (Gen. 1:2, Matt. 1:20).

The child's name would be called Jesus

which means "God is salvation." His purpose in life would be to "save His people" (Matt. 1:21).

The cherished hope of the Jewish people was being fulfilled, the angel told him, and Joseph got to play a part in God's redemption story. He would be the foster father of the Son of God.

When Joseph awoke, he acted immediately. He took Mary for his wife. All the public scorn that was to be heaped on her for being pregnant before marriage, he now shared. The sting of the gossip and accusations fell on him, not just her. He accepted the public shame. Joseph intentionally placed himself between Mary and public humiliation. He would be her strength and she would be his.

How like the gospel is that story? God acted in love and mercy toward humankind even though we were guilty. Each of us repeated Adam's story and turned away from God. Yet despite His broken heart caused by our sin, God did not strike out in anger. Rather as Romans 5:8 declares, "While we were still sinners Christ died for us."

This Holy Creation in Mary's womb would one day bless Joseph, Mary and all who call on the name of the Lord with forgiveness and reconciliation. This Jesus who "will save His people" would be God's channel of love and mercy.

Through Jesus, God identified with our sinful condition for "He who knew no sin was made to be sin" for us (2 Cor. 5:21). Through Jesus, God's righteousness was met as Jesus paid the price for our sin. First Peter 2:24 teaches, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree." God's own strength through Jesus became our strength because it is "by His wounds that you are healed," the verse adds. Our hope of glory is Christ in us through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus (Col. 1:27).

Redemption's story

Redemption's story continues as God's Word declares that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). But do not miss that this story begins when a man shattered by what had all the appearances of sin chose love and mercy over anger and vengeance. In that decision Joseph gave the world a glimpse of the gospel.

Now those who know Jesus as personal Lord and Savior are called to live before God in ways that provide glimpses of the gospel as we live in love and mercy with one another. 🙏

"How often God waits to see what is in our hearts before sharing with us what is in His. Our minds and hearts must be attuned to God's mind and heart before we can hear His message."

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

REMOVE THE MAGI

To all my brothers and sisters in the faith and on the journey, I have a pet peeve that manifests itself every year about this time. Some call me petty while others who know me understand what drives me. I have, and Lord willing, will always persevere

to rightly divide God's Word, the Word of truth. So here goes.

Please, please, please — move the magi/wise men from your nativity scene. They simply were not there. Place them across the room or in a different room. When people ask, you will have a wonderful oppor-

tunity to share the true story of the Nativity.

Tell them when the magi saw the star appear they wondered what it meant, then after searching the Scriptures that Daniel had taught them, they figured it out and journeyed to Jerusalem to see the newborn King.

All of this took several months at least. But on the night of Christ's birth the only ones there were Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and the angels.

Tony L. Fisher
Birmingham, Ala. 🙏



**The Alabama Baptist
will not publish an issue Dec. 25.
The next issue will be Jan. 1.**



"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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Christmas in the City

Birmingham's Covenant Community Fellowship helps collect, deliver Christmas gifts to area orphans

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

For most, Christmastime holds fond memories of family, laughter, presents, lots of food, carols and, in the Christian home, the remembrance and celebration of Christ's birth.

But for the orphan, Christmas may not mean any of those things, said Frank Woodson, pastor of Covenant Community Fellowship Church, Birmingham.

In Jefferson County there are 940 orphans that live either in a group home or some form of foster care, according to the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR).

In order to show those 940 children "that there are people out there who truly care about them," the Birmingham Baptist Association church started Christmas in the City a few years ago.

Coordinated through Mission Alabama, the church's outreach ministry, Christmas in the City organizes the collection and delivery of presents for all the orphans in Jefferson County in DHR's system — plus an additional 300 children that live in the low-income area of Gate City/East Lake.

Woodson, who also serves as executive director of Mission Alabama, said Christmas in the City works through DHR "because they already know where the most vulnerable children are."

The Christmas project also works to dis-

band the negative connotation DHR often carries with it and shows the government agency in a different light — as an organization working to reconnect families and find progress in family preservation, Woodson said.

During the fall months more than 15 organizations, including more than eight Alabama Baptist churches, "adopted" a child's Christmas wish list and pledged to provide the presents for them, according to Ronnie Adkins, director of faith and community partnerships for Mission Alabama.

The wish lists, gathered by DHR, include the first name of each child, his or her age, if he or she has siblings and includes three "Christmas wish list" items — stuffed animals, basketballs, dresses, twin-size comforter set, iPad and so on.

Perfect collection location

Presents were provided to children from newborn to age 21. The older children and adults are usually in independent living, Adkins explained, "but have never been adopted or (been in) foster care."

So how do all these presents get collected, sorted and distributed? That's where Covenant Community Fellowship plays a big role. The church, planted in August, shares a building with Central Park Baptist Church, Birmingham. The large sanctuary — no longer used as both congregations meet in the building's chapel — served as the perfect place to collect the presents.

Presents for orphans in Jefferson County fill the pews of Central Park Baptist Church, Birmingham, during Christmas in the City, a Mission Alabama project.



Photo by Neisha Roberts

In early December each child's name was written on a large piece of paper and placed on the end of every pew in the sanctuary as more than 100 volunteers sorted the donated presents and placed them in their designated pew. Then each child's social worker picked up and delivered the unwrapped presents so the foster parent or children's home could know what the child received and could wrap the present for them.

The presents were collected and sorted Dec. 1-5 and 8-10 but can still be donated through Dec. 19. For more information, visit missionalabama.org.

Anita Scott-Smith, DHR program manager for community resources and training, said the children and caregivers are "very appreciative for the overwhelming support" through Christmas in the City.

"We are still getting calls for help with providing Christmas presents for some children that are not in our custody but live with grandparents or are in other families," Scott-Smith said. "We are able to assist them as well."

Making connections

Scott-Smith said she received a call in early December from someone who wanted to donate presents to whomever needed it. A few minutes later, she said, a grandparent called and needed someone to sponsor her children. Through Christmas in the City, Scott-Smith was able to connect the two.

Rick Ousley, bivocational pastor of Grace Point Church, Pelham, helped to sponsor 250 children by working through Volunteers of America (VOA). He helped connect The Station Church, Hoover; Grace Point Baptist; The Gathering Place, Moody; Faith Community Fellowship, Trussville; and others through VOA to provide presents for the children they "adopted."

And although providing Christmas presents for the children in Jefferson County is a meaningful act of service that brings joy to each child and raises awareness of the need for foster care and adoption, Woodson said he sees Christmas in the City as something even bigger.

"(Christmas in the City is showing the) whole Church on the move to reach the whole city with the whole gospel." ❏



Photo courtesy of Bill Russell

Bibb Association wraps up first Samford extension classes

Bibb Baptist Association concluded its second 8-week extension class with Samford University's Ministry Training Institute (MTI), which is based in Birmingham, Dec. 15. Designed to help ministry leaders and lay people deepen their knowledge of biblical truths and doctrine through weekly meetings, the two classes were the association's first-ever but they will not be the last, said Director of Missions Bill Russell. Russell said the benefits of growing spiritually and learning about the Bible made the classes well worth continuing. For more information about MTI, visit www.samford.edu.

Adopt a state missionary

DOMs launch initiative to support state missionaries

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When Mel Johnson receives a flurry of text messages and phone calls it usually means that trouble has struck and it's time to mobilize Alabama Baptist disaster relief volunteers.

That's exactly what he thought on a recent Sunday when his phone suddenly began filling up with texts. Instead of requests for help, however, Johnson was receiving texts of encouragement from supporters in Cahaba Baptist Association who knew he was headed to a preaching engagement that morning.

"When I pulled over to check my text messages, I was so surprised and blessed to see that the members of those churches were all sending messages offering prayer support. I've never had anything like that happen before," Johnson said.

Johnson, disaster relief strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), was one of the first state missionaries "adopted" by a local association in a new initiative led by Alabama Baptist directors of missions. The goal of the initiative is to engage local churches in providing encouragement and support for state missionaries, according to Ken May, director of missions for Montgomery Baptist Association and president of the Alabama Baptist Conference of Directors of Associational Missions.

The hope is that each of Alabama's 75 associations will select at least one state missionary and find ways in the coming year to support that person professionally, spiritually and personally, May said.

Despite cuts in staff and funding in recent years, SBOM personnel continue to provide outstanding ministry and missions support, said John Nicholson, pastor of Siloam Baptist Church, Marion, in Cahaba Baptist Association, who is helping coordinate the support effort.

'We're the beneficiaries'

"Any time we need advisement of some type of equipping, the SBOM is our resource and they always tell us how glad they are to be doing what they do," Nicholson said. "Whether it's Vacation Bible School or evangelism training, we're the beneficiaries of their care and service."

Alabama's full-time staff of 48 state missionaries — 32 associates housed in the SBOM office in Montgomery and 16 campus ministers serving on public college campuses across the state — keep a busy schedule, according to Bobby DuBois, SBOM associate executive director. State missionaries lead an average of 3,000 conferences and travel 700,000 miles annually, in addition to consulting by telephone and email and preaching across the state. Nicholson said it is only fitting that churches and

associations show their appreciation for that service.

So far 10 state missionaries have been chosen by associations and Nicholson hopes to have everyone on the initial list covered by the end of the year. Once all the missionaries are selected Nicholson hopes there will be enough associational participation to provide support for SBOM administrative staff as well.

At its annual meeting Clarke Baptist Association voted to "adopt" state missionary Scotty Goldman, an associate in the SBOM office of global missions. In its December newsletter the association recognized Goldman, his work through SBOM and a little about his years of service in other Baptist work so those in the association could begin to get to know him.

Donnie Payne, pastor of Forest Lake Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, and moderator of the Tuscaloosa Baptist Association, said response to the initiative in his association has been extremely positive. It has been so positive, in fact, that Tuscaloosa Association chose to adopt two associates with "deep roots in the Tuscaloosa area" — Rick Lance, SBOM executive director, who served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, and Jim Swedenburg, director of the office of Cooperative Program (CP) and stewardship development for SBOM, who grew up in Tuscaloosa.

Payne said he asked Lance and Swedenburg for information to help guide churches in their contacts including each man's birthday, anniversary, SBOM employment anniversary, favorite restaurants and preferred method of receiving communication.

"So on those dates we will encourage our people to use their creativity and respond in some way throughout the year," Payne said.

Payne hopes that the effort will not only make local church members more aware of the value of state missionaries but also of the significance of CP giving statewide.

"Money given to missions on a weekly basis through the Cooperative Program stays in Alabama and funds our state missionaries," Payne said. "I hope this will help people connect the dots between the Cooperative Program and missions fulfillment in Alabama as well as on the national and international level."

Nicholson said the effort is a simple yet important way to express appreciation for the ministry of state missionaries.

"We need to love our state convention. They are doing so much more with so much less and this is a way to encourage them in the work they do for all of us," Nicholson said. ☞



Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

Samuel Burke Vaughn Sr.



VAUGHN

Fulton Road Baptist Church, Mobile
Mobile Baptist Association

FAVORITE VERSE: John 1:1

FAVORITE HYMN: "There Is a Name I Love to Hear"

HOBBIES: Reading and studying the Bible and encouraging people

FAMILY STATUS: Widower for two years after nearly 75 years of marriage to wife, Dorothy "Dot"; sons, Samuel Vaughn Jr. and Donald R. Vaughn; six grandchildren; one great-grandson

Ninety-five-year-old Samuel Vaughn Sr. said his heart's desire is to show love to people and to share the gospel with them. Opportunities to do both arose during the years through his work with Goodyear and Firestone and his sales or general manager positions with the Adamson and Long-Lewis dealerships in Birmingham and the DeVan, Treadwell and Mobile Dodge dealerships in Mobile. A deacon, Vaughn has served on various committees, taught Sunday School from 1972 to 2002 at the different churches he attended, led Bible studies and helped in the children's ministry. For 20 years he sponsored a monthly luncheon club for Christian men in Mobile and Baldwin counties. The club grew to 40 participants. During World War II, Vaughn was a Marine serving in Guadalcanal, among other places. He also was "plane captain" for Charles Lindbergh, as well as the fighting ace and Commander Joe Foss. As such, Vaughn inspected the crafts for flight readiness before sending the pilots on their missions.

Q: What influences in your life pointed you to Christ at the beginning of your faith journey?

A: My wife. She did not preach to me; she did not push me. But I knew she wanted me to be a Christian. There (were also two) preachers, Richard Leubbert and Art Burroughs. I was saved in 1957.

Q: When and how were you led into the ministry?

A: At West End Baptist Church, Mobile, by Brother Richard Leubbert and my wife. My wife showed me how. All I had to do was watch her.

Q: What does the ministry demand?

A: That I love people and lead them in the way I think they ought to go.

Q: What do you get from the ministry?

A: I get a lot of peace and comfort in my heart and my conscience and a lot of satisfaction knowing, one day, I'll meet my Lord Jesus Christ and see Dot again.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: I would say 100 percent because they have no doubt where I stand.

Q: How do you see yourself involved in this in the future?

A: I would certainly lead everybody to Christ that I could.

Q: What difference will this ministry make for you in the future?

A: I would have the peace and satisfaction of knowing that I have lived the life God wanted me to live.

Q: What difference has Jesus Christ made in your life?

A: Jesus Christ came into my life through other people's efforts. I believe the Word of God. I was hell-bound. I have no doubt now that I'm saved. I think there is only one way and that is Jesus Christ. ☞

Church ANNIVERSARIES



Hanceville's Bethlehem East celebrates 125th anniversary

The bell that used to be housed in the original church building's belfry was rung for the first time in decades to open the 125th anniversary service at Bethlehem East Baptist Church, Hanceville, Oct. 5.

"The look on people's faces when the bell rang was one of such surprise," said Rebecca McAnnally, anniversary committee chairperson and wife of Pastor Dale McAnnally.

More than 150 people participated in the anniversary service where Scott Adams, associate pastor for First Baptist Church, Holly Pond, shared the morning message.

Hanceville Mayor Kenneth Nail gave a special presentation as did Rep. Randall Shedd and Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative Jerry Armor.

A 1984 painting of the church building by deacon Roy Lee was displayed and also was printed on the front of the celebration service bulletin, McAnnally said. She and 10 other church members served on the anniversary committee.

Dale McAnnally said he would like to see the church "built back up" and "thrive and be here when the Lord comes back." (Neisha Roberts)

Margaret's Macedonia Baptist #1 holds centennial celebration

Macedonia Baptist Church #1, Margaret, marked 100 years in ministry Sept. 21.

The St. Clair Baptist Association church began the celebration in January with a special program each month leading up to the September celebration.

During the final celebration service special presentations were made by Ben Chandler, St. Clair Association director of missions; Johnie Sentell, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative; and Rick Lance, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions executive director. Church member Elvie Phillips gifted the church with a painting of its first building.

Pastor Pat Giles brought the message, focusing on the significance of 100 years of service and the importance of looking to the future.

To conclude the service church member Joseph Moseley prayed a prayer of dedication over a commemorative bell tower. Lunch on the grounds immediately followed. (Maggie Walsh)

Honoraville's Midway Baptist Church marks 100 years

Midway Baptist Church, Honoraville, in Butler Baptist Association, celebrated its centennial Sept. 14.

Church clerk James Brown said "a church full of people" were present to listen to Pastor Jerry Hogwood bring the message and receive a plaque from Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative Don Donald on behalf of Midway Baptist.

The 11 a.m. service also featured a reading of the church history. Special guests included grandchildren of some of the charter members and several former pastors.

A fellowship meal followed the service and pictures of the church and members from the past 100 years were displayed throughout the fellowship hall. (Maggie Walsh)

Deatsville's Liberty Baptist commemorates 150 years

Liberty Baptist Church, Deatsville, celebrated its 150th anniversary Sept. 21 with about 150 people.

Lonette Berg, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission executive director, presented the church with a commemorative plaque, according to Maggie Trivett who serves as the church's assistant administrator and clerk.

Former pastor James Bozeman shared the message at the celebration service and former pastor Clay Carroll spoke. ReNay and Rick Robertson provided special music and a photo slideshow was displayed during the service.

A fellowship meal followed and each participant was given a commemorative 150-year anniversary album filled with the photos from the slideshow, Trivett said.

Joey Bentley, who was pastor at the time of the celebration, said he hopes the Autauga Baptist Association church "continues to go out and reach the unchurched families in the community and to be intentional about the gospel." (Neisha Roberts)

First Baptist Church, Winfield, celebrates 125 years in ministry

With the theme "Jesus Christ: The same yesterday, today and forever," First Baptist Church, Winfield, celebrated its 125-year anniversary Oct. 5.

The 9 a.m. service featured special music by the church's choir and its quartet, 4 for One. Former pastors Charles Ballew, Ken Anderson and Don Graham each brought one part of the three-part message focusing on the "yesterday, today and forever" theme. Current pastor Paul Murphy served as the master of ceremonies for the day.

Also during the service Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative Angie Cooper presented a commemorative certificate to the church. Dinner on the grounds immediately followed. Large historical displays were set up in the fellowship hall for the more than 500 participants to enjoy.

Jill Hawkins, secretary of the Marion Baptist Association church, said, "We were bursting at the seams but it was a really good time." (Maggie Walsh)

FBC Luverne holds 125th anniversary celebration

First Baptist Church, Luverne, celebrated homecoming and its 125th anniversary Sept. 28 with about 150 family and friends.

Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist Association church with a certificate and Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, shared a message. Carol Floyd led the music for the service.

Carole Knox served on the homecoming committee and said 29 visitors, who came with church members, signed the guest book. A video presentation that recognized members who had died — not just in the past year but also in the church's history — was played during the service and a fellowship meal followed.

Lee Dymond is serving as interim pastor. (Neisha Roberts)

CHRISTMAS & CHURCH

Americans want 'more Jesus' in their Christmas, survey finds

Christmas is a time for family, faith and a little bit of controversy.

This year it's a set of atheist billboards featuring a fictional letter from a little girl who lost her religion and said she's too old for fairy tales.

"Dear Santa," the billboard reads, "All I want for Christmas is to skip church."

No thanks, say most Americans, according to a new survey from Nashville-based LifeWay Research.

Most Americans believe Christmas goes better with a visit to church, religious Christmas songs in public school concerts and more focus on Jesus.

Christmas traditions

"Christmas traditions that have nothing to do with the Christian faith continue to multiply," said Scott McConnell, vice president of LifeWay Research. "Still most Americans want more of Jesus in their Christmas rather than less."

Among the survey's findings:

► *Church remains an essential part of Christmas.* Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of Americans agree Christmas should include a trip to church.

Younger Americans are least

interested in church at Christmas time. Fewer than 4 in 10 of those 18 to 24 say church is an essential part of Christmas.

► *Americans prefer the sacred to the secular at Christmas.* Eight out of 10 Americans (79 percent) agree with the statement: "Christmas should be more about Jesus." About 1 in 5 (18 percent) disagree. Three percent are not sure.

► *Americans want to keep Christ in Christmas.* Seven in 10 Americans believe "Christmas would be a better experience if it had a more Christian focus." One in 4 (26 percent) disagree, while 4 percent are not sure.

► *Most people are fine with the phrase "Happy Holidays."* Less than a third (29 percent) agree with the statement, "It is offensive when people say Happy Holidays instead of Merry Christmas."

► *Some are bothered by "X-mas."* About 4 in 10 (39 percent) say using "X-mas" is offensive. More than half (55 percent) disagree, while 6 percent are not sure.

► *Theology remains a bit shaky, even at Christmas.* A little more than half (56 percent) agree with the statement, "God's Son existed before Jesus was born in Bethlehem." Three in 10 (29 percent) disagree. Fifteen percent are not sure. (LifeWay)



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Sisters perform at Mud Creek Assoc.

Heather (right) and Hope Tucker, twin 16-year-old sisters, are members of Tannehill Valley Baptist Church, McCalla, and are a 'valuable part of the music ministry,' according to worship pastor Lance Maddox. The sisters performed at the Mud Creek Baptist Association annual meeting Oct. 23 and Director of Missions Ken Maddox said, 'The people really enjoyed them, their sweet spirit and their talent to play and sing.'

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.

BESSEMER

► **The Church at McAdory, Bessemer**, will observe Christmas Eve Lord's Supper on Dec. 24, 6 p.m. Everyone is welcome. Bill McCall is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Westmont Church, Birmingham**, will hold a Christmas Eve service Dec. 24, 6 p.m. For more information call 205-788-6811 or visit www.westmont-baptist.org. Nathan Daniels is

pastor. ► **East Gardendale Church, Gardendale**, will host "He Is Here" Christmas cantata Dec. 21, 10:30 a.m. and "Special Happy Birthday Party" children's church (three years old to third grade). For more information call 205-608-0889. Allen Davis is pastor.

GENEVA

► **Jonathan Woodham** is the new worship and children's pastor for **Shiloh Church, Hartford**. He

earned a bachelor's degree from Auburn University and a master's degree in church music from Southeastern Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. He previously served as worship leader for Bahama Church, Bahama, N.C., and for First Church, Clover, S.C. He and his wife, Katie, have two children. Ricky Hall is pastor.



WOODHAM

OTHER

► **New Beginnings Church, Hayden**, will hold an open house in its new building Jan. 4, 2-4 p.m. For more information email lees145@bellsouth.net or call 205-529-4051. Joby Tricquet is pastor. ❧

— Correction —

In the Dec. 4 issue, it was noted in 'Glimpse at Alabama Baptists' support of OCC' that Bethlehem Baptist Association collected 315 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child. Bethlehem Baptist Association actually collected 3,057 shoeboxes.



Photo courtesy of Union Grove Baptist Church, Crossville

Crossville's Union Grove hosts breakfast

Church members volunteer at Union Grove Baptist Church, Crossville, during its third annual Breakfast with Mary and Joseph on Dec. 7. More than 40 children participated in the event where breakfast was served and church members acted out the story of Mary and Joseph with a twist of comedy. Zack Richards is pastor.

REFLECTIONS



ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Winston Association DOM Hood to retire

Al Hood, director of missions (DOM) for Winston Baptist Association since 2000, will be retiring from the position Dec. 31.

"Watching people as well as churches grow and challenge themselves to get more involved in missions by going as well as giving" has been one of the most rewarding aspects of his ministry, Hood said.

Hood received his education from Walker State Technical College (now Beville State Community College) in Sumiton, the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Luther Rice University in Lithonia, Ga.

He has served as pastor of Saragrossa Baptist Church, Nauvoo; Philadelphia Baptist Church, Jasper; Center Grove Baptist Church, Cullman; and First Baptist Church, Andrews, N.C.

Throughout his more than 14 years as DOM, Hood said he sought to embed a "missional mindset" within the pastors and members of Winston Association — a mindset that produces a willingness to do whatever it takes to reach people for Christ.

Once retired Hood and his wife, Duronda, plan to move to Murphy, N.C. He plans to become more involved in missions as well as being available for interim positions and pulpit supply.

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



HOOD

Choctaw's McLelland to retire from DOM position

The ability to serve "in fellowship, stewardship and partnership" has been the most rewarding aspect of the Choctaw Baptist Association director of missions position for Franklin McLelland, who is retiring Dec. 31.

A Meridian, Miss., native, McLelland graduated from Southeast Lauderdale High School in Meridian and Clarke Memorial College in Newton, Miss. He served as pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Butler; Emmanuel Baptist Church, Meridian, and Big Creek Baptist Church, Waynesboro, both in Mississippi. In 1997, McLelland accepted the director of missions position and has served faithfully in that capacity for 17 years.

"It has been my desire to do what I feel the Lord requires of us as found in His Word and that is to: walk humbly, care deeply, respond kindly, love unconditionally, believe strongly, speak wisely, stand courageously, minister abundantly, dwell peacefully, rejoice constantly, finish victoriously and live eternally with Him," he said.

He and his wife, Towanda, have two children, three grandchildren and one great-grandchild. (Maggie Walsh)

High Pine holds 7th annual Christmas program

High Pine Baptist Church, Roanoke, in Randolph Baptist Association held its 7th annual musical Christmas program, "A High Pine Christmas," on Dec. 14.

Led by music minister Scott Brand, the program is two-fold with the first half featuring Christmas songs that tell of the birth of Christ such as "Silent Night, Holy Night." The second half of the program features secular, classic Christmas songs such as "White Christmas" and concludes with an appearance by Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus. Narration and solos are intermixed with the choir's performance.

Brand got the idea for the program from his college show choir and is "very amazed" by how much the program has grown. The first year the program consisted of eight to nine songs and has grown to include 20-25 songs.

"People want to be entertained but on top of that they want to hear the true meaning of Christmas," Brand said, noting the addition of Santa was for the enjoyment of the children.

Pastor Richie Farrow said they hope the event continues to grow in the future. (Maggie Walsh)



MCLELLAND

Strategic partnership

BHS considers merger with Brookwood

By Bob Terry
The Alabama Baptist

Baptist Health System (BHS) in Birmingham was expected to receive permission to explore a new partnership with Tenet Healthcare of Dallas, owner of Brookwood Medical Center in Birmingham. At press time the approval vote was scheduled for Dec. 15 during an executive session of the Birmingham Baptist Association (BBA) executive board. BBA is the parent body of BHS.

The BBA executive board was asked to allow BHS to sign a formal letter of intent to merge BHS with Brookwood. The BHS board of directors unanimously voted on Dec. 8 to approve signing the letter of intent.

Keith Parrott, BHS president, said the new company would have the largest primary care physicians network in the greater Birmingham market and would increase the strategic viability of both organizations.



PARROTT

Baptist culture, values

The new company will continue the Baptist name, culture and values, he said. Baptist religious directives will be honored and a chaplaincy program will continue at all hospitals.

A board of directors will be created to oversee the new company with representatives from BHS and Tenet.

Parrott said BHS did not have to merge but needed a ministry partner to better position itself in the Birmingham market. The BHS board of directors explored several options before settling on a partnership with Tenet.

The proposed option allows BHS to fully fund its pension obligations, pay off all its debt, secure significant funds for capital needs while preserving the Baptist name and heritage of doing health care with a spiritual component. The mission statement for the new company will honor Jesus Christ, Parrott confirmed.

The new company is roughly based on a model Tenet uses in San Antonio, Texas, where Tenet partnered with a Baptist hospital system a few years ago. Parrott said he and BHS board members visited and thoroughly investigated that arrangement

and found it operated as a traditional faith-based hospital. That study caused BHS to move from skepticism about partnering with a publicly traded company to embracing the idea, Parrott added.

Tenet Healthcare currently operates 80 acute care hospitals in 14 states. In 2013 the company reported \$11.1 billion in revenue and \$16.1 billion in assets.

Parrot said the due diligence study will begin immediately after signing the non-binding letter of intent. Approval of a final agreement could come as soon as March. ☞

Washington Association adds to current building



Photo courtesy of Michael W. Olewski

A new floor slab is being poured at Washington Baptist Association in Chatom in preparation of adding on to the office. The addition will house its food ministry, which has grown out of its current space. Michael W. Olewski is director of missions for Washington Association.

Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Songs of Christmas

Gloria in Excelsis: The Angels' Song

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

Hymns and songs are time-honored vehicles of praise. They also can be notable vehicles of theology. Such is the case with the songs associated with the coming of Christ into the world. In the Dec. 4 issue Mary's song gave voice to a number of attributes and acts of God. In the Dec. 11 issue Zacharias' song spoke of salvation and forgiveness as well as divine mercy and spiritual light for the world's darkness. Turning to the angels' song in Luke 2:14, we continue thinking about songs associated with Christ's birth.

At Jesus' birth an angelic choir also visited a band of shepherds on a Judean hillside and serenaded them with praise. Since 1862 when James Chadwick translated it into English from French, the English-speaking world has been able to enjoy the traditional Christmas carol, "Angels We Have Heard On High." The song's refrain has introduced generations to the Latin expression with which the angels' song begins, "Gloria in Excelsis" or "Glory in the Highest." This is the shortest of the songs, being only a single verse.

God's glory

The angels' song was in two parts. One part had to do with heaven, the other with earth. The heavenly part centered on glory, the earthly part centered on peace. We look first at the "glory" portion of the song. Glory is one of those grand words in the Bible. Let's discern two basic meanings of the word. Glory often refers to an attribute of God. To speak of God's glory is to speak of His majesty. God is glorious in His person or being. On the other hand sometimes glory is an ascription of praise to God, such as "glory to God in the highest." This second use fits the angels' song. We then have to ponder what is meant by the "highest." Three possibilities come to mind. The idea could be glory in the most excellent or highest place, that is, in heaven. God is praised in His heaven. A second idea

could be glory in its most excellent or highest expression. The highest expression of praise would be that from the heavenly hosts. The third possibility is glory to the most excellent or highest object. The highest object of praise is God Himself. It just might be that we should feel no compulsion to choose only one of the three possibilities, since all are true. God's glory fills the highest place, heaven. His glory knows no more excellent expression than that given by the hosts of heaven. To be sure, God is the highest One to whom creatures above and creatures here below can offer praise.

Announcing peace

Now to the part about peace. The heavenly choir not only voiced praise to God but also announced peace to those on earth. Peace on earth at its best is both relational and experiential. Relationally believers have peace with God. Experientially the peace of God keeps our hearts and minds. We have peace toward God and peace from God.

"Gloria in Excelsis" would be heard a second time toward the end of Jesus' saving mission. When He arrived in Jerusalem for the suffering of death the people exclaimed, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest (Gloria in Excelsis)" (Luke 19:38). Angels sang it the first time but humans cried it the second time. Jesus was born to establish peace in heaven toward sinners on earth. The Bible calls this reconciliation. ☞

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.





“TODAY
in the town
of David
a Savior
has been born to you; **he is**
CHRIST THE LORD.”

LUKE 2:11 (NIV)

As we reflect on this Christmas season, we are reminded that God gave the greatest gift of all in the form of a child. Let us all give generously in response to the gift that we have received in Christ Jesus. Contact us today to learn how you can effectively impact the Kingdom of God.



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The Baptist Foundation of Alabama has been blessed to serve many Alabama Baptist churches and members in 2014. Please let us know how we can serve you in 2015 and beyond.



Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

By Joanne Sloan

Joanne Sloan, a member of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, has been a published writer of articles and books for 30 years. She has a bachelor's degree double majoring in history and English from East Texas State University (now Texas A&M-Commerce) and a master's degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).



2014 marks 275th anniversary of Wesley's writing of 'Hark! The Herald Angels Sing'

Charles Wesley (1707–1788) was one of the greatest hymn writers of all time, penning more than 6,000 hymns.

This year marks the 275th anniversary of his writing the Christmas carol "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." It has been rated in several polls as one of the five most popular carols of all time. Among Wesley's other well-known hymns are "Christ the Lord is Risen Today"; "Jesus, Lover of My Soul"; "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing"; and "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling."

Wesley was the 18th of 19 children born to Samuel and Susanna Wesley. He was born prematurely Dec. 18, 1707, in Epworth, England.

His mother, Susanna, who knew Greek, Latin and French, taught him and his siblings for six hours each day. He then attended Westminster School

in London and college at Christ Church, Oxford, where he received his bachelor's (1730) and master's degree (1732).

At Oxford he and his brother, John, joined evangelist George Whitefield in forming the Oxford Holy Club. They became known as "Methodists" because of their methodical religious practices.

Charles was ordained in the Anglican church in 1735. He served for a brief time as a missionary in Georgia. Yet in his early years of ministry he had no assurance of his salvation. However, during a lingering illness he studied the epistle of Galatians, focusing on Galatians 2:20: "The Son of God ... loved me and gave Himself for me." After dwelling long on the word "me," he believed in a personal faith in Christ and "rejoiced in the hope of loving

Christ." He dated his conversion to May 21, 1738, in London.

Soon afterward he wrote his first hymn, "Where Shall My Wondering Soul Begin?" The next year he penned the beloved

Christmas carol "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." He wrote all his hymns to instruct converts in the great truths of the Christian faith and "Hark!" is rich in theological themes.

The lyrics were first published in 1739 in Hymns and Sacred Poems. Whitefield in 1753 changed Wesley's original words "Glory to the King of kings" to "Glory to the newborn King."

Whitefield also cut out Wesley's final 16 lines. Clergyman Martin Madan in 1767 also changed several words in the carol.

Wesley requested slow and solemn mu-

sic for his lyrics. Thus the carol was originally sung to a different tune than today's familiar one. In 1840, Felix Mendelssohn composed a cantata to commemorate Gutenberg's invention of the printing press. In 1855, English musician William Cummings adapted Mendelssohn's upbeat music to fit the lyrics of the carol.

Other ministry work

Along with writing hymns Wesley served as a church minister and as an itinerant preacher for many years.

While preaching in Wales, 40-year-old Wesley met 20-year-old Sarah Gwynne. They were happily married for more than 40 years.

Wesley died in London on March 29, 1788, and was buried in Marylebone Anglican churchyard. His widow and four of their seven children survived him. ☩



WESLEY



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Historical HIGHLIGHTS

FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



50 Years Ago December 1964

Baptists in Shelby County: A short while back the Shelby Association designated Ray M. Atchison, professor of English at Howard College and a native of Shelby County, to write a complete history of Baptists in Shelby County. He has done an able, efficient, inclusive and documented work with this book. It is a splendid example by which all associations in the state should write a history of themselves.

40 Years Ago December 1974

Generous Gift to Judson: Mo-

bile philanthropist J.L. Bedsole has made a gift of \$92,000 to Judson College. Announcement of the contribution was made by N.H. McCrummen, president of the Baptist college for women, and Sam Booker, of Birmingham, overall chairman of the Judson College Continuing Excellence Campaign. Mobile is represented on the college's board of trustees by Mrs. Shepard Jerome, former president of the national Judson Alumnae Association.

30 Years Ago December 1984

Youth Hold Fast: A group of 19 youth from Corinth Heights

Baptist Church, Haleyville, recently held a 24-hour fast for world hunger by which \$1,100 was raised to be channeled for hunger relief through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board). Lawrence Musgrove, pastor of Corinth Heights, and Jeff Chafin, minister of music and youth, led the group in this successful endeavor.

20 Years Ago December 1994

Dramas Present Gospel on Campus: Auburn University Baptist Campus Ministries (BCM) took the gospel to non-Christians by doing "walk-on" outdoor dramas at 11 a.m. each day for four days. One drama employed a funeral theme, encouraging passersby to examine their own lives. The last drama was the most elaborate, with BCM students staging a mock wedding complete with bride, groom, attendants and preacher. Campus minister Clete Sipes "officiated" at the ceremony.

At the end of the ceremony, Sipes pointed out that the relation-

ship between husband and wife is symbolic of the relationship Christ wants to have with each person — He wants to be each one's closest friend and prove His unconditional love for all.

10 Years Ago December 2004

DiscipleNow Grows Youth Groups Across East Liberty: Although First Baptist Church, Lanett, has sponsored DiscipleNow programs for their students during the past three years, Tim Andrews, associate pastor and East Liberty Baptist Association student coordinator, saw the need to include other association churches in the event. Nine of the 39 associational churches responded with more than 180 registered junior high, high school and college students. During the weekend students learned about evangelism from featured speakers and the "Jesus 101" discipleship study led by Auburn University's Baptist Campus Ministries. Students also participated in various local missions projects. ☪

New ministry tips column coming in January

Church life and all that it entails can be overwhelming at times. No matter the size of a church's congregation nor how many staff members a church has, there are always decisions to make about how to improve the various ministries and systems that make church work.

In an effort to help with bite-

size tips that can be applied right away, *The Alabama Baptist* is launching a new column in January called "Ministry Tips."

The column will be written by guest columnists who are experts in their particular field. To suggest an area to be covered, email news@thealabama-baptist.org. (TAB)

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Pleasant Springs Baptist Church is accepting resumés for a full-time pastor. Submit your resumés to: Search Committee, Pleasant Springs Baptist Church, 409 Winchester Road NE, Hunstville, AL 35811.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR/CHURCH PLANTER: Bay Side Baptist Church, Lillian (Gulf Shores area) seeking a bivocational pastor/church planter. Send resumés to: P.O. Box 533, Lillian, AL 36549.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR: Union Baptist Church, Honoraville, Ala., is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Union Baptist Church is located near the Crenshaw-Butler county line, approximately 40 miles south of Montgomery. Please submit resumés to: UBC Search Committee, P.O. Box 158, Honoraville,

AL 36042. For more information, please contact Jeff Burns at 334-525-0344.

MUSIC MINISTER: Piney Grove Baptist Church in Ardmore, Ala., is accepting resumés for a part-time music minister. Send resumés to: PGBC, ATTN: Search Committee, 28430 Pinedale Road, Ardmore, AL 35739, or laryequick@gmail.com.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC: First Baptist Church of Ardmore, Ala., is looking for a Christian individual to serve as worship leader for church services and choir director. Interested persons should submit their resumés to the church by mail at: 26670 5th Street, Ardmore, AL 35739, or email: firstbaptist@ardmore.net.

INTERIM MUSIC/WORSHIP LEADER:

Resumés should be sent to: Greensboro Baptist Church, ATTN: Music/Youth Search Committee, 908 Main Street, Greensboro, AL 36744, or email to: greensboro@bellsouth.net.

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Want to know GOD?

Pastor John Carney
Blue Ridge Baptist Church, Wetumpka

Do you have a favorite Christmas movie? One movie I play every year is "A Christmas Story." Everybody knows the story of Ralphie and his pursuit of the Red Ryder BB Gun. Throughout the movie Ralphie makes unsuccessful attempts to make his dream come true. He writes an essay, he tries to trick his mother into supporting his dream and even takes his request to a local store's Santa. All attempts fail with one statement, "You'll shoot your eye out."

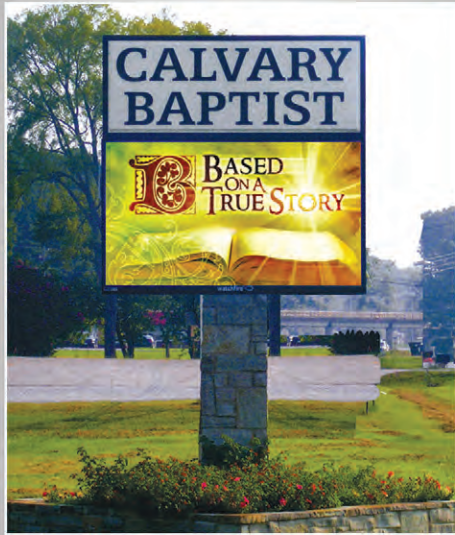
All hope is lost on Christmas morning as the tree empties with no Red Ryder in sight but Ralphie has a father who knows him better than he knows himself. His dad hid the last gift — a Red Ryder BB Gun.

Ralphie's story is our story. We stumble around desperately trying to make our dreams come true and failing at every turn. What most people don't know is that they have a Father in heaven who knows them completely. Psalm 139:4 says, "Before a word is on my tongue You know it completely, O Lord." God the Father knows us, loves us and longs to give us all we desire. "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:4).

How can you delight in God? By becoming His child with three steps. 1. Admit you are sinner. Romans 3:23 says we all "fall short of the glory of God." We sin and don't deserve to be in the presence of God, but we have hope. 2. We can believe God loves us and sent His Son to die for our sins (John 3:16). 3. We can confess Him as Savior and Lord. If you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

This Christmas your dreams can come true if you will just call on the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:13). God has a dream for you that is better than you could ever imagine but you have to become His before you can know all that He has for you. Here's wishing you a Red Ryder, dream-come-true kind of Christmas. ☪

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Unity in mission key to reaching community

(continued from page 1) who doesn't know Christ or someone who has fallen away from attending church and needs encouragement, that is our foremost emphasis."

Focusing on the impact of Walk Through Bethlehem encourages church volunteers as well. Earls describes Bethel as a small but growing country church, averaging 125 in worship each Sunday. Almost everyone from children to adults is involved in the production in some way, many in multiple ways.

Once the set is put up in October, actors start practicing their roles. Kitchen volunteers bake thousands of cookies for visitors to enjoy after their walk. Greeters and parking staff stay busy during

the four nights of the production making sure everyone stays safe and knows where to go. Altogether it takes 85 people or so to staff the production each night.

Al Clingan, a Bethel deacon who helps put up the set and portrays the innkeeper during the event, said, "For a church our size to take on something like this is a pretty good challenge but everybody jumps in and loves it."

Growing excitement

Stastka, a lifelong member of Bethel, said excitement about the production grows each year especially as volunteers anticipate the people who are going to experience it.

"It's a lot of work and a lot of preparation but every year it

brings our church closer together," he said.

Unity in their mission to reach the community is key to the success of Walk Through Bethlehem, Earls said, though he admits he doesn't know whether it's the production that builds unity or an established sense of unity that supports the production. He just knows that the church is united in their desire to reach the community with the true meaning of Christmas, a mission vision echoed by other volunteers.

Clingan said, "It's always so rewarding to sit down and read the comments people leave. Many want to talk about their salvation and we always say if we can reach one person the whole thing was worth it." ❧

FBC Roanoke celebrates 100 years of GAs



Photo courtesy of FBC Roanoke

FBC Roanoke celebrates 100 years of Girls in Action (GAs) with fellowship, reminiscing and worship. Historical information was read and a gift of appreciation was given to longtime member Ruth Childress for her involvement with GAs. Lunch concluded the celebration.

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Reverse Mortgages to Change

By Jimmy Dixon

Starting March 2, 2015, FHA will require a credit analysis and proof of a certain amount of income for anyone applying for a reverse mortgage. They've been talking about this for some time and now will drop the ax very soon.

I plan to give you more details after the lenders study and discuss the 78-page memorandum and issue their policies on compliance.

Meanwhile, if you or someone you know is considering a reverse mortgage, you may want to encourage them to think about applying before March 2 to avoid the added paperwork and scrutiny.

In FHA's defense, they are implementing these changes to make sure seniors are able to pay for their homeowner's insurance and property taxes. All mortgages require that the property be insured, so this is nothing new.

Remember, like The Alabama Baptist, Jimmy covers our great state helping seniors improve the quality of their lives. He is a Sunday School teacher and deacon at Valley



Jimmy Dixon

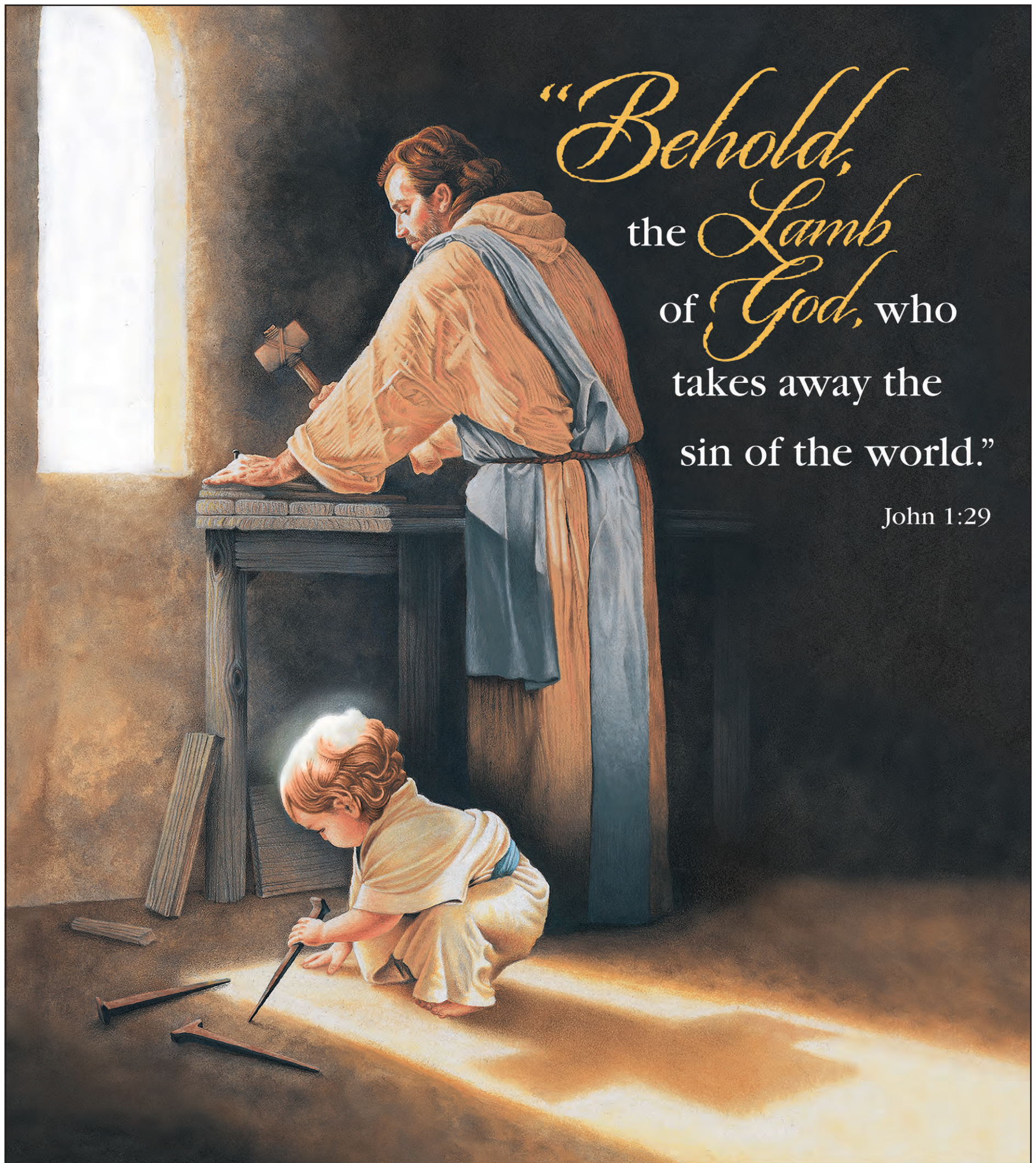
Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown. For a free brochure, quote or discussion, call him direct at 205-567-4800 or email jdixon@mcgowinking.com.



My wife, Pat, and I hope this Christmas brings joy, peace and love to you and yours and honor to the One who came to seek and save the lost.

Merry Christmas!

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of God, who
takes away the
sin of the world.”*

John 1:29

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Clatus NeSmith

Former Alabama Baptist pastor NeSmith dies

Clatus NeSmith, who served as pastor of several Alabama Baptist churches, died Dec. 2. He was 82.

NeSmith graduated in 1950 from J.B. Pennington High School in Blountsville.

NeSmith most recently served as pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Blountsville, a church that he planted in 1983 and was a member of at the time of his passing.

He also served as pastor of several Alabama Baptist churches including Mountain Grove Baptist Church, Blountsville; Nectar Baptist Church, Cleveland; New Canaan Baptist Church, Arab; Westside Baptist Church, Arab; West Side Baptist Church, Cullman; and Jones Chapel Baptist Church, Cullman.

NeSmith was preceded in death by one daughter. He is survived by his wife, Margret, two children, six grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)



NESMITH

J.A. Linville

Alabama Baptist pastor Linville dies at 89

Alabama Baptist pastor J.A. Linville died Nov. 24. He was 89. A Scottsboro native, Linville graduated from Jackson County High School in Scottsboro and received ministry training at extension classes through Samford University in Birmingham and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Linville served as pastor of Dutton Baptist Church; Stamp Baptist Church, Fort Payne; Fairfield Baptist Church, Hollywood; Bethany Baptist Church, Scottsboro; Happy Home Baptist Church, Henagar; and Center Point Baptist Church, Scottsboro.

Linville was preceded in death by his wife of 66 years, Dess, and is survived by three sons, six grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. (Maggie Walsh)



Beard Auction

Photo by Joanna Nicholson

Marion's Siloam Baptist holds unique LMCO fundraiser

Members of Siloam Baptist Church, Marion, offered their beards and moustaches as a way to raise money for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO). The Cahaba Baptist Association church held the second annual Beard Auction on Nov. 30 as a 'fun way to raise money for LMCO and to kick off the Week of Prayer for International Missions,' Pastor John Nicholson said. One man, who had not shaved his moustache in 31 years 'auctioned' it off for \$2,000. More than \$3,000 was raised this year to give to LMCO.

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 21

Explore the Bible By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D. Dean, School of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

GOD PROVIDES A SAVIOR LUKE 2:8-20

This passage is a Christmas Eve classic for our family. In the midst of decorations, puzzles, games, music, presents, food, scents and sounds, we gather together to read the Nativity story and remind each other that Jesus is the greatest Christmas gift ever given. We usually begin reading verses 1-20, noting Luke always provides historical context through his references to leaders (Herod in chapter one, Augustus and Quirinius in chapter two and seven civil and religious leaders in chapter three).

We also note in the passages before and after our lesson's text that Mary and Joseph considered honoring God and meditating on godly counsel to be crucial for themselves and baby Jesus. Mary often considered deeply the information she received (Luke 1:29; 2:19, 51). Joseph was careful to follow God's Torah (vv. 21-27) regarding rites of circumcision and naming (Lev. 12:2-3), rite of cleansing (Lev. 12:6-8) and rite of redemption tax (Ex. 13:2, 12; 34:19-20), as well as cultural training (Luke 2:41-52). Joseph and Mary agreed to follow Gabriel's instruction (Matt. 1:21; Luke 1:31) to name him "Yeshua," salvation, or "Yehoshua." Yahweh saves. This child was the promised Savior.

The Savior Announced (8-14)

Why did God choose shepherds outside the historic town of Bethlehem to be recipients of an angelic announcement? Could it be it was because David, promised descendant of the Savior, had his start as a shepherd? Or was it because David referred to Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, as their Shepherd? Perhaps Gayle Erwin had it right in his book, "The Jesus Style," where he points out that God uses improbable means to announce the birth of Jesus so that He receives the greatest glory. Or perhaps God is teaching us that He still uses unnamed men from the outskirts of society to serve as His messengers today.

Although the New Testament was origi-

nally written in Greek, not Latin, it is a phrase from the Latin "vulgate" (the first official Christian translation of Scripture) that is still sung at Christmas time by Catholics and Protestants alike, "Gloria in excelsis Deo." This phrase encapsulates the reason the Savior was born into the world, to bring glory to God in the highest.

The Savior Found (15-16)

The shepherds followed the angelic instructions and they found Mary, Joseph and the baby. Everything the angel told them was true, down to the detail that the infant would be wrapped in strips of burial linen and lying in a feeding trough.

Though he was just a newborn, these men already knew this child was the Anointed One promised by God, the Savior for "all the people" (v. 10). A week later Jesus was named and circumcised. Within two months He was dedicated at the temple. Within two years he was visited by magi from the East (Matt. 2:1-11).

The Savior Proclaimed (17-20)

Once the shepherds confirmed that what they heard was true, they told anybody who would listen. "Angel ... scared to death ... fear not ... good news ... Savior ... are you seeing this? Blinding light ... music ... surrounded ... Glory to God ... let's go see ... just like the angel said ... hey, you're not going to believe this." Then they went back to work. They worshipped God, glorifying and praising Him because of what He had revealed to them.

Mary listened to it all. What does this mean? What kind of child will He be? What kind of man will He be? What does God have in store for Him? For us?

Not everyone responds the same way to Jesus. The innkeeper provided no room. Mary quietly pondered everything she heard. The shepherds proclaimed His birth. Simeon and Anna prophesied His passion. The magi presented Him gifts. Herod prepared for His murder.

Jesus the Savior has come. What will you do with Jesus? 🙏

Bible Studies for Life By Kevin Blackwell, D.Min. Assistant to the President for Church Relations, Samford University

THE SHELTER OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS PSALM 32:1-7

Have you ever failed God only to feel that you had disqualified yourself for future use? So many Christians have simply given up in their service to the Lord because they feel unworthy or sadly unwanted by God.

As we celebrate this Christmas season, the Baby in the manger should be a stark reminder that God forgives our sin, no matter the severity.

There is no doubt that God forgives our sins when we confess them but are we able to move past our failures to a time of future effectiveness?

Psalm 32 is a great reminder that forgiveness is available and we don't have to live under the guilt of sin. When we live under the shelter of God's forgiveness we experience a peace only God can give.

David is a perfect example of this. He had sinned with Bathsheba and made things much worse when he attempted to cover it up.

When God sent Nathan to point out David's failures (2 Sam. 11-12), he expressed godly remorse (Ps. 51). David found forgiveness and Psalm 32 is an expression of a forgiven heart. This Psalm is known as a "penitential" Psalm.

Joy and Blessing are the By-Products of God's Forgiveness. (1-2)

David uses three different words to describe his sin. "Transgressions" means to rebel against God. "Sin" means to miss the mark of the holiness of God and "iniquity" means to be twisted or crooked. David intentionally uses these words to denote the seriousness of his actions.

Yet in spite of the use of these three wicked words the first two verses are jubilant in nature, taking the form of beatitudes. Both begin with the word "blessed," giving the tenor of a man who is experiencing pure happiness. Why is he so happy? In contrast to the three wicked words for his actions he also expresses three

words for what God does with the sin.

First He "forgives" the sin. The word literally means to have sins lifted off. Second he "covers" the sin. This is a strong term taken from the Day of Atonement where the priest covers the mercy seat with the blood of the sacrifice. Finally he does not "impute" or count against us our wrongs. It is an accounting term that means that God doesn't record the sin on our ledger. The righteousness of Christ is "imputed" toward us, but our sins are not (Rom. 3:24). Oh the joy.

There is No Forgiveness Without Confession. (3-5)

These verses stand in great contrast to the emotions that David experienced. In verses 3-4 he shares his misery. Unconfessed sin has dramatic results on the mental, physical and spiritual well-being of the sinner.

When God is convicting you of wrongs it feels as though your strength and vitality have been lost. He does this because of His great love (Heb. 12:6). However, when we confess our sins and repent of our wrongs we experience unbridled joy.

In verse 5 he once again shares the three wicked words but notice the last phrase in the verse, "And You forgave the iniquity of my sins." God's forgiveness is comprehensive and immediate.

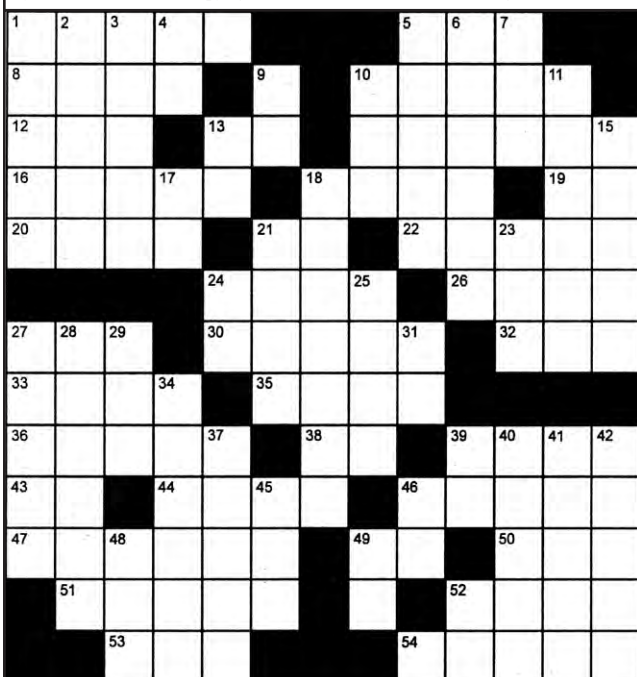
Living in a Restored Relationship with God Places Us Under His Care. (6-7)

David turns his attention to others who need the same deliverance. If we want to be godly in our character, David said we should pray to God. There should be immediacy in our confession. We should do it today while God's grace is available to us and forgiveness is attainable. We should pray because we will enjoy the protection of the Lord.

David shows how God places us under the protection of His care as forgiven children. God hides us, preserves us and surrounds us from the effects of sin once we confess our transgressions. 🙏

Christian Crossword

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Across

- And next unto them repaired ... the Meronothite. (Neh. 3:7)
- And in the 20th year of Jeroboam king of Israel reigned ... over Judah. (1 Kings 15:9)
- Israeli leader Abba ...
- Dropped the first atomic bomb.
- Pale.
- Digraph. 14. My spirit shall not always ... with man. (Gen. 6:3)
- Rejoice not when thine ... falleth. (Prov. 24:17)
- Arabian prince.
- Plural suffix.
- Girl.
- Place. (abbr.)
- Flies high.
- He that is now called a Prophet was before time called a ... (1 Sam. 9:9)
- He that winneth souls is ... (Prov. 11:30)
- Bone. (comb. form)
- Every wise ... buildeth her house. (Prov. 14:1)

- ... virgins or lepers. (Prov. 11:22)
- Norse god of thunder.
- Captain of the "Nautilus."
- Moses ... came to the mountain of God, even to ... (Ex. 3:1)
- Continent. (abbr.)
- But there was none like unto ... to work wickedness. (1 Kings 21:25)
- Electron volt. (abbr.)
- Abstain from eating.
- A swelling.
- ... a wise man, and he will love thee. (Prov. 9:8)
- 365 days. (abbr.)
- The sun and the ... were darkened. (Rev. 9:2)
- The heathen ..., the kingdoms were moved. (Ps. 46:6)
- Trieste liquid measure.
- German article.
- And ... the priest ... before the tabernacle ... at Gibeon. (1 Chron. 16:39)

Down

- As a ... of gold in a swine's snout.
- Are not ... and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better? (2 Kings 5:12)
- People of Denmark.
- Potipherah priest of ... (Gen. 41:45)
- Those opposed.
- No more death, neither ..., nor crying. (Rev. 21:4)
- Mohammad ...
- Interjection.
- Samantha Steven's Aunt ... erelda.
- Reluctant.
- ... Cobb of baseball fame.
- German city.
- Woman's title of address.
- A fundamental part.
- A drudge, menial.
- Island.
- Compass point.
- Incarnation of Vishnu.
- He will hate the one and love the ... (Matt. 6:24)
- Pusher.
- Craggy hill.
- I will punish the multitude

- of ... (Jer. 46:25)
- Thou hast been my defence and ... (Ps. 59:16)
- His ... had offended the ... king of Egypt. (Gen. 40:1)
- Commercial.
- Thy prayer is ... (Luke 1:13)
- Acid component of protein.
- So ... went down from mount Tabor. (Judg. 4:14)
- Sediment. (abbr.)
- And she ... bare a son; and he called his name ... (Gen. 38:3)
- They were so ... (Jer. 24:2)
- Hear this, all ... people. (Ps. 49:1)
- Digraph.



TOP 10

downloaded albums from iTunes

CHRISTIAN & GOSPEL



1. Into the Silent Night

By for King & Country



2. Wake Up the Wonder

By Elevation Worship



3. A Worship Initiative Christmas

By Shane & Shane



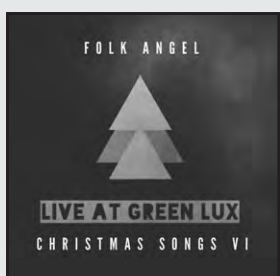
4. How Can It Be

By Lauren Daigle



5. We Sing Joy

By Cloverton



6. Live at Green Lux Christmas Songs, Vol. 6

By Folk Angel

7. God You Are

By U R Worship

8. You Make Me Brave (Live)

By Bethel Music

9. I Will Trust

By Fred Hammond

10. Thrive

By Casting Crowns

Media reviews

Carrollton

Breathe In Deep
Centricity Music

Centricity music has a new band, formerly an independent band known as Mosteller for the lead singer's surname, now renamed Carrollton after the little town that is central to their respective homes in Ohio and Kentucky where they meet to write and practice. That may be an unusual way to name a band but no matter. These guys are the real thing. Their first Extended Play (EP) for Centricity is as good a first effort as I've heard in a while.

The record starts with "Pass You By," based on Matthew 6:25 and invites the listener to just slow down and stop worrying. The opening riffs had me thinking U2 had somehow snuck onto the record



and Justin Mosteller's gravelly vocals work well against the light rock and tight background vocals. "Red," an almost country song with inspiring lyrics about the saving blood of Jesus is another standout. The EP even gives you three more bonus tracks, all good. This is an im-

pressive first effort on their new label and I expect we'll hear a lot more.

Solid writing, skillful and inspired playing and impressive production make this a record you should consider.

Allison Speer

Writer
Independent

Allison Speer's new CD, "Writer," is something of a departure for her. Her beautiful Kentucky-tinged alto voice that's made her so popular as a vocalist with Bill Gaither is still as heavenly as ever. What's different this time is that she's stepped out into writing and performing her own songs, something she says she's been uncomfortable with in the past. I can't imagine why. Speer co-wrote every song on "Writer" and there's not a bad song in the bunch.

If you were already a fan, then you will be glad

to know the delicate southern gospel arrangements that are her trademark are still there. Few vocalists can weave a song around the solid acoustic gospel music like Speer.

This record is a joy to listen to and everything from the finger-style guitar, whistles, solid bass, soaring piano, whirling B3 organ and inspired and subtle drumming add to the magic of Speer's vocals. Yes I like this a lot.



It's a shame to pick out the stronger tracks because they're all great. But certainly I have to give a special nod to the song "She's

Better Now," written by Speer and Joel Lindsey as a tribute to their mothers and featured on the Gaither Homecoming Video "Women of Homecoming." "The Crown" is another standout with its simple piano-driven arrangement. "The Light of the Kerosene" is a great song inspired by a real story of a grandmother, who despite her fading eyesight taught her grandson to read the Bible by the light of a kerosene lamp.

"Writer" is available on iTunes, Amazon.com and Speer's website, allisonspeer.com. 📱

Meet the reviewer

Rick Sharp writes music reviews for The Alabama Baptist. He is a writer and musician and a member of Central Baptist Church, Decatur, where he plays guitar in the praise band.



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Do you have a CD
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BP photo

Steve (center) and Andrea Cabrillos serve at an Anthology Church booth during a Studio City Night Out event designed to bring awareness to crime prevention in Los Angeles. Southern Baptist church planter D.J. Jenkins started the church to reach the Studio City neighborhood.

'Super-influential area'

Church planters see progress in metro Los Angeles

God called D.J. Jenkins to a community with a population of around 40,000. In the midst of a mostly upper middle-class neighborhood full of young families, Jenkins set out to plant a church in a place where there were no evangelical churches. In many ways Studio City is like a thousand other communities of around 40,000 people throughout North America.

Except that Studio City is in the heart of Los Angeles, Calif., the third largest city on the continent and what many consider the cultural mecca of North America.

"It's a super-influential area," said Jenkins, a native Southern Californian who moved back to the area to plant Anthology Church. "Up in the hills you have the stars like George Clooney and Justin Bieber but in the lower neighborhood you have everyone else."

The Studio City community where Jenkins lives is one of 114 neighborhoods in the city of Los Angeles. There also are 88 other neighborhoods in the metro L.A. area, including 16 with more than 100,000 in population. Made up of 4,700 square miles, L.A. County is larger than Rhode Island and Delaware combined.

Largely unreached

Though some of the largest and most influential evangelical churches in North America reside in Southern California, greater L.A. remains largely unreached. Only 8.3 percent of the population claims affiliation with an evangelical church, according to the North American Mission Board (NAMB) Center for Missional Research. The area also has only one Southern Baptist church for every 18,794 people.

Robby Pitt, NAMB's Send North America: Los Angeles city missionary, noted that pushing back lostness in the city will require more of a focus on the peoples and places that make up the region.

"I think one of the things that planters need to realize as we reach this city is that we must focus on

reaching neighborhoods like Westwood, Downey or Compton — rather than L.A. as a whole," Pitt said. "It's those neighborhoods that have the identity."

Despite the vast task of reaching a metro area as large and diverse as Los Angeles, Southern Baptists have begun to see signs of progress. For example Pitt said he's seen a plethora of church planters trusting God to provide financially as they make their homes in especially expensive communities.

"We're seeing church planters come and move into places with a high cost of living," Pitt said. "They're demonstrating faith as they're looking at how they can raise money and how they can make family decisions to cut back. They're paying the price and moving to places of great need."

Pitt also pointed to First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Ga., as another sign for optimism in the city. Earlier in 2014, Los Angeles became one of the last Send North America cities to get connected to a lead partner church. First, Woodstock, took on the assignment after its own youth pastor, Matt Lawson, accepted God's call to start a church in L.A.

The church's senior pastor, former Southern Baptist Convention president Johnny Hunt, already has led several vision tours to Los Angeles with fellow pastors.

Hunt began reaching out to pastor friends and urging them to join him on vision tours. Hunt said the response to those vision trips has been overwhelming, particularly to see how many churches have connected to planters and to what level they've done so.

Hunt said pastors will likely have two reactions to the enormous challenge involved in reaching Los Angeles — either it'll be too big and they'll shrink from it or it'll be a challenge that's so big they'll want to be a part of it.

"When you realize that [Los Angeles] is telling stories to the world that are influencing culture, and we get an opportunity to tell His story to the story-makers — it's an overwhelming opportunity to be a part of something bigger than ourselves," Hunt said. (BP)

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

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Brewton-Parker College accreditation reaffirmed

MOUNT VERNON, Ga. — Brewton-Parker College in Mount Vernon, Ga., announced Dec. 9 in a press release that its accreditation was reaffirmed and will remain an accredited member of The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The Georgia Baptist State Convention-affiliated school is no longer on probation. On Dec. 9, SACSCOC announced its decision at the conclusion of its annual meeting in Nashville.

Brewton-Parker College President Ergun Caner and members of the executive cabinet met for an hour Dec. 6 in Nashville with the SACSCOC committee on compliance and reports to present new verified material evidence demonstrating the college's compliance with the principles of accreditation. The evidence submitted and reviewed by SACSCOC verified the college has sufficient financial resources to meet its obligations and its mission, is financially stable, is in control of its finances and complies with its Title IV program responsibilities to the United States Department of Education.

"This is a great day for Brewton-Parker College," Caner said. "We are thankful that after reviewing all the evidence SACSCOC removed us from probation and reaffirmed our accreditation. The process that Brewton-Parker College has endured over the past four years shows that the system works. Brewton-Parker College is a better and much stronger institution today."

Court hears arguments in GuideStone contraceptive suit

DENVER — A three-judge panel of the U.S. Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver, Colo., heard arguments Dec. 8 surrounding the preliminary injunction granted to GuideStone's health plans, prohibiting the government from enforcing penalties in its controversial contraceptive mandate called for under the Affordable Care Act.

In December 2013, Federal District Judge Timothy DeGiusti, of Oklahoma, issued a preliminary injunction against the federal government's mandate that required ministries that are not churches to provide abortion-causing drugs and devices.

The government appealed the order to the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver earlier in 2014.

Attorneys representing GuideStone continue to defend sanctity of life convictions.

Although the timing of the ruling is unknown, employers in GuideStone's health plans continue to be protected by the injunction granted in December 2013. GuideStone's litigation, launched along with Reaching Souls International, an Oklahoma-based missions organization, and Truett-McConnell College, a Georgia Baptist Convention-affiliated college, is one of almost 90 lawsuits brought against the abortion-drug mandate that is part of the Affordable Care Act.

Former FBC Albertville student pastor killed in homicide

BRADENTON, Fla. — An estimated 350 people attended worship Dec. 7 at Bayshore Baptist Church, Bradenton, Fla., to pay respects to Pastor Tripp Battle, a former student pastor at First Baptist Church, Albertville, who died at the Florida church Dec. 4 in what police believe is a triple homicide.

That same morning murder suspect Andy Avalos Jr. appeared in court for the first time. Avalos was captured without incident Dec. 6 at a trailer park not far from the church. He was charged with three counts of second-degree murder and confined to Manatee County Jail without bond.

Avalos' wife, Amber, who also worked at Bayshore Baptist, was found dead in the couple's home along with Denise Potter, who cleaned houses with Amber.

Prosecutors said in court that Avalos gave a full confession to all three killings.

Authorities didn't say where Andy Avalos was during a 51-hour manhunt or why he decided to turn himself in.

Second-degree murder is the unlawful killing of a human being without premeditation, sometimes called a "crime of passion" because it is motivated by a sudden impulse like rage rather than a "premeditated design" to kill another person. It is punishable by life in prison.

Avalos' next court appearance is scheduled for Jan. 9. ☞