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Merry Christmas

FROM
EDITOR BOB TERRY
and the staff of
The Alabama Baptist.

— 2017 —

"FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE." JOHN 3:16



123rf.com photo, graphic by Lauren C. Grim

What Lottie Moon taught me about injustice, gospel

By Lori McDaniel
International Mission Board

I've met injustice face to face. She was a trafficked woman who stood beside me at a train station in Asia, her pimp glaring from a few feet away. Everything within me wanted to grab her hand and rescue her. But our conversation ended abruptly and I don't know where she is today.

I heard injustice cry out on the edge of an African village as 10-year-old girls were "circumcised" as part of a village tradition. The village women sang in celebration, and my heart split between anger and compassion. The need for justice and the gospel weighed heavy on my soul.

"I cannot be silent," wrote Lottie

Moon, the 19th century Southern Baptist missionary who helped inspire the international missions offering that carries her name today. And I feel a similar urgency myself. Writing as if she were a wartime correspondent, Lottie sent dispatches from the front lines. Her provocative letters asked the Church to courageously send reinforcements to advance the gospel and to compassionately give aid to those dealing with oppression. Her words a mere whisper of the thunderous life she lived: "The needs of these people press upon my soul and I cannot be silent."

Voice for the voiceless

Lottie entered China to teach women and school-aged girls. It wasn't long before she collided head-on with injustice in the Chinese culture, specifically the ancient

practice of foot-binding. The custom entailed bending a young girl's toes downward until her foot doubled and binding them tightly until they broke. The tighter the better.



The agonizing pain resulted in a deformed, three-inch foot believed to attract better marriage prospects and a higher social status. To a groom, "It is much more important for her to have small feet than a pretty face," Lottie wrote. "As to education, that

is neither desired nor expected." Lottie spoke out, encouraging parents to unbind their daughter's feet and to allow them to go to school. And for 40 years, Lottie lived among people whose needs altered between poverty, disease, war, persecution, famine and the results of human atrocities.

She met injustice face to face with a relentless love and the truth of the

gospel. Her resolve to persist on the front lines nearly 150 years ago inspires me to tenaciously wrestle with injustice and the gospel in my own world today.

Here's what Lottie's example teaches me about injustice and the gospel.

Inner tension

We must live in the tension of injustice. Lottie proclaimed the gospel while ministering to broken people wrapped in the brutality of injustice. The inner tension she felt was thick. She knew that unbinding the feet of a young girl came with risks. A girl with unbound feet may have become an outcast, rejected by her family.

But with feet bound, girls suffered excruciating pain, were susceptible to infection and death and would likely become uneducated child-brides. As many of us would, Lottie wrestled through her options. "Has the time come and are we strong enough to make a decided stand on the question of foot-binding?" she asked. "Shall we make it a rule that

(See 'Fight,' page 7)

COMMENT

Awed and Overwhelmed

Who has not stood awed by a mountain vista or dazzled by a sparkling sunset? Who has not seen the majesty of God as they cuddled a newborn child or been overwhelmed by the reality of God as they gazed into a starlit sky?

The psalmist knew such feelings. The opening verses of Psalm 19 declare:

*The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.*

*Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.*

*There is no speech, nor are there words;
Their voice is not heard.*

*Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their utterances to the end of the world.*

Voiceless though it may be, His handiwork we call nature declares the glory of God.

Centuries later the Apostle Paul picked up this theme in his letter to the Christians at Rome. In Romans 1:20, he argued, "For since the creation of the world His (God's) invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made."

Available to all

The Apostle Paul says God took the initiative to make Himself known in these ways (Rom. 1:19) and this knowledge of God is available to all people everywhere.

In Acts 14:17 the apostle expounds that theme in his sermon to the pagans in Lystra. There Paul declares, "He (God) did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

When God acts to make Himself known, that is called "revelation," a word that means "unveiling." Both the psalmist and Apostle Paul contend God took the initiative to make Himself known (to reveal Himself) through the created order.

Theologians call this "General Revelation." One can see God's power and majesty through General Revelation, even God's artistry and creativity. Some even argue that General Revelation helps



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

explain the worldwide phenomenon of religion and religions.

General Revelation may provide insights into God as Creator and Sustainer but it cannot provide a transforming knowledge of God's love and grace in behalf of humanity that "exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Rom. 1:25).

That kind of knowledge can only come from what theologians call "Special Revelation."

Special Revelation began with God's choice of Israel through which all humankind was to be blessed. God's choice of Israel was a particular choice sealed with a covenant although it always looked forward to the eschatological kingdom of God.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews uses a summary statement to gather together the various ways God acted through Special Revelation to make Himself known to Israel. He writes, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways" (Heb. 1:1). The Old Testament records the words and deeds of the prophets; the moral mandates of the law; God's actions in historical events; natural phenomena; divine guidance of individuals and groups, angels, dreams and visions; and more.

God readily disclosed His nature and His will to Israel because Israel was to make God known to all others.

After the summary statement with which the Book of Hebrews begins, the writer declares that God has made an ultimate Special Revelation. The author writes, "In these last days He has spoken

to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He (the Son) is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:2-3a).

The Apostle John's Gospel says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14).

Both writers reference what theologians call "incarnation," the event we celebrate at Christmas.

In Philippians 2:6-7, Paul defines incarnation when he writes of Jesus, "who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men."

Incarnation is the ultimate Special Revelation because the God who has always acted to make Himself known ultimately reveals Himself in human form — in the life of one individual, Jesus of Nazareth who was born in a Bethlehem stable.

Incarnation is not something concocted by the church at some theological council. It is recognition of what Jesus said about Himself. In John 6:46, Jesus declared, "No one has seen the Father except the One who is from God; only He has seen the Father." Later, in John 10:30, Jesus said plainly, "I and the Father are one." In John 14:9, Jesus is quoted as saying, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father."

'God was in Christ'

Is it any wonder that Paul would later write to the Corinthian Christians that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19)? Earlier in that same letter he wrote the "knowledge of the glory of God" could be seen "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Again, this is the ultimate "Special Revelation."

During Christmas most of us will talk about shepherds and wise men, about a tired donkey and a town crowded with tourists. We will focus on Mary, Joseph and the infant swaddled and laid in an animal's feeding trough.

In the midst of the celebration of incarnation — of God coming in human form — let us not forget that it all happened because from the beginning God would not leave Himself without a witness in His desire to make Himself known to all people everywhere including you and me.

Perhaps it is God's love and grace revealed in the incarnation that should leave us awed and overwhelmed. ✝

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

CHURCH SECURITY

I'm writing in reference to the article "How can we protect the church?" that appeared in the Nov. 16 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*.

First and foremost it is not the "pastor's role to safeguard the congregation against active shooters," as the article stated.

Unless theological seminary curriculum included such training for many years, there are likely few pastors qualified to assume such a role. That role is better left to a congregant (volunteer) who is Christ-led to pursue church security. The pastor has a full plate without adding security.

Pastors, however, should advocate

for the safety and security of the congregation and support those who step forward to lead such an effort.

Second "establishing a no-concealed weapons policy in the church" (See 'Letters,' page 10)



The Alabama Baptist
will not publish a Dec. 28 issue.
The next issue will be Jan. 4.



“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 ministries

— Alabama Baptists share love of Christ statewide —



Photo courtesy of Coffee Baptist Association

Coffee Baptist Association’s 90-plus year ‘Coffee Cakes’ tradition of donating cakes, cookies and candies to Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries continues with 821 items given by churches this year.

East Cullman Baptist Association volunteers set up Christmas ‘stores’ in area nursing homes so residents can select gifts for loved ones or themselves. Gifts and gift wrapping are provided to the residents at no cost.



Photo courtesy of Debbie Keaton



Photos courtesy of Mona Crawford

FBC Union Springs holds living nativity to kick off the Christmas season. Countless volunteers assisted with the effort from building the sets to filling roles to greeting guests and handing out animal crackers. An international missions speaker also shared about work in a closed country.



How you can help secure your church

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions Office of LeaderCare and Church Health will hold “Basics of Church Security: Protecting Against Imminent Threats of Violence” training for churches seeking to improve security. The training will be held Jan. 18 from 9 a.m.

until noon at First Baptist Church, Prattville.

Topics will include:

- ▶ Why church security
- ▶ Basics for any congregation
- ▶ Dealing with armed attackers
- ▶ Armed security teams.

Even small churches like most in Alabama can be targets, said state missionary Mark Wakefield,

who has served in emergency-related roles for 30-plus years.

There is no “perfect solution” if someone is intent on doing harm, he said. However, churches can take steps to improve safety and security.

The conference is made available through CP support and pre-registration is suggested. (TAB)

For more information about the conference, contact Ana Raymundo at 334-613-2356 or go to www.alsbom.org/events.

Alabama church security resources:

▶ **Your local police or sheriff’s office:** Many local officials are trained in ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate), instructor-led classes that provide preparation and a plan for organizations on how to proactively handle the threat of an aggressive intruder or active shooter event.

▶ **Central Alabama Firearms Training (Birmingham area and statewide):** CRASE (Civilian Response to Active Shooter Event) training for church security teams at your church. Initial training for unarmed team is free; firearms training is available for a fee.

Contact David McCullough at 205-743-8609 or go to www.caftllc.com.

▶ **North Alabama Security Training Academy (Huntsville area and statewide):** Training for unarmed and armed church security teams. Classroom portion includes communication, use of force and legal liability issues. Basic class requires a minimum of 5 participants and has a fee per participant. Includes onsite assessment of church campus and facilities to look for vulnerabilities. Contact Barry Pendergraft at 256-682-3760 or find information at www.alabamasecuritytraining.com/church-security-training.html.



Photo courtesy of Sherrie Bittle

Children from the pre-K class at New Bethel Baptist Church, Warrior, in Sulphur Springs Association bring donations to the Cane Creek Baptist Church, Warrior, food bank.

Labor of love

Cane Creek Baptist food bank sees God at work

There's a building at Cane Creek Baptist Church, Warrior, that's loaded down with food. And Harold Donald says it's a labor of love.

"We've been doing this for 12 years at least," said Donald, Cane Creek's pastor. "It started out really small and it's really grown."

The food bank, which opens its doors to the community on the third Saturday of every month, feeds about 150 families.

"It's definitely been something supported by the community — it's not just Cane Creek Baptist Church," Donald said. "There is a lot of work that goes into it."

Churches from across Sulphur Springs Baptist Association pitch in to buy food, stock shelves and fill volunteer needs.

And in December, there's a spe-

cial bonus — children get stockings stuffed by local churches.

Sherrie Bittle, director of the food bank, said the contents of the stockings range from onesies for babies to toys, clothes and food for older kids.

Help from others

"Other churches are such a big help with the ministry," she said.

For one, New Bethel Baptist Church, Warrior, starts its generosity early — its pre-K class has a canned food drive, and the teacher brings the children to the food bank to deliver it.

"Their teacher really works to teach them missions and that's the first mission they do together as a class," Bittle said.

Donald said Cane Creek Baptist has invested in the food bank because they feel deeply the weight

of God's command to care for the poor.

Before each third Saturday distribution, Donald gives a short message and offers everyone there a chance to respond to the gospel.

Dan Nichols, director of missions for Sulphur Springs Baptist Association, says it is "an unbelievable work of the Lord going on at Cane Creek." (Grace Thornton)



On March 2, 1876, *The Alabama Baptist* printed a report from the managing board of the Muskogee (Creek Native Americans) Baptist Association. In part the letter said, "We feel very grateful to you for sending missionaries to our people. ... Now we have an association of Baptists comprising some 32 churches in the Creek Nation alone, besides associations among the Choctaw and Chickasaw, one among the Cherokee and several churches among the Seminole."

Bullock prison ministry distributes Christmas gifts to inmates

Kyle Curington says he's got a lot of motivations to keep going into Bullock Correctional Facility every Christmas, but one of the biggest ones is this.

"It's quite an experience when you go into the dorm to hand out presents to the inmates and tell them that we love them, God loves them and the outside world is thinking about them," he said. "Some of them have been disowned by their families or don't have any families, and when we tell them that, tears well up in their eyes."

Longstanding ministry

For more than a decade, Curington, a member of First Baptist Church, Union Springs, in Bullock Baptist Association, and others have gone into the prison every Christmas to hand out Christmas presents to the inmates.

"We make an assembly line at the prison and pack gallon (plastic) bags with all kinds of goodies — food, deodorant, pencils and other things," Curington said.

It's a longstanding ministry, but the relationship between area Baptists and inmates isn't just a once-a-year thing.

Curington and others have taught Sunday School in the prison for about 25 years, even starting a new Sunday School program at Easterling Correctional Facility when some of the inmates transferred over from Bullock and found they didn't have Bible study there.

"Starting a ministry to prisoners in our area was the vision of Tom Randall, who was our pastor back then," Curington said. "He had a feeling in his heart that the prisoners needed access to Bible study."

With the permission of the prison, Randall, Curington and others were designated a portion of the property inside the chain-link fence and built a chapel for prisoners, "maybe the prettiest chapel you've ever seen," Curington said.

He and others tore down an old school nearby, and with the help of prisoners who cleaned up the brick, they built the chapel with exposed wood beams from the school gym.

"A lot of people made that happen and God has done a lot of things through this ministry," Curington said. "It's been quite a ride but it's been a good ride." (Grace Thornton)

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SHARING Christmas joy

Christmas backpack ministry to continue after Barker retires

Alabama Baptists will send a record number of Christmas backpacks to kids this year through its partnership with the Mississippi River Ministry (MRM).

Alabama's 2017 goal was 6,500 backpacks, and Pat Ingram, missions and ministry consultant for Women on Mission and women's ministry for Alabama Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), confirmed the goal had been met at press time.

"We may even make 7,000," Ingram said, noting that some associations are still delivering backpacks.

This is the third year Alabama WMU and the global missions team of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) have partnered with MRM to share Christmas joy with children who otherwise might not have a very merry holiday.

"Many areas served by MRM are poverty-stricken areas," Ingram said. "The communities are very rural and their lives are just difficult."

Each backpack includes a Christmas story and a Bible study postcard along with a variety of gifts and necessities, including toys, clothing, school supplies and hygiene products. Canned foods

and snacks are included too.

"A lot of these children are in such poverty that they are not getting meals when school is out," Ingram said. "The food in the backpack is what they survive on until school goes back."

The regional Christmas backpacks effort began six years ago as a shoebox ministry. The program has expanded from 300 shoeboxes in 2012 to an expected 65,000 backpacks this year.

Though Alabama primarily sends backpacks through MRM, thousands also are distributed through Appalachian Regional Ministry (ARM). ARM and MRM are North American Mission Board (NAMB) ministries that mobilize Southern Baptists to meet the spiritual and physical needs of the two regions through evangelism, church planting and church strengthening.

Upcoming retirement

Bill Barker has served more than 16 years as director of ARM and has overseen MRM since 2012. Though Barker is retiring at the end of December, the backpack ministry will continue, Ingram said.

"We will still partner with MRM just as we have been doing," she said. "There shouldn't really be any changes for our

churches and our folks."

Barker will be missed though, said Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama WMU.

"I've never known anyone who has such compassion and passion for ministering to the poor," she said of Barker. "He has a heart for the people and an understanding of the challenges they face. He is really an advocate and champion for the underserved."

She also noted his passion for missions and missions education. In his 16 years as ARM director, Barker has been a popular speaker at local churches, associational meetings and state conventions and conferences, including many events in Alabama.

"It has been an honor to work with him," McIntosh said.

As he looks back over his missionary service, Barker noted several developments that stand out. A gospel tract written by ARM volunteers has been distributed to more than 1.6 million people. The tract led to a correspondence Bible class initiated by ARM, now led by local churches and completed by more than 5,000 people. Hundreds have come to faith in Christ through it, including several dozen men in prison.

"I wake up every morning wondering what miracle God is going to do today," he said. "I've seen



Photo by John Swain/NAMB

Bill Barker, director of Appalachian Regional Ministry, picks up donated clothes sent in an assortment of cardboard boxes.

God do small miracles. I've seen Him do big miracles."

Barker started seeing miracles in his first year with ARM. In February 2002, Barker visited Larry and Bessie McPeek to learn more about their ministry helping young mothers keep their babies. In the three months before Barker arrived they'd helped 180 women. But they were broke.

Years of miracles

"I have no money to give you," Barker told the couple before praying with them and leaving.

That night a call came to Barker's cell phone in a location where he typically did not have cell coverage and hasn't since. It was from a lady who had heard Barker speak at her church two weeks earlier in South Carolina. She wanted to send money from an inheritance to help the people of Kentucky.

Barker thought the lady would send him \$20 or so. Two days later he received a check from her

for \$10,000, which substantially helped fund the McPeeks' pro-life ministry.

"It has been 16-and-a-half years of miracles," Barker said.

"God has enabled me to be out there and be among Southern Baptists and talk about His work," he said of the ministry that has led to 77,000 professions of faith. "It has been a marvel to see God use this old boy from the head of a hollow in West Virginia in a manner such as this."

Barker expressed his appreciation for Southern Baptists and their support of Cooperative Program missions, noting their offerings have supported the work of ARM and MRM. NAMB's work in the region will continue through a new Send Relief ministry hub located in Kentucky.

Barker will stay active in the backpacks ministry when he begins his new role as director of the Appalachian Mountain Ministries of the Georgia Baptist Mission Board in January 2018. (TAB, BP)

Baptist associations 'grab hold of' backpack ministries

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

From June to almost November, all Aimee Starling thinks about is backpacks.

It's been that way now for several years.

"Three years ago, a letter was sent out to each association challenging them to set a goal of maybe 50 backpacks each," said Starling, a member of Adoniram Baptist Church, Abbeville, in Judson Baptist Association. "We set our goal at 21. We thought, 'That's one per church — certainly we can manage that.'"

They managed 42 that year. Last year they set their goal at 50 and packed 81.

"This year we set our goal at



Photo by Dina Burdeshaw

Judson and Selma associations are two of many Alabama Baptist associations assisting with Backpacks of Hope.

100 and we had 170," said Starling, who also serves as a missions mobilizer for the North American Mission Board (NAMB). "It's all because of the support of our churches."

The Backpacks of Hope project, run each year by NAMB, provides Christmas presents for thousands of impoverished children in Appalachia and the Mississippi Delta.

"Our churches have overwhelmingly supported it," Starling said.

Throughout the year, churches give both money and supplies to cover what's needed. Starling buys the backpacks at a discount then shops with donated funds to get the remaining supplies to fill them. Volunteers pack the bags.

It's a well-loved project, Starling said. And this year, when church messengers to the associational meeting heard about the program, they went back and challenged their church to get involved.

They gave \$1,000 — enough to fill 66 backpacks.

"It's a project the churches have

really grabbed hold of," Starling said.

Judson Association's backpacks have gone west to the Mississippi Delta region each year, but Jonathan Jenkins, pastor of Sister Springs Baptist Church, Tyler, in Selma Baptist Association, said his church's go north.

For the past few years, a team from his church has not only packed the bags but helped with distribution in Williamsburg, Kentucky, part of the area served by Appalachian Regional Ministry.

"Each year, the number of backpacks has grown," Jenkins said. "It started out as a simple project where we could give and send, but

then it grew into an opportunity to get our folks involved in going."

This year, a team of 47 people from across Selma Association went in mid-December with Sister Springs Baptist to deliver 340 backpacks.

On previous trips, they have met and ministered to people in extreme poverty, "folks who don't have beds to sleep in, living in homes that don't keep

out the weather or the wind," Jenkins said. "It's been really interesting to see what God has done through the ministry there. It's been really, really good." ✝

For more information about Backpacks of Hope, visit www.namb.net/send-relief/backpacks-of-hope.

FBC Livingston's ministry to Chinese students thriving

It was several years ago when the people of First Baptist Church, Livingston, were first told the world was headed to their town of 3,000. The University of West Alabama (UWA) was getting an influx of students from China, and the staff asked the community to help make them feel welcome.

The church took that as a wide-open door.

"The first year, we provided basic necessities for them," said church member Cindy Larkin.

But they all agree the ministry had a slow start. That first year they put Bibles in the welcome packets too and a lot of them were thrown away.

But when things took off, they really did, and now the church's ministry is thriving. In the past several years, they've baptized eight new Chinese believers, including one woman who is a professor at UWA.

"Now our Chinese Christians are leading

our Friday night fellowship," Larkin said. On Friday nights, a local restaurant run by Chinese Christians prepares dinner for the students, then they gather for Bible study.

"God just laid it all out and we are amazed," Larkin said. "It's been great."

Her mother, Lenora Hamrick, and fellow church member Eleanor Ward have been leading English conversation classes on Tuesday nights for years, and Larkin leads a Sunday School class for the new believers.

"We started at Genesis and are going through the Bible," Larkin said. "It's really fun. We read it in English and then one of the students reads it in Chinese."

The members of First, Livingston, build relationships with the students, invite them into their homes, take trips with them and introduce them to Jesus.

Ward said the holidays provide a great opportunity to share culture and the gospel.

"It's not us, it's God," she said. "We are just in awe." (Grace Thornton)

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

SOUTHEAST

► **Bethel Church, Dothan**, will hold a Christmas Eve candlelight service Dec. 24, 5 p.m. This will be a time to celebrate Jesus Christ through a service of traditional Christmas carols and Scripture reading. Ricky Plummer is pastor.

WINSTON

► **Roger White** is the new pastor of **First Church, Arley**. He previously served as pastor of Friendship Church, Springville. He also served churches in

DeKalb and St. Clair associations and assisted with statewide evangelical events for the State Board of Missions. White holds a bachelor's degree from Trinity College of the Bible and a master's degree and doctorate from Trinity Seminary. He is married to Katherine. ☞



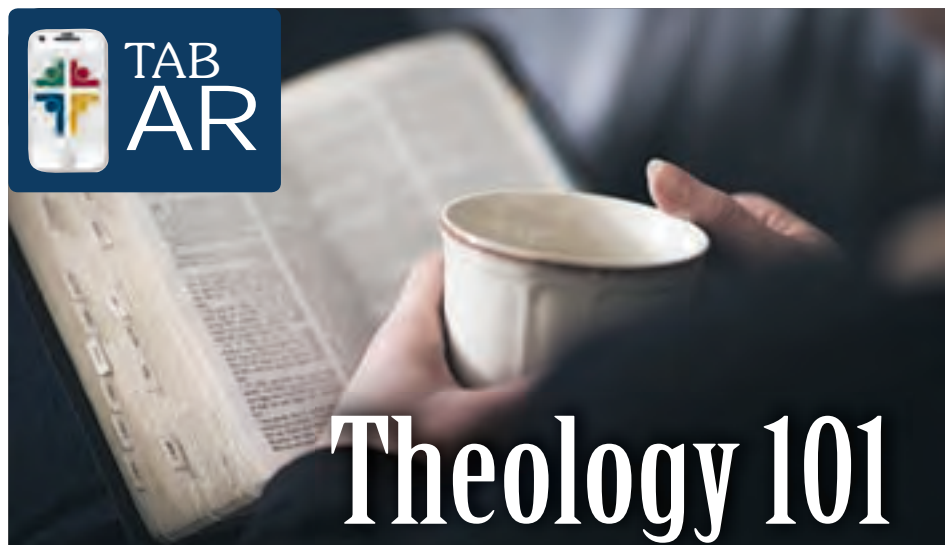
WHITE

Calvary BC celebrates 50 years of deaf ministry



Photo courtesy of Vickie Brown

Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, celebrates 50 years of deaf ministry Oct. 29 with a recognition service. The ministry was started in October 1967 by then church secretary Naomi Scott. Vickie Brown, who has served in deaf ministry for 40 years, currently serves as Calvary's interpreter. Robert Scott, who was 14 years old when the ministry began, is still an active member 50 years later and leads and teaches the Sunday School class. Tim Lovett is pastor.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

God's Self-Revelation

Revealed in the Incarnate Christ

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

God has chosen to reveal something about Himself both in nature and in humans whom He created in His own image and likeness.

Students of theology have traditionally referred to these disclosures as General Revelation. We might describe General Revelation as God's self-disclosure to all people throughout all time and in all places. Revelation by means of creation and human image-bearers is general in the sense that it is and has been available to all people at all times. It also is general in the sense that the perceptions about God through these means is of a general nature, namely that He exists; is powerful and wise; is a lover of beauty, symmetry and orderliness; and that He is personal, communicative and knowable. However, for people to know God in a personal way and enjoy fellowship with Him it required further revelation of God; humankind's limitations of finiteness and sinfulness made this necessary.

Beyond all that could be known about God through General Revelation, His most complete and saving self-revelation awaited the coming of Jesus into the world. The approach of another Christmas affords an opportune time to reflect on God's self-disclosure in the person, mission and message of Christ. In this season we do well to confess the truth of Colossians 2:9 concerning Christ: "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

Christmas also is the time to acknowledge and reaffirm that Christ Jesus came as fully human in order that all humans might have a saving knowledge of God. This goes beyond General Revelation. It is often referred to as Special Revelation or Particular Revelation. All people need to know more about God than a general grasp of some of His attributes. We all stand in need of knowing God in a relational way, not merely gaining a mental grasp of what God is like but entering into a personal, redemptive and heart-to-heart relationship with Him. The

insufficiency of General Revelation at this point of need made necessary special revelation. So if we would enjoy fellowship with God and know Him experientially, we are compelled to receive the saving self-revelation of God that He has revealed in the Savior's coming into the world. The incarnation of God in Christ became the apex of God's self-revelation.

Authority of the Bible

People who accept the authority and accuracy of the Bible believe that when the prophets spoke or wrote, they were declaring a message from God and about God, but when Christ spoke, it was God Himself who was speaking. Not only in His message was God being heard but also in the character of Christ, God was being revealed. God had actually come among humans and displayed His attributes to them. Christ's utterances, attitudes, affections, actions and reactions did more than mirror the Father. They were the actual presence of God who had come to make Himself knowable to and experienced by human beings.

The Roman centurion at the cross expressed it succinctly: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54). Elsewhere, the Bible puts it like this: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). Jesus is on record as having said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). In celebrating Christmas, be sure to include gratitude for God's self-revelation in His Son. ☞

Jerry Batson is a retired Alabama Baptist pastor who also has served as associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor of several schools of religion during his career.



'Fight injustice with gospel-informed response'

(continued from page 1)
all who come in (to school) shall unbind their feet?"

Injustice binds, the gospel sets free — and we must relentlessly minister in the tension between the two.

Let us not shrink in the face of injustice but courageously fight injustice with a gospel-informed response.

Righting a wrong of injustice is not redemptive. Christ's presence and power is. The gospel breeds injustice-fighters, but fighting injustice is not necessarily proclaiming the gospel. We are called to defend against the assault of injustice while introducing God as the one who "heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Ps. 147:5).

Standing firm

After years of attempting to right the wrong of foot-binding, Lottie wrote of one student who chose to follow Christ but "was forced to marry into a heathen family. They used every effort to induce her to recant."

But she would not. Her husband destroyed her Bible and demanded she leave her faith. Unrelenting, this woman fervent-

ly prayed. Twenty years later her husband chose to follow Christ. Not long after his conversion, she "prayed about the unbinding of her daughters' feet, and when she spoke of it to her husband, she could scarcely believe her ears that he promptly consented."

It was Christ in him that changed his perspective of right and wrong. Injustice and brokenness dwell where God's name and glory does not. But, when His name is present, God has the power to redeem and restore justice.

Injustice dwells where truth does not. Injustice will continue as long as the truth is suppressed (Rom. 1:18).

As believers, we don't just inform people of truth, we introduce them to truth by being a living example of Christ.

When we introduce people to the Word, "many hearts are stirred," wrote Lottie, "but these newly awakened souls are bound in the chains of old habits. ... Now what these people need — next to grace of God in their hearts — is to see the life of Jesus Christ set before them."

We can't just do good. We must love people enough to live



IMB photo

International missionary Lottie Moon had such an evident love for the Chinese people she served that on her tombstone her Chinese friends carved on a plaque 'how she loved us.'

as a tangible gospel witness among them — yes, live among the impoverished, the diseased, the broken, the displaced and the dejected. We can declare truth when we dwell among injustice.

Reconciliation

Injustice is uprooted when we share the story of reconciliation. As believers, we understand justice differently because we've been justified. Our story has been redeemed by our reconciliation

to God through Jesus Christ.

Injustice is often tethered to a belief — a story — that's a deeply rooted worldview, passed down through generations.

Cultures may place their identity in such beliefs, anchored in religion, tradition or societal expectations.

We cannot change the narrative of a culture without giving them a better story to believe. Through Jesus Christ, God reconciled the

world to Himself and entrusted us as "messengers of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19).

We can't love the gospel and not have compassion for the broken in need of the gospel. Ironically, a year and a half before Lottie died she was still writing of injustice and oppression as famine claimed the lives of many around her. She wrote of men collapsing on the side of the road, their sacks of grain still beside them as they died of starvation on their way back to their families. She told of mothers sending their children away from home, just hoping someone would feed them.

Lottie fell in love with the Chinese people and the Chinese people fell in love with her. When she died, her Chinese friends carved in Chinese letters on a plaque, "Lottie Moon."

And underneath could be found the phrase, "how she loved us."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Lori McDaniel is a church initiatives leader at the International Mission Board. She served with her family for several years in Africa before returning to plant a church in the United States.✝

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

2017 marks 100th anniversary of Oswald Chambers' death

Oswald Chambers (1874–1917) was a Scottish Baptist preacher, evangelist, teacher and writer. He is best known for the devotional book, "My Utmost for His Highest."

Born July 24, 1874, in Aberdeen, Scotland, to Clarence and Hannah Chambers, Oswald Chambers was converted under the preaching of Charles Spurgeon and was baptized by Spurgeon, as were his parents years earlier. He joined Rye Lane Baptist Chapel.

When Chambers was two years old, the family moved to Stoke-on-Trent, where his father became a home missions evangelist for North Staffordshire Baptist Association. From there they moved to Perth, Scotland, and his father returned to preaching. In 1889 the family settled in

London where Chambers' father worked for the Baptist Total Abstinence Association.

As a teenager, Chambers was known for his deep spirituality and love of art.

He studied at the National Art Training School in London from 1893 to 1895 and then at the University of Edinburgh. While at Edinburgh, he felt a call to the ministry.

He later studied at Dunoon College near Glasgow.

Richard Harris, founder of the Pentecostal League of Prayer, influenced Chambers. Through the League, he met Juji Nakada, a Japanese evangelist. In 1906, Nakada and Chambers went to America where Chambers spent a semester teaching in Cincinnati and then went to Japan.



CHAMBERS

In 1908 he sailed back to America and dated Gertrude Hobbs (whom Chambers affectionately called "Biddy"). They married in May 1910 and had their only child, Kathleen, in 1913. Biddy became his partner in ministry. She could take shorthand at 250 words per minute and transcribed and typed his sermons and lessons.

Chambers founded the Bible Training College in London in 1911. By July 1915, 49 of the 106 students were serving as missionaries. In 1916 during World War I, Chambers enlisted as a YMCA chaplain. Assigned to Cairo, Egypt, he and Biddy evangelized Australian and New Zealand troops. He met the soldiers' spiritual and physical needs. He stressed having a personal relationship

with Christ and completely abandoning oneself to Christ.

On Oct. 17, 1917, Chambers was stricken with appendicitis but resisted going to a hospital because wounded men would need the beds. On Oct. 29 he had an emergency appendectomy and died Nov. 15 from a pulmonary hemorrhage. Biddy telegraphed family and friends in Britain saying, "Oswald in His presence." He was buried with full military honors at the British Military Cemetery in Cairo.

Today his words live on because of his industrious widow. Biddy transcribed and published 30 books edited from her notes. "My Utmost for His Highest," composed of 365 selections of his talks, has never been out of print, has sold millions of copies and has been translated into 39 languages.✝

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).



Valley Grove members 'dig deep in their pockets' to help Children's Homes

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

In Jeff Logan's eyes, they fell a little short of what they normally like to do.

But when their gift came in, Steve Sellers wept.

Valley Grove Baptist Church, Remlap, where Logan serves as pastor, has given faithfully to the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH) for years, but this year was a little different.

In summer 2016, the church lost its building to arson.

"They've been in the process of rebuilding," said Sellers, church relations manager for ABCH.

In recent months, Carpenters for Christ and others have worked to get the church back in a new facility. In

June, they dedicated the cross on top of the new sanctuary.

"I used to be in the insurance business and I know that probably most churches are underinsured," Sellers said.

So for the people of Valley Grove Baptist to dig deep in their pockets at a time like this was

sacrificial and touching, he said. "They are a very loving church."

The church, part of Blount Baptist Association, is hoping to be back in its own building in early 2018. They've been meeting at another church in the area ever since the fire.

But they haven't forgotten who they are or what they're about, Logan said.

"You can't out-give the Lord," he said. "He always blesses beyond what we can even imagine."

Soon after Logan first met Jesus, he went with a group to tour the ABCH facility in Troy.

That visit stuck with him.

"I've tried to encourage every church I've been a part of to contribute," he said.

So at Valley Grove, every week they do a penny march — children hold buckets, and others march with their offering to the front of the church to deposit them there.

Then every year, someone takes the offering total to the ABCH Christmas open house in Decatur.

"They've been faithful to give substantially to the Children's Home," Sellers said.

Logan said it just makes sense. "It's a great ministry," he said.

He's watched over the years as children have grown up through ABCH and even gone back to be house parents for the next generation.

"I think the Lord holds a special place in his heart for children and we want to do the same," he said.

"I feel like the money is used for a great cause to help those children have a chance in life they wouldn't normally get, and our church wants to be a part of that."



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Every week the children at Valley Grove Baptist hold buckets at the front of the church while others take their offering to them during an organized 'march.'



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WISHING
CHRISTMAS

For unto us a child is born ... Isaiah 9:6

Conecuh County youth rally shows evidence of Lord's faithfulness

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Four or five years ago, Tim Covin saw that his daughter, Lisa, and a few other teens at Lyeffion Baptist Church, Evergreen, in Conecuh Baptist Association really needed a youth group.

"We started out just having a time for them to get together and watch Christian movies on Sunday afternoons," Covin said. "Six months later, we decided to do a service just for them."

They started holding that service at 5:30 on Wednesday nights — and it grew from there, he said.

Growing ministry

"We started out with five kids and now we usually have 25 every Sunday," Covin said, adding that it was all the youth's doing. "They just kept inviting their friends," he said.

In November, Covin decided they should do something a little bigger — something to draw all the youth in the area together.

For the last few years, the church has held a peanut boil and

horseshoe tournament, a challenge to all the churches in the area. A trophy even travels back and forth every year from winner to winner, said Pastor Larry Johnson.

"It's nothing fancy — we just love on each other and be there for each other," he said. "For the adults, it's a day of fellowship. Our goal is to bring more and more people together."

They have soup, sandwiches and s'mores, and they play games and just hang out.

"But for the youth this year it was a chance to get together and worship too," Johnson said. "That gave the event a whole different aim."

Before the outdoor festivities started, 46 youth from different denominations across Conecuh and Butler counties gathered for worship and to hear a mes-

sage from Michael Holcombe of Brushey Creek Baptist Church, Greenville, in Butler Baptist Association.

They played games, sang worship songs and had a great time, Covin said.

It went so well that they have future plans brewing already — for starters, Lyeffion Baptist wants to make the rally an annual event.

But Covin is also helping to plan another rally for February 2018 at Old Town Baptist Church, Evergreen, that he's

hoping will draw 400 students.

Covin says he's just a deacon who "took over the youth ministry," but Johnson said Covin is a "tireless youth worker."

"He brings them in, takes care of them and preaches the gospel to them," Johnson said. "God has laid it on his heart to do these things and he just runs with it." ✠

"[Covin] brings them in, takes care of them and preaches the gospel to them."

**Pastor Larry Johnson
Lyeffion Baptist Church,
Evergreen**



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LETTERS

(continued from page 2)
is fundamentally flawed. The only adherents would be those who abide by law and honor property policy. People like Stephen Paddock, Omar Mateen, Seung-Hui Cho, Adam Lanza, George Hennard and Devin Patrick Kelley are driven by evil and have no compunction about violating law or policy.

One common thread among mass murderers is they choose locations where armed resistance is not anticipated. The outcome at First Baptist Church, Sutherland Springs, might have been different if several congregants were armed.

Third, planning for police intervention to stop an active shoot-

er is statistically ill advised.

In mass murder situations where the police stopped the carnage, an average of 14 people died. In mass murder situations where civilians stopped the carnage, an average of 2.3 people died.

Planning for the police to intervene only affords a mass murderer more time to wreak more carnage. A security plan has to include immediacy. Waiting is not an option.

Parochially, active shooter response is: escape, evade, confront. Run-hide-fight is a solution set intended to afford an individual a better chance to survive.

When a mass murderer enters a sanctuary full of people, the

situation is immediately escalated to the fight mode — the first two options are not available to the vast majority of people within an auditorium.

Since a congregation is considered the body of Christ, each with his or her contributing talent, then acting as one body in an active shooter situation is most appropriate.

If the First, Sutherland Springs, congregation had done so and everyone close by had immediately tackled him, then Kelley would have been stopped before he killed 24 people.

There are many courses of action churches can plan and rehearse to improve security; however, the Nov. 16 article advised churches to consider some ineffectual elements which many readers will presume to be measures for improving security.

The Alabama Baptist could better serve churches and readers by advising them to seek out resources experienced in the church



security field and providing a list of such resources.

John H. Yetter
Hartford, Ala.

EDITOR'S NOTE — While The Alabama Baptist's (TAB) policy for letters to the editor is 200 words or less, an exception was made for this letter because of the broad scope of the topic for our readers and the research provided by the letter writer, who has safety and security experience. Mr. Yetter served 31 years in active duty in the U.S. Army and currently serves as the safety and security director for his church. TAB also followed up on his suggestion of compiling a list of resources for improving church security (see page 3).✉

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Remember to:

- Include your name and address.
- Focus on issues, not people.
- Be as concise as possible.

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Greenbrier Road Baptist Church is seeking full-time senior pastor. Submit resumés to: Pastor Search Team, 1235 Greenbrier Dear Rd., Anniston, AL 36207, or email: pastorsearch@grbc.org.

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Immanuel Baptist Church in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, is accepting resumés for a full-time pastor. The candidate selected will have 5 years senior pastor experience, seminary training, expository preaching style and be able to attract and appeal to all age groups. We currently have an elderly congregation and no other ministerial staff. We have underused, debt-free, excellent facilities and a good location. Candidates with the above qualifications can email resumés to: immanuel38464@bellsouth.net. Our website is myimmanuel.net. Please include current sermons on websites.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Bethel Baptist Church, Highway 5, Brent, Alabama, is searching for a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: Bethel Baptist Church, c/o John D.

Russell, 298 Tabernacle Rd., Brent, AL 35034, or email to: russellcatering@bellsouth.net.

PART-TIME MUSIC DIRECTOR

Lakeview Baptist Church, Oxford, Alabama, is seeking a music director. This is a paid, part-time position. They will supervise the planning and leading of our worship services in an energetic, blended style. Their primary additional responsibility will be to lead the choir ministry and choir rehearsals. Interested persons should send a resumé to: lburell@cablone.net and/or contact Lem Burell at 256-846-2807.

MINISTER TO STUDENTS

First Baptist Church of Oxford, Alabama, is seeking a full-time minister to students. Our student ministry is a thriving ministry focused on reaching, equipping and sending students for the glory of Christ. This ministry position covers grades 7 through college. Please send resumés to: the Personnel Committee at: 95 E. Oak St., Oxford, AL 36203, or you may email resumés to: stan@firstbaptistoxford.org.

MINISTER TO CHILDREN

First Baptist Church of Oxford,

Alabama, is seeking a full-time minister to children. Our children's ministry is a vibrant ministry with incredible potential. This ministry position covers birth through 6th grade. Please send resumés to the Personnel Committee at: 95 E. Oak St., Oxford, AL 36203, or you may email resumés to: stan@firstbaptistoxford.org.

OTHER POSITIONS

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR

North Shelby Baptist Church is accepting resumés for the full-time position of business administrator. Responsibilities include overseeing the operations and maintenance of the facility and the financial activities of the church. Candidates should have knowledge of church operations, supervisory experience, physical facilities management, as well as experience and education in business management. Qualified candidates can send their resumé to: administrator@northshelbybaptist.org.

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- 5 Hold your device over a page or image in *The Alabama Baptist (TAB)* marked as augmented reality and watch the paper come to life.
- 6 If the image is slow to load at any point, then it may be your data speed or Wi-Fi strength. Change locations and try again.
- 7 Each week when *TAB* arrives, open the app and hold your device over the augmented reality articles.

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

LifeWay dedicates new corporate headquarters

NASHVILLE — LifeWay Christian Resources dedicated its new corporate headquarters Nov. 27 with a ribbon-cutting, a prayer of thanksgiving and a pledge to remain faithful to God's Word.

Speaking to a crowd of employees, executive leadership team members and special guests, LifeWay President and CEO Thom S. Rainer recounted the changes taking place within the organization, from new physical spaces to new digital technologies, but declared a commitment to "remain faithful to Him who has called us" and "continue to provide resources that will point people to God's Word and to Christ."

Joined by other LifeWay leaders, Rainer wielded giant scissors to cut an oversized red ribbon in front of the new 277,000-square-foot facility, which includes a retail store to serve downtown Nashville.



BP photo
New corporate headquarters of LifeWay Christian Resources.

"We dedicate this building to God," Rainer said, "for His glory and for His gospel."

The event capped a month of activities celebrating LifeWay's move to Capitol View from its former location about a half-mile away. LifeWay, known as the Sunday School Board at its founding in 1891, sold the previous property to developers in late 2015 and broke ground on the new facility in April 2016. (BP)

Union settles over HHS abortion mandate

JACKSON, Tenn. — Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, has settled its lawsuit against the U.S. government concerning the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' mandate that Union provide abortion-causing drugs as part of its employee health plans.

Under the terms of the settlement, the U.S. government agreed that the mandate was a violation of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and that under the Supreme Court's decision in the *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* case, it imposed a "substantial burden" on Union's free exercise of religion.

Union University President Samuel W. "Dub" Oliver said the university is pleased with the outcome.

"We believe, based on the Bible, that life begins at conception," Oliver said. "We went to court to defend religious liberty, the right to believe and to live according to those beliefs, and we are glad that religious liberty prevailed."

The agreement between Union and the U.S. government specifies that Union's employee health plans are permanently exempt from the HHS contraception mandate.

The settlement follows new rules issued by the Trump administration Oct. 6 to exempt entities from the mandate based on their religious beliefs. As part of the settlement, the government agreed to pay the bulk of the legal fees that Union accrued. (BP)

CP giving 5.67 percent under projection

NASHVILLE — Contributions to Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) national and international missions and ministries in November were 0.05 percent below the first two months of SBC's 2016–2017 fiscal year and 5.67 percent below the projected budget for the first two months of the current fiscal year, according to a news release from SBC Executive Committee President and CEO Frank Page.

As of Nov. 30, gifts received for distribution through the Cooperative Program (CP) Allocation Budget totaled \$30,185,535.65, or \$14,018.60 below the \$30,199,554.25 received through November 2016. The two-month total is \$1,814,464.35 below the \$32,000,000 year-to-date allocation budget projection. (BP)

ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Northport Baptist Church member receives volunteer award

Bill McDonald says that when you knock on the door of a hospital room, you never know what needs are going to be waiting behind it.

"Many times it's much more than just a physical need," he said of the patients he visits regularly as a hospital lay chaplain in Tuscaloosa. "We want to help them with any spiritual needs they have too. We're just there to encourage."

And encourage he has — for more than 1,500 hours' worth of volunteer time in the past six years. He's also trained 31 other lay chaplains.

And for that work he was recently awarded the Alabama Hospital Association's (AHA) Outstanding Auxilian Award.

"Volunteers like Mr. McDonald provide invaluable support to hospital staff and to patients and their families," said Dr. Donald E. Williamson, AHA president.

Six years ago, when McDonald, a member of Northport Baptist Church, "sort of" retired as head athletic trainer for the University of Alabama, he approached a friend who was an administrator at the hospital and asked if she would be willing to let him try to revive the hospital's lay chaplaincy program.

In addition to the recent award, he was named Northport's Religious Leader of the Year in 2016. (Grace Thornton)

Harris to retire from part-time role at SBOM, focuses on pastorate

After five and a half years serving on the state evangelism team, Billy Harris is retiring from the role to focus on his pastorate.

Harris, pastor of Linden Baptist Church in Bethel Baptist Association, has served in a part-time capac-



MCDONALD

ity with the evangelism office of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) since June 2012.

"He has been a blessing to Kingdom service," said Sammy Gilbreath, SBOM evangelism director. "He's a good communicator, he loves pastors and directors of missions and he's a good teacher."

Harris said the evangelism team is "like a family" and he enjoyed "working in unity and harmony with a great vision, purpose and singleness of mind." He noted that he enjoyed pouring his life into encouraging churches to emphasize evangelism.

Harris said he is stepping down from the role to spend more time at Linden Baptist, a church he has served three times in the course of his ministry.

"It has been a great journey. They are some of the most precious people in all the world, and I am anticipating that God is going to do some really great things." (Grace Thornton)

Moundville Baptist children help deliver Christmas shoeboxes

'Tis the season for Operation Christmas Child

(OCC) shoeboxes and the churches of Hale Baptist Association, like many other Alabama Baptist congregations, dove in.

Moundville Baptist Church got their children involved in delivering their 349 shoeboxes collected to Community Baptist Church, Moundville, in November. Jason Duckett is pastor of Moundville Baptist. (Maggie Walsh)



Photo courtesy of Lindsey Davis Mullins
Maddy Turner (left) and Wesley Mullins unload Christmas shoeboxes at Community Baptist Church, Moundville.

in Loving Memory

OF ALABAMA BAPTIST LEADERS, FRIENDS

Virginia Maxine Stewart Former missionary to Thailand dies

Virginia Maxine Stewart, an Alabama native who served as a missionary to Thailand for 36 years, died Nov. 24. She was 93.

Stewart taught school for several years before moving to Thailand with her husband, Bob, and three young children. While there, she ministered in hospitals, taught English, directed an orientation program for Thai women married to American soldiers, worked with refugees and served as a foreign correspondent for Baptist Press for 18 years, sending in 717 articles during that time.

Since retiring in 1994, Maxine Stewart has spoken or played Thai hymns on the ranat-ek, similar to a xylophone, more than 800 times in 16 states.

She is survived by her husband of 70 years, three children and several grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren. (TAB)

Franklin Eugene Lewis Former Alabama pastor dies

Franklin Eugene "Gene" Lewis, former pastor of Stamp Baptist Church, Valley Head, died Dec. 5. He served Stamp Baptist in the 1970s.

An Air Force veteran, Lewis served 58 years in the ministry, leading churches in Tennessee and Georgia. At the time of his death, he was serving as pastor of Caperton's Chapel Baptist Church, an independent church in Flat Rock.

Lewis was preceded in death by his wife, Phyllis. He is survived by three children, five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. (TAB)



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Barry



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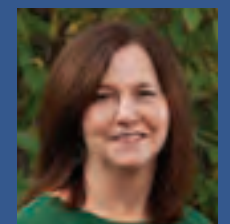
John



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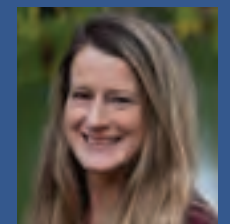
Sarah



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Stephanie



Connie

Church ANNIVERSARIES

Compiled by the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and TAB

Hanceville's Hopewell Baptist Church marks 175 years

It was a perfect day at Hopewell Baptist Church, Hanceville. At least that's what Tyler Hooper, chairman of the anniversary committee, said of the church's 175th anniversary celebration Oct. 29.

"It was a great day to be in the Lord's house," he said. "We could feel His presence."

Focusing on the theme "Embracing our heritage, preparing for the future," members gathered that day to hear reflections from former pastors Trueman Davis, Steve Miller and Wayne Wisener.

Lonette Berg, director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented Hopewell Baptist with a framed certificate, and Randy Makemson, director of missions for East Cullman Baptist Association, presented the church with a plaque. Kenneth Nail, Hanceville's mayor, also

delivered a proclamation, and the church received commendations from Gov. Kay Ivey and others.

Ten were recognized as the longest active members and were presented with silver trays, and the oldest member, Nellie Brown, was also recognized.

A celebration meal followed the service. Layne Howard is interim pastor of Hopewell Baptist.



Photo by Lonette Berg

Logan Baptist Church commemorates 'memorable' 125th anniversary

It was "a memorable day" at the 125th anniversary celebration of Logan Baptist Church in West Cullman Baptist Association, according to church member Lynne White.

Held on Oct. 29, the service featured former pastor Alfred Phillips as guest speaker, as well as special music by former members Darlene Abbott, Riley Grace Abbott, Wendy Davenport, Earlene Simmons, Deborah Oldacre, the White Sisters and the Martins.

A slideshow of old photos brought back memories and introduced church members and guests to some of the history of the church.

Johnie Sentell of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a plaque to the church in honor of the milestone anniversary.

Logan Baptist also celebrated Old Fashioned Day on Oct. 8, holding the service under the brush arbor outside and serving lunch in the fellowship hall.

Frisco City's Old Salem Baptist anniversary both 'tearful, joyful'

In the beginning years of Old Salem Baptist Church, Frisco City, members were scattered across a wide, rural stretch of the Alabama Territory. They had to ford Limestone Creek and other smaller creeks and streams to attend worship services.

When the rains were heavy, they were cut off from the church — but they persevered. And 200 years later, the congregation is still going strong.

"Combing through the history that we have was both joyous and tearful," the church bulletin read on Old Salem Baptist's bicentennial celebration service Nov. 19. "What a joy it was to see the handwriting and read the words of those who stepped out in faith 200 years ago."

To mark the anniversary, former pastors and members gathered together for Memories Day on Nov. 18 and the celebration service the following day. Cleveland Brown, who grew up in the church and served as its pastor from 1965 to 1969, sang "The Old Rugged Cross."

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, was the guest speaker for the day. Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical

Commission, presented a framed certificate, and John Marks, director of missions for Bethlehem Baptist Association, presented the church with a plaque.



Photo by Lonette Berg

Plantersville's Pilgrim Rest celebrates history, 150 years of ministry

In 1867, Christians of all faiths met in a log house near Pletcher and called themselves Pilgrims. That's the way the story goes, anyway.

In 1875 a vote changed the name to Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church. And this year on Nov. 12, church member Jerry Harrison told the story of the log house to the crowd gathered at the brick church in Plantersville to celebrate Pilgrim Rest's 150th anniversary.

During the special service, church member Sallie Wright read the church's history, and Pastor Michael Brasher preached on keeping a right perspective.

Mavis Gates of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a certificate to Peggy Harrison, who has been a church member for 65 years.

Memorabilia was displayed around the Chilton Baptist Association church for members and guests to enjoy, and a lunch followed the service.

Jones Chapel celebrates new pastor, anniversary with special service

There was a plot of ground in Cullman designated years ago for a church, but the first attempts at starting one didn't succeed.

But E.L. Knopp believed the land was meant for a church. So he helped organize a second one, and it wasn't long before Jones Chapel Missionary Baptist Church was thriving on the spot.

Now called Jones Chapel First Baptist Church, the congregation celebrated its 75th anniversary Nov. 5 with a special service. It was Pastor Chris Chambless' first Sunday there and he delivered the message. Afterward they had a lunch to celebrate both his arrival and the anniversary.

During the service, Pat Tucker presented the history of the church and gave everyone copies of the history book she had compiled for the occasion.

Gerald Glenn of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a certificate to the two oldest deacons, J.P. Brown and Robert Carpenter.

Birmingham's New Hope marks 125 years with celebratory banquet

In 1892, New Hope Baptist Church, Birmingham, started from a "prayer band of dedicated Christians" that grew rapidly. And Nov. 18-19 the congregation celebrated 125 years.

During the anniversary weekend, the church gathered for a formal banquet on Saturday at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex with guest speaker Cedric Sparks, chief of staff for Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin.

On Sunday, Gregory Clarke, New Hope's pastor, spoke at the 10 a.m. service, and Bishop Dreyfus Smith of Wings of Faith Church in Atlanta preached at the 4 p.m. service.

Mary Gaines presented the church's history and those present watched a slideshow of old photos. Yvonne DuBose presented a memorial to deceased members.

In a separate service in December, Johnie Sentell of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented the church with a plaque. The congregation is "thankful for 125 years" of ministry, Clarke said.

Mount Carmel Baptist, Guntersville, commemorates 150th anniversary

Anthony Patterson was pastor of Mount Carmel Baptist Church, Guntersville, when the church celebrated its 125th anniversary in 1992. So it was a special day when he stepped into the pulpit again Oct. 22 to speak at the church's 150th anniversary service.

Patterson, now pastor of Gum Springs Baptist Church, Hartselle, spoke that morning to a full house at Mount Carmel Baptist.

During the anniversary celebration, deacon Tim Henley also read excerpts from old church minutes, and the choir presented two special medleys. Wendell Dutton of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented the Marshall Baptist Association church with a plaque.

After lunch, the crowd watched a slide show of old photos and participated in a time of sharing memories. Ben Jones is pastor of Mount Carmel Baptist.

Liberty Baptist congregation enjoys 'great time of fellowship' at 175th anniversary

The congregation at Liberty Baptist Church, Ashland, gathered together for a "great time of fellowship" Oct. 22, according to member Anne Gaither.

The occasion? The church's 175th anniversary.

As part of the special celebration service, former pastor Ben Rosser brought the message, and Pastor Jon Adams read the history of the church. Susan Landers provided special music.

Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, and Bruce Willis, director of missions for Carey Baptist Association, each presented the church with a plaque. After the service, a fellowship lunch was held and old photos of the church were on display.

'Good fellowship' characterizes Duncan Creek's 150th anniversary

It was a day of "good fellowship" and a "good time" at Duncan Creek Baptist Church, Russellville, when the congregation celebrated its 150th anniversary, said church member Darryl Green.

Harley Hollingsworth, a former pastor of the church, preached the message at the special anniversary service Nov. 12, and Doug Reed and Barry Rickard provided special music.

Jerry Armor of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and Larry Dover, director of missions for Franklin Baptist Association, each presented the church with a certificate.

An old photo of the church was on display, as well as old church minutes and a photo of the current building. A church history written by Frances Nichols also was displayed. Joe Thorn serves as pastor. †

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 24

Explore the Bible By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

THE PROMISED ONE Luke 2:25-38

A week after the angels filled the skies over the fields of Bethlehem to announce the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph took their newborn to the temple to present Him to God. The beautiful events recorded in Luke 2 were given to Mary and Joseph to deepen and confirm the significance of the Incarnation in their minds and ultimately in the thoughts of the faithful through the centuries.

Simeon's Praise (25-32)

While Mary and Joseph were in the temple, they met Simeon and Anna.

Simeon was advanced in years but devoted to God. He was "righteous and devout" — he behaved well and was careful about his religious duties and his service for God.

Simeon was filled with anticipation. He is described as a man "waiting for the consolation of Israel." The word used here for "consolation" appears many times in the Greek translation of Isaiah in verses that refer to the Messiah. "Comfort, comfort my people" (Isa. 40:1) and "as one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (Isa. 66:13). Simeon expected God to send His Messiah. He believed when few others truly believed in the coming of the Messiah. He never gave up hope but kept trusting and looking for God to fulfill His promise.

As he began to hold the baby Jesus in his arms, he began to praise God in song and his song set out for Mary and Joseph (and for us) the purpose of the Messiah. With the baby in his arms, secure in God's presence, Simeon experienced a profound peace of soul. God's favor rested upon Simeon as he held the "Prince of Peace." He was ready to die and go to be with his God forever.

He declared: "for my eyes have seen Your salvation." Jesus was and is God's salvation. True peace comes only when we, like Simeon, understand and trust that salvation is Jesus Christ plus nothing. God's salvation is universal.

Simeon sang: "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Your people Israel." In other words, there is only one Savior for all the peoples of the earth, and His name is Jesus.

A Future Piercing (33-35)

Simeon turned to Mary and Joseph and addressed them directly. This prophecy would become important to Mary. She was told her future included blessing and great sorrow. That future would include the family's flight to Egypt; her Son's being misunderstood and rejected; and watching her Son die on a criminal's cross. A sword would pierce Mary's soul.

The rest of Simeon's prophetic words apply to all of us — "this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel." The imagery is from Isaiah 8:14-15 and 28:13-16, texts often used in the New Testament to describe reactions to Jesus. Jesus will split the nation in two.

Jesus will be opposed and His ministry will reveal what the thoughts of one's heart are. As the salvation of God and the expression of God's will, the reaction to Jesus reveals one's reaction to God. The way you respond to Jesus determines your destiny.

Anna's Affirmation (36-38)

In all likelihood Anna was 100-plus years old. She had served God faithfully for years in worship, prayer and fasting. She thanked God for sending the Messiah and shared the good news of great joy with others. We too should be thankful this Christmas and seek to share the good news with others this holiday season. ✝

Bible Studies for Life By Jim Barnette, Ph.D. Samford University and Brookwood Baptist Church, Mountain Brook

JESUS SAVES Luke 2:4-20

Jesus was born in the plan and timing of God. (4-7)

Luke does not indicate how long in advance of Jesus' birth Joseph left for Bethlehem or why he took Mary with him. Some believe Joseph used the emperor's census as a means of removing Mary from possible gossip and scorn in her own village but the passage neither affirms nor denies it. Luke simply states the birth took place "while they were there." Since she had stayed three months with Elizabeth, Mary was at least three months pregnant.

There is "no place" for the newborn Messiah. From the beginning, He is a displaced person for whom the world will not make a place. The world has made a choice not to accommodate the Savior and Lord. The Jesus born in a stable will find "no vacancy" signs throughout His ministry and finally He will be buried in a borrowed tomb. The "inn" may have been a cave, as tradition suggests, or some part of a house. Even today in many places around the world farm animals and their food are often kept in the same building as the family quarters.

Jesus was born ultimately for our salvation. (8-14)

The story of the shepherds and the angels magnifies God's love for the poor and despised. In contrast to their positive image in the Old Testament, shepherds in first century Palestine were regarded as low-class, irresponsible thieves who grazed their sheep on other people's land. Many of them were ex-convicts, and they were considered ceremonially (and spiritually) unclean. "Never trust a shepherd" was a common maxim of the day. And yet it was to these social outcasts that the good news

of Christ's birth was first announced.

The traditional date for the nativity was set long after the actual event to coincide with a pagan festival honoring the "Unconquerable Sun." Setting Dec. 25 to observe the nativity served as a foil to this pagan event, announcing that the "Unconquerable Sun" had been conquered by the true Son of God. This is why Dec. 25 was widely celebrated as the date of Jesus' birth by the end of the fourth century. Flocks were kept "out in the field by night" from April to November, which is further suggestion that Jesus' birth might have been at a different time. No doubt the time of the birth is less important than the reality of the birth.

Jesus' birth must be proclaimed. (15-20)

Luke is often referred to as "the Gospel of Joy." Just as the 72 disciples "returned with joy" after their preaching mission (Luke 10:17), so the shepherds "returned glorifying and praising God." Likewise, Luke tells us that after the risen Christ ascended to heaven, His followers "returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:52). Truly the Christmas story is the doxology of the birth of the new King. This child would be given the throne of His earthly ancestor, David. The world was moving according to the orders of Caesar Augustus, whom so many hailed as the bringer of peace. However, the real surpassing peace would be realized only through the sovereign Lord born in the city of David. The birth of this new King signals hope for all people — rich and poor, rabbi and shepherd. There is hope for all of us who face oppression by the dark forces of this world. God has not forgotten us or abandoned us to the brokenness we have created. With the advent of the incarnation, we have reason to return to the world with great joy. ✝

The Alabama Baptist will not publish a Dec. 28 issue. Sunday School lessons for Dec. 31 will be available at www.thealabamabaptist.org.

Christian Crossword

By Lee Esch Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

1. A son of Jacob. (Gen. 30:11)
4. King or emperor.
8. Opened slightly.
12. 52 in Roman numerals.
13. Southern vegetable.
14. Thy will be _____. (Matt. 6:10)
15. ____ him as a brother. (2 Thess. 3:15)
17. A son of Seth. (Gen. 4:26)
18. Wonders and mighty _____. (2 Cor. 12:12)
19. Take, ____: this is my body. (1 Cor. 11:24)
21. Go to the ____, thou sluggard. (Prov. 6:6)
22. If a man ____ a pit. (Ex. 21:33)
24. Pants' support.
26. Because Judas had the ____. (John 13:29)
29. Abraham's nephew. (Gen. 11:27)
31. A prophet of Judah.
34. My God. (Mark 15:34)
36. Daniel was in one. (Dan. 6:16)
38. Foundation.
39. That which I do I ____ not. (Rom. 7:15)

41. Cain lived here. (Gen. 4:16)
43. Peter and John used one in their work.
44. Combat between two persons.
46. A brother offended is harder to be ____ than a strong city. (Prov. 18:19)
48. Kind of tree.
50. Paper sack.
52. She answered the door when Peter knocked. (Acts 12:13)
56. Red and Dead.
58. To bind up the brokenhearted, to ____ liberty. (Isa. 61:1)
60. Cover (a road).
61. Abraham's wife, _____. (2 Pet. 3:6)
62. Hot or cold drink.
63. Simmer or boil slowly.
64. Falls away or declines.
65. Standard. (abbr.)
5. Slide on snow.
6. Funeral vehicle, he ____.
7. She hid the spies sent out by Joshua. (Josh. 2:1)
8. A sweetened beverage.
9. A son of king Saul. (1 Sam. 13:16)
10. He that heareth the word, and ____ with joy receiveth it. (Matt. 13:20)
11. I will give you _____. (Matt. 11:28)
16. Unusual.
20. The ____ Commandments.
23. The Supreme Being.
25. Experiment room. (abbr.)
26. Nickname for Beatrice.
27. Come unto me, ____ ye that labour. (Matt. 11:28)
28. Silver and ____ I none. (Acts 3:6; 2 words)
30. ____ little Indians.
32. ____ not liberty for an occasion to the flesh. (Gal. 5:13)

Down

1. We will rejoice and be ____ in it. (Ps. 118:24)
2. Assistant.
3. Ten cent coin.
4. A common childhood illness, ____itis.
11. I will give you _____. (Matt. 11:28)
16. Unusual.
20. The ____ Commandments.
23. The Supreme Being.
25. Experiment room. (abbr.)
26. Nickname for Beatrice.
27. Come unto me, ____ ye that labour. (Matt. 11:28)
28. Silver and ____ I none. (Acts 3:6; 2 words)
30. ____ little Indians.
32. ____ not liberty for an occasion to the flesh. (Gal. 5:13)
33. His servants ____ him and told him. (John 4:51)
35. Debt note. (abbr.)
37. ____ I know in part. (1 Cor. 13:12)
40. Spider's home.
42. A seamstress who was

- brought back to life. (Acts 9)
45. Slip gradually, drift into. (abbr.)
47. National Hockey League. (abbr.)
48. The poison of ____ is under their lips. (Rom. 3:13)
49. Make a mercy ____ of pure gold. (Ex. 25:17)
51. Snatch.
53. Grain. (plural)
54. Eating plan.
55. Will ____ rob God? (Mal. 3:8; 2 words)
57. Stitch.
59. Sphere.





Media reviews

MOVIES/TV

'How the Grinch Stole Christmas' tops streaming Christmas selections

By Michael Foust
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

He's the meanest creature on the planet but perhaps that's to be expected. After all, his heart is "two sizes too small."

He enjoys sending nasty letters to the people in the next town. He gets jollies out of stealing presents. He even eats glass.

The Grinch — who lives on an intimidating mountain overlooking the kind people of Whoville — just may be the most unlovable "thing" ever made. But not everyone agrees.

Little Cindy Lou Who — a bright-eyed young girl from Whoville — believes the Grinch is capable of good. She even claims he saved her life.

So when the townspeople push back against Cindy Lou's claims about the Grinch, she launches an investigation. What she finds is shocking: Long ago, a younger Grinch was bullied by the kids of Whoville. He subsequently left town and climbed up the mountain, and the people haven't heard from him since. Perhaps that's why he is so mean. And maybe if someone is kind to him he will return the favor.

It's all part of "Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas" (PG), the highest-grossing film of 2000 and one of the top choices for Christmas-themed streaming selections in December. It is playing on Netflix.

This delightful and mostly family-friendly film was directed by Ron Howard and stars Jim Carrey as the Grinch. Is also won an Oscar (Best Makeup).

Although purists of Dr. Seuss' books might be troubled by some of the additions, it nevertheless maintains messages on kindness and redemption. The bullying

angle gives it a timely feel, too. It does contain a few scary parts that might trouble young children, and one or two slightly inappropriate scenes.✦

Meet the reviewer

Michael Foust covers the intersection of faith and entertainment as a writer and podcast host for Heirloom Audio. He also is the husband of an amazing wife and the father of four small children.



Photo courtesy of Universal Studios

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Other Christmas-themed selections this month

Netflix

▶ "White Christmas" (1954, unrated). Known as a musical comedy about a pair of singing-and-dancing men, it won an Oscar (Best Song) and stars Bing Crosby, Danny Kaye and Rosemary Clooney.

Also playing are lots of Hallmark-type romantic Christmas specials. Just type "Christmas" into Netflix.

Amazon Prime

▶ "Charlie Brown's Christmas Tales" (2002, unrated). This isn't the "Charlie Brown Christmas" that we all love but for 20 minutes of entertainment with Snoopy it's not bad. Just don't expect a gospel

message in this one. Animated.

▶ "I Want a Dog for Christmas, Charlie Brown" (2003, unrated). Ever heard of Snoopy's brother Spike? He's featured in this one — and he's hilarious. Animated.

▶ "If You Give A Mouse A Christmas Cookie" (2016, unrated). Based on the popular series of children's books, this cartoon likely will have your kids cackling in the floor. Animated.

▶ "Christmas with the Kranks" (2004, PG). In this comedy, a family decides to skip Christmas and go on a cruise. It doesn't go well. Starring Tim Allen and Dan Aykroyd. Rated PG for brief language and suggestive content.

Also playing: Lots of old Christmas cartoons that haven't

aired on television in several decades. Search for "Christmas cartoons." Additionally, "The Mayflower Voyagers" — a classic Peanuts cartoon about the Pilgrims and their faith — also is on Amazon Prime. It's never too late to teach history.

Hulu

▶ "Christmas with the Kranks" (2004, PG). See above. Otherwise, it's a slow month for Christmas classics/family-friendly entertainment on Hulu.

Note: The 1965 classic "A Charlie Brown Christmas" is not available on any of the major streaming services. But it often is available on YouTube.✦

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Photo by Oded Balilty, AP for National Geographic

Workers begin removing the worn marble that encased the original burial shelf inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. First reported by *National Geographic*, the renovation of the tomb is the focus of the magazine's December 2017 cover story and a documentary, 'The Secrets of Christ's Tomb: Explorer Special,' that premiered Dec. 3. The exhibit 'Tomb of Christ: The Church of the Holy Sepulchre Experience' is open at the National Geographic Museum in Washington through the fall of 2018.

'Visible proof'

Revered tomb in Jerusalem dated to AD 345

Scientific testing of a cave thought by many to be the tomb of Christ has provided evidence to authenticate tradition as history.

The cave is located within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Though archaeologists working on the project cannot say with certainty the tomb is where Christ's body was laid after His crucifixion, the new research does seem to date the site much earlier than previously determined.

Historical accounts say the tomb was discovered by representatives of the Roman Emperor Constantine sent to find the tomb around A.D. 325. The emperor's delegation was directed to a Roman temple built some 200 years earlier. Ancient tradition contends that around A.D. 134 the Roman Emperor Hadrian built a temple dedicated to the Roman goddess Aphrodite over a cave in Jerusalem venerated as the place of Jesus' resurrection. Ostensibly this was done to emphasize Rome's power and to push back against the new Christian religion.

Constantine's representatives razed the temple and excavated the site, revealing a tomb hewn from a limestone cave, according to *National Geographic* magazine. After the excavation, a shrine called the Edicule was constructed around the tomb.

Last year archaeologists had the opportunity to obtain samples from the cave's limestone walls, which had been covered in marble cladding since at least

1555 probably to protect the site. An archaeological team removed the marble cladding Oct. 26, 2016, and team members were granted 60 hours to conduct research. Their investigation revealed an intact limestone shelf, or burial bed, that had been covered by another marble slab with a cross carved into its surface. According to tradition, after His crucifixion, the body of Jesus was laid out on a burial bed, a common feature in tombs of wealthy 1st century Jerusalem.

The recently announced findings add weight to this tradition. *National Geographic* fellow and archaeologist Fredrik Hiebert said he was "absolutely amazed" by what the team found.

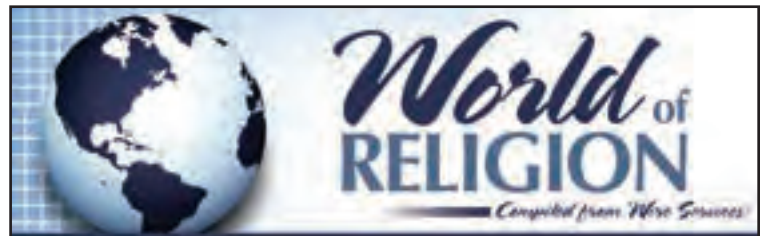
"We can't say 100 percent but it appears to be visible proof that the location of the tomb has not shifted through time, something that scientists and historians have wondered for decades," Hiebert told *National Geographic's* Kristin Romey.

An immersive 3-D exhibition "Tomb of Christ: The Church of the Holy Sepulchre Experience" is open at the National Geographic Museum in Washington through the fall of 2018. The exhibit virtually transports visitors to Jerusalem. Visitors can virtually walk inside the rotunda in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Tomb of Christ and see the site just as the *National Geographic* team saw it during the removal of the marble cladding.

The historic renovation project is featured in *National Geographic's* December 2017 issue. (TAB)

"We can't say 100 percent, but it appears to be visible proof that the location of the tomb has not shifted through time."

**Fredrik Hiebert
archaeologist**



Trump declares Jerusalem capital of Israel

JERUSALEM — President Donald Trump's declaration that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and his vow to move the U.S. Embassy to Israel from Tel Aviv is receiving a mixed response worldwide.

The declaration, made Dec. 6, changes decades of policy by the U.S. and other world powers who have located their embassies in Tel Aviv to avoid taking sides in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the sovereignty of Jerusalem. However, the decision has been an option for the U.S. since 1995 when Congress passed a law calling for recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital and for the U.S. Embassy to be moved there. Trump waived the law in June, which many saw as backtracking on a campaign promise.

Trump called his decision "a long overdue step to advance the peace process," but the global response was mixed. The move divides American Jews, who mostly threw their support to Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election, but it thrills many white American evangelical Christians who have long lobbied for the change.

Patriarchs and bishops in the Holy Land predicted that the president's actions will lead to "increased hatred, conflict, violence and suffering in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, moving us farther from the goal of unity and deeper toward destructive division." Some protests in the wake of the decision have turned violent.

In his announcement, Trump committed U.S. support for "a peace agreement that is acceptable to both sides." (RNS)

British aid worker shot dead in Nigeria

ENKOROGHA, Nigeria — British charity worker Ian Squire was killed moments after singing "Amazing Grace" to his fellow captives, sources say.

Squire was an optician training local people to carry out sight tests and dispense eyeglasses using a solar-powered portable lens-grinding machine he had developed. He was one of four missionary medics serving in Nigeria with New Foundations, a medical charity started in 2003 by David and Shirley Donovan. The Donovans along with Squire and Alanna Carson were held for ransom after being abducted in Nigeria's southern Delta State on Oct 13.

The Donovans told *The Daily Telegraph* that the kidnappers returned a guitar to them and Squire played "Amazing Grace," which lifted their spirits, but he was then killed instantly.

The captives were freed after a month. The kidnappers told them a ransom had been paid. Nigeria has one of the world's highest kidnap rates. (TAB)

Orthodox Church consecrates deaconesses

ALEXANDRIA, Greece — Patriarch Theodoros II, pope and patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, and the Greek Orthodox Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria have decided to reinstate the order of deaconesses.

Modern Orthodox scholarship acknowledges the existence of a female diaconate in the early church, with many tracing it back to a woman named Phoebe mentioned by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans. However, female deaconesses, for the most part, fell out of existence in the late Byzantine period.

The move to bring the order back began in February when Theodoros consecrated five women to the diaconate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, primarily to assist in missionary churches in Africa where there aren't enough priests to lead the growing church population. (TAB)

Saudi Arabia to monitor use of religious texts

RIYADH — King Salman of Saudi Arabia recently announced the establishment of an authority to monitor use and interpretation of the words of Muhammad in an effort to combat terrorism.

The Saudi Culture and Information Ministry said the body's aim would be to "eliminate" messages that "contradict the teachings of Islam and justify the committing of crimes, murders and terrorist acts." It will be overseen by a council of senior Islamic scholars from around the world, according to the decree. (TAB)