



# The Alabama Baptist

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December 19, 2019

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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Unsplash.com photo, graphic by Lauren C. Grim

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

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

LUKE 2:10-12

To watch the videos from this week's issue, visit our YouTube channel "TAB Media."



**DEMENTIA**  
AND THE *holidays*  
pages 6-7

# TAB team makes visit to local assisted living facility to spread Christmas story



Photo by Jessica Ingram

On Dec. 10 members of *The Alabama Baptist* staff spent the morning visiting with the residents of Legacy Ridge assisted living in Trussville.

They sang Christmas carols, told the Christmas story, read “The Legend of the Candy Cane” and helped each participant complete a candy cane craft to remind them of the story of Christ’s birth, death and resurrection.

They also visited each resident’s room and delivered Christmas cards and candy canes. (TAB)



Photo by Jessica Ingram



Photo courtesy of Cynthia Watts



Photo by Debbie Campbell

*Special thanks to Legacy Ridge assisted living in Trussville for hosting the TAB team.*



The special Christmas crossword puzzle can be found on page 17.



“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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2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018  
as judged by Associated Church Press, Baptist  
Communicators Association, Evangelical Press  
Association or Religion Communicators Council

*The Alabama Baptist*  
will not publish a Dec. 26 issue.  
The next issue will be Jan. 2.

# MY RASHIONALE

By **Jennifer Davis Rash**  
President and Editor-in-Chief

[jrash@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:jrash@thealabamabaptist.org)  
@RashionalThts



## 'He changed her whole world' — reflecting on birth of Jesus

*EDITOR'S NOTE — Mentoring and helping develop young communicators is an added bonus to what we get to do at TAB.*

*When those young communicators find their voice we cheer. And when they perfect their art, we become the students.*

*I'd like to present a reflection on Luke 2 for the Christmas season by one of TAB's former interns who is now an award-winning creative writer and mom of two adorable little boys.*

*Thank you, Amanda Oliver Hendricks, for sharing your gift with all of us.*

### Mary pondered

By Amanda Oliver Hendricks

Mary was exhausted. Months of behind the back whispers. Perhaps moments her own fears had taken over the gratitude and faith that was her foundation.

"I don't even know myself completely. How can I be a mother?"

An echo inside of her barely above the silence before she would close her eyes to sleep: *the Son of God.*

The journey on a donkey with its bumps and unsteadiness had rocked the baby inside her to sleep and brought her body closer and closer to the moment of His birth.

Weary. To arrive and find nowhere to rest or curl up from the pain as the contractions deepened. Drained. She had felt more physical pain than she'd ever experienced in her young life. She cried out. Every moan mimicked by the livestock surrounding her.

Depleted. Mary prayed loudly in her heart and on the ground as she lay beside the manger where they would soon place Jesus. Sweat pouring down her face in the cold night. Tears of antici-

pation. Excitement to meet the Son of God. The Son she carried heavily in her belly. A belly that had shook with His kicks and hiccups. That had grown rounder than she could have imagined to be possible.

She pushed. Pushed herself. Went limp and let God push her past fears, questions and the limits of a human faith. Then she pushed for Him, the Savior whose whole journey she couldn't yet see, His face held up before her.

Crying out as He was pulled from her, she pushed herself until she saw the face of God. And then she sobbed. She sobbed in relief as Joseph lay the baby's soft body on her chest. She kept Him warm. This baby her body had nourished. The sound that soothed Him, her own heartbeat. She held Him on her bare chest and they cried together. She

christened Him in her tears and He cleansed her — little rivers of dirt from the journey trickling away until she was clean.

When she woke there was a brightness to the night. She kissed the top of His head that smelled like almonds and heaven. She patted the back that would some day carry the burden of the whole world.

She looked to see if He had her hands, she counted His toes and she watched for the rise and fall of each of His breaths.

Did He have the same birthmark she carried on the back of her neck?

His eyes that had been shaped so much like her own had stared up at her after His birth as if He knew her. I have waited all this time just to see you. Mary, the first to see that she was truly made in the image of God, could trust fully that this was the best



HENDRICKS

## SHOPPING FOR THE KIDS



Photo courtesy of Cynthia Watts



Photo by Amy Hacker

TAB team members (above, l to r) Cynthia Watts, Haley Piersol and Annette Brown pack up toys to deliver to the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (left). The toys were purchased by individual staff members to provide Christmas gifts for two children in care of foster parents connected to the Children's Homes. ✝

# Your Voice



Share your comments, letters to the editor, blog excerpts, social media posts

## Christmas hymn affirms true rest comes from Jesus

By Keith Getty  
Special to Baptist Press

Charles Wesley is probably my biggest hymn-writing hero. He wrote the perfect hymn for every season, every celebration and every genre of Christian congregational worship.

For Easter he wrote “Christ the Lord is Risen Today.” For Christmas he wrote “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.” On the theme of redemption he wrote “And Can It Be.” No one can compete with him.

His advent carol “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus” contains a

wonderful sense of bursting anticipation:

*Come thou long expected Jesus  
Born to set the people free  
From our fears and sins release us  
Let us find our rest in Thee.*

This sense of anticipation reminds us not only of the Israelites longing for their promised Messiah, their King, to set them free but also reminds us that we, in the midst of celebrating the birth of our Savior, are still waiting and anticipating and hoping for Christ’s return.

He is the long expected Jesus for both the Israelites in the past and

for us in the present as we look with expectation to the future fulfillment of all God’s plans.

In the third and fourth lines of this first verse, the words fear and rest are juxtaposed reminding us that Christmas is often a time when our fears are amplified — our worries about our family or the future or our feelings of loneliness can all increase in the run up to Christmas.

There is often an unspoken pressure that Christmas must be perfect and harmonious, a time when we can stop and rest and have a break from all the usual stresses of life.

And yet the reality is that the Christmas holidays don’t always give us the reprieve that we long for — many of us continue to carry huge burdens and difficulties.

This carol reminds us so beautifully that no matter what we are facing or how stressful our lives might be our true rest is found in Christ — rest from striving, rest from busyness but also rest for our souls, our bodies, our minds and rest from the fears and sins that so often keep us captive.

Only Jesus can release us from our fears and sins and bring us the true rest we so desperately need.

When I sing this song at our Christmas concerts, it’s just extraordinary to see the expressions of longing and anticipation on people’s faces as they sing these lines:

*Israel’s hope and consolation  
Hope of all the earth thou art  
Dear desire of every nation  
Joy of every longing heart.*

The promised Messiah was the consolation, the comfort, the solace of all of Israel and still today so many people are seeking con-

solation and comfort, often in the wrong things, but wonderfully these words assure us as the verse turns upward that Jesus is the joy of every longing heart.

So often at this time of year we are promised through the big brands and department stores that we will find fulfillment and joy through the gifts we give and receive — the more expensive the better!

But it’s an empty promise and this carol brings us back to the truth that can so easily get lost in the midst of consumerism, busyness and striving — Jesus is the fulfillment of every desire. Jesus is the person in whom we find ultimate joy.

*Born Thy people to deliver  
Born a child and yet a King  
Born to reign in us forever  
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring  
By Thine own eternal Spirit  
Rule in all our hearts alone  
By Thine all-sufficient merit  
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.*

The carol finishes on a note of triumph and encourages us to look toward eternity. It reminds us that there is still a much bigger heavenly celebration to come.

It encourages us to wait with expectancy, with longing and anticipation while at the same time calling us to recognize the joy and fulfillment that Jesus’ birth has already brought.

**EDITOR’S NOTE** — Keith and Kristyn Getty are modern hymn writers whose compositions are sung the world over. For more information on Getty Music and the Sing! initiative, visit [www.gettymusic.com](http://www.gettymusic.com).

## Letters to the Editor

The article in the Dec. 5 issue about Lineville Baptist Church’s missions partnership in Ireland got my attention as being very much like the Pickens Baptist Association’s many missions trips to Brazil.

Many people have heard about Jesus but have never heard the truth of the gospel.

These people are just as lost as people who have never heard the name of Jesus.

Several years ago we shared the gospel with a Brazilian man who said he had been going to church all his life but had never heard that Jesus could and would forgive his sins.

God saved him that day! We have seen this same type thing in many parts of the world.

As David Platt has said, every

saved person this side of heaven owes the gospel to every lost person this side of hell. We are the plan of God, and there is no plan B. The stakes in this spiritual battle are eternal.

**Buddy Kirk**  
Carrollton, Ala.

It is very interesting that during the time we are emphasizing Kingdom expansion, being Great Commandment- and Great Commission-minded, and meeting the “Acts 1:8 Challenge” of reaching the lost, the ideas of J. Frank Norris and John R. Rice resurface in the minds of some people.

Thank God for the Cooperative Program.

**James Preachers**  
Enterprise, Ala.

“Do not try to keep Christmas without good will towards men.”

CHARLES SPURGEON

*Pastor and author*

I had a dear friend who has passed, Grace Davis, who told me her morning prayer included a request to God to send someone she could help so she could have a blessing. I try each morning to follow her example and make that same request. I have found that it is easy to find opportunities to reach out in so many ways.

**Peggy Tucker**  
via Facebook

I wish the church was as eager to offer redemption as the colleges were to hire a new coach. A losing coach can get fired, spend a year or two in “restoration” and they become the most sought after head guy.

**Pastor Mickey Bell**  
Comedian and author

I firmly believe in the Bible. The Bible says you walk by faith and not by sight. I trust in the Lord.

**Quarterback Tua Tagovailoa**  
University of Alabama

We tend to dislike rules unless we are the rule-makers. It all began with Adam and Eve. We inherited their aversion to regulations. If we pick and choose our rules though, watch the chaos roll. How quickly we remember that strict adherence to the law makes us legalistic Pharisees.

Jesus, however, didn't attack the law but those who thought obedience to it made them right with God. It wasn't the doing of the law that God wanted but the open heart behind the doing. Even Jesus asked for obedience from His disciples.

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Pursue the rule of love that Jesus introduced. It's a good rule.

**Darryl Wood**  
Retired pastor

While stores, as well as shopping habits, have changed, we still need many of the items they sell. Through the years, churches have changed too. Houses of worship are often larger, look different and have various styles of worship. Worship services are even delivered to our homes via television and internet. One thing remains the same — we need spiritual nourishment, which can be found only in God.

**Director of Missions Bill King**  
Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association



Photo by SBOM

Rick Lance is executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

## Rejoicing and giving

One Christmas song reminds us this is the most wonderful time of the year — and it is in many respects.

Especially during this season we honor and recognize the birth of Jesus Christ — God becoming flesh in the person of our Lord and Savior.

As Alabama Baptists and Southern Baptists we have an opportunity to help others around the world hear the gospel by our support for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO) for International Missions.

The International Mission Board (IMB) has a national goal of \$165 million dollars. Alabama's goal is \$12 million.

Pam and I decided that our LMCO gift would be equal to the largest gift we make to anyone this Christmas — actually a little more.

I would invite you to put the LMCO at the top of your gift list. If you do that your priorities are right in order.

Alabama Baptists are part of a wonderful missions team. We have a stellar leader in Paul Chitwood as IMB president. He is doing an excellent job and our missionaries are on the frontlines of service.

So let's remember: It's a time to rejoice but it's also a time to give — the most wonderful time of the year.

—Rick Lance

## From the *Twitterverse*

### @DustyMcLemore

Someone asked Mother Teresa what could be done to promote world peace? She replied, “Go home and love your family!” If you want to change the world, start at home!  
#thewordforyoutoday

### @BlalockMarshall

Churches must make missions personal because it is. There are no insignificant people. With over half of our Southern Baptist Convention churches not giving even one penny to Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, it's time to make it personal. Will you make a personal commitment?

### @KieBowman

She loved a man she couldn't

marry. She was a celebrated linguist when 19th century women didn't go to college. She lived in obscurity and died penniless and malnourished weighing 50 pounds. But more than \$4 billion has been given to missions in her name. Are you sure you know Lottie?

### @NationalWMMU

We were lost, wandering in despair and God came for us. God sees you! He loves you no matter what.

### @MarcHodges3

Conferences are good. Cohorts and huddles are better. @Passion-TreeNet and @RobertAtCCC in Alabama are doing a great work connecting and equipping pastors to #MakeDisciples.

### @Rogerdwill

God is more concerned about who you are than what you do. If who you are does not please God, then what you do is virtually useless.  
— Stephen Olford

### @wmbrown

Both @NAMB\_SBC and @IMB\_SBC are calling for more missionaries. But missionaries don't grow on trees. What is your church doing to mobilize, identify and develop church planters and missionaries?

### @davidcofield

“Prayer is the divine equalizer. Some preach, others teach, a few sing publicly but all can pray.”  
— Dick Eastman

Share online or email [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org)

# DEMENTIA

AND THE

## holidays



123rf.com

## Awareness, preparation help everyone enjoy the season

By **Michael J. Brooks**  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**D**ementia affects millions of Americans and during the holidays the disease can play terrible tricks in the brains of those affected, in ways even caregivers might not expect, said Phronsie Owens, a registered nurse and certified trainer for Alzheimer's Disease and dementia care and outreach coordinator at Piedmont Health Care Center.

Owens spoke at "Holiday Hints for Caregivers of Loved Ones with Dementia," a seminar held Nov. 21 at River Highlands senior living center in Birmingham.

Holiday stress affects everyone

but a person with dementia may be especially affected, Owens said.

She offered some tips for caregivers as the holiday season approaches.

**1. Orient the patient to what is planned for the day.**

"We could say, 'Mother, we're going to Jane's today for lunch and then we're going to stay for a few hours and visit with Jim and Sue, your grandchildren.' This helps patients better orient themselves for the day's activities."

**2. Advise family members ahead of time.**

"I counsel caregivers never to ask, 'Who am I?' to patients," she said. "This is playing a memory

game they're not equipped to play. They may know people but may not be able to remember their names. I always say, 'Hi, Mrs. Jones. I'm Phronsie and I'm your nurse today.'"

**3. Reduce background noise to lessen confusion.**

"The TV or radio might be blaring in the background and this can be controlled," she said. "Children might need to play in another room so it's not as noisy. The dementia patient needs rest and calm."

**4. Use contrasting colors in table settings for the holidays.**

"Psychology tells us red is an appealing color that stimulates hunger," she said. "Many restaurants

like McDonald's and Burger King use red in their color schemes. Dementia patients often have eating issues and may be confused with white place mats, tablecloths, plates and food. We suggest mixing up the colors for your mealtimes."

**5. Be aware of scammers.**

People with dementia are easy prey for unscrupulous people, Owens said.

"They give money to people when they shouldn't," she said. "Someone comes to their home and promises to return and do some work but they need a down payment, for example. And they're vulnerable to telephone scams allegedly from the IRS or Medicare." ❖

# RESOURCES

## for those living with dementia and their caregivers

### Statewide

Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) are local aging programs that provide information and services on a range of assistance for older adults and those who care for them. By contacting your local agency you receive access to critical information including:

- ▶ Available services in your area
- ▶ Mobility assistance programs, meal plans and housing
- ▶ Assistance in gaining access to services
- ▶ Individual counseling, support groups and caregiver training
- ▶ Respite care
- ▶ Supplemental services, on a limited basis.

Go to [www.alabamaageline.gov](http://www.alabamaageline.gov) or call 800-AGE-LINE (800-243-5463) for more information.

### Regional

Alzheimer's of Central Alabama (ACA) serves 21 counties across central Alabama but accepts statewide and nationwide calls for information. Contact ACA if:

- ▶ You are noticing memory loss in a loved one which is disrupting his or her normal routine.
- ▶ You have a loved one who has been recently diagnosed with dementia or Alzheimer's disease.
- ▶ Your loved one has been diagnosed for several years and you need information and guidance.
- ▶ You are concerned about a friend or a neighbor.
- ▶ You are in need of a break from caregiving.
- ▶ You are looking for a support group to attend.
- ▶ You want someone to hear your story.

The ACA helpline is available Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 205-871-7970 or toll-free at 866-806-7255. More information is available at [www.alzca.org](http://www.alzca.org).

- **Dothan** — Alzheimer's Resource Center: 334-702-2273, [www.wesharethecare.org](http://www.wesharethecare.org)
- **Decatur** — Mental Health Association in Morgan County: 256-353-1160, [www.mhainmc.net](http://www.mhainmc.net)
- **Mobile** — Alzheimer's Foundation of the South: 251-209-6766
- **Montgomery** — Alzheimer's Education, Resources & Services, Inc. (AERS): 334-233-2139, [www.alzheimersers.org](http://www.alzheimersers.org)
- **Florence, Northwest Alabama** — Coalition of Alzheimer's and Related Disorders: 256-740-5431, [www.cardnwa.org](http://www.cardnwa.org)

# Those with dementia, caregivers need Church's support, help

By Carrie Brown McWhorter  
The Alabama Baptist

The Church has a responsibility to help meet the physical, social and spiritual needs of the growing number of Alabama families living with Alzheimer's Disease and dementia.

That was the message of a Dec. 4 lunch-and-learn workshop hosted by *The Alabama Baptist* and led by Miller Piggott, executive director of Alzheimer's of Central Alabama, and Morris Murray Jr., a minister and biblical counselor based in Jasper.

Attendees from across the state heard how Baptist churches can join in the work already taking place in churches of other denominations regarding ministry to those living with dementia and their caregivers. Murray and Piggott offered rationale for these ministries.

Caring for the sick, which includes those living with dementia, was something Jesus did regularly, Murray said.

"If poor health issues captured the attention of Jesus and His disciples then should that not continue to be true for the Church today?" Murray asked.

Many church members disappear from the pew when chronic health issues develop, Murray said. Outreach requires the "courage to care."

"We may need to learn how to do things we've never done before," he said. "We may need new understandings of health-related problems, new methods of doing things."

Alabama has the 5th highest rate of Alzheimer's Disease in the nation, Piggott said. And while the state's population is expected to remain the same, the percentage of the popula-



Photo by Hannah Muñoz

Morris Murray Jr. (standing) and Miller Piggott (top, far right) take questions from participants during TAB's workshop on caregiving.

tion age 65 and older is going to increase. Simply reaching age 65 puts one at greater risk of developing dementia, she said, and now is the time to plan for the future.

"[Science] probably won't find a cure," she said. "When you don't have [a] cure, you have care. How do we provide the kind of care we want for our mothers, fathers, spouses, sisters and in some cases, children? What kind of care do we want for them going forward?"

One way many churches are helping is by offering respite care similar to a mother's day out model. A respite care program typically runs four hours during which participants are supervised as they engage in activities such as crafts, singing and games.

### More programs needed

Most respite programs are church-based, Piggott said, and the movement has grown within the Episcopal and Methodist denominations.

"We are waiting for the Baptists to take this on," Piggott said. "[Established] programs are eager to pass on

what they're doing to other churches."

The Golden Rule of caregiving is "you must take care of yourself before you can care for somebody else," she said, but caregivers often wait until help is absolutely necessary.

"The result is the patient grows more dependent," Piggott said. "Respite needs to be part of the routine as early as possible to provide comfort and security for the person living with dementia."

The option of respite care even just one day each week helps caregivers, Piggott said.

Caregivers also need to hear they're doing well, she said, which is why the care of a church is so needed. Support groups are helpful too because they allow caregivers to share their experiences with others walking the same path. Providing space for support group meetings is another way churches can assist caregivers, Piggott said.

When churches help people living with dementia and their caregivers, they fulfill the gospel, Murray said.

"Christianity is not only individual, it's also social," he said. "Once we become believers we become members of the body of Christ. The gospel is social in its orientation and outreach. To know Jesus and to serve Jesus is to serve people." ✝

**Free Bible study resources on a variety of topics, including supporting those with health-related issues, are available through email at [morrismurrayjr42@gmail.com](mailto:morrismurrayjr42@gmail.com). For additional resources go to [tabonline.org/dementia-care](http://tabonline.org/dementia-care).**

Famous Christians from previous centuries

# Heroes of the Faith

## 2019 marks 125th anniversary of poet, hymnist's death

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).



Christina Rossetti (1830–1894), a famous Victorian poet, wrote the beautiful Christmas carol — “In the Bleak Midwinter.”

She also wrote the words of “Love Came Down at Christmas,” as well as religious, children’s and fantasy poetry.

This year is the 125th anniversary of her death.

She was born to Gabriele and Frances Rossetti in London on Dec. 5, 1830. Her father, a revolutionary nationalist, was an Italian exile. He settled his family in London and became a professor of Italian at King’s College.

Rossetti’s mother taught her at home, stressing classical and religious literature. At the age of 6 she wrote her first poem, “To My Mother.” Her grandfather published it when she was 17 as well as seven more poems when she was 20.

In the 1860s she wrote “Goblin Market and Other Poems” and “The Prince’s Progress and Other Poems,” which established her as a major poet. Her “Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book” made her a famous children’s writer.

A member of the Anglican Church, she devoted her life to God.

Her faith sustained her as she suffered poor health. In 1871 she was diagnosed with Grave’s Disease which caused her to have protruding eyes and discoloration of her skin. In 1893 she developed breast cancer.

She died on Dec. 29, 1894, and is buried in London’s Highgate Cemetery.

Her first Christmas carol, “Love Came Down at Christmas” was published in 1893. Christian band Jars of Clay included it on its 2007 album “Christmas Songs.”

The editor of the American magazine, *Scribner’s Monthly*, asked



ROSSETTI

Rossetti to write a Christmas poem for his periodical. “In the Bleak Midwinter” was published in 1872. Composer Gustav Holst set it to music for The English Hymnal.

In a poll of some of the world’s leading choir experts in 2008 it was named the best Christmas carol. Several famous singers such as Julie Andrews, James Taylor and Susan Boyle have recorded the carol.

The last stanza resonates with many people at Christmas:

“What can I give Him / Poor as I am? / If I were a Shepherd / I would bring a lamb. / If I were a Wise Man / I would do my part. / Yet what I can I give Him? / Give my Heart.”

**SAVE the DATE!**

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[beltone.com](http://beltone.com)

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15	16	17	18	19	20	21
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29	30	31				

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Trussville: 205-383-3094  
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# Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

## Christmas Features and Figures

### Lights and a Tree

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

In the prior two weeks Theology 101 has taken four features of our Christmas programs and traditions as pointers that lead us back to truths associated with Christ's coming into the world. Having considered angels and carols as well as gifts and guests, this week we turn to lights and a tree.

Brightly colored lights begin showing up everywhere as the Christmas season unfolds. Christmas lights can serve to point us to the truth that originally Christmas was all about the Light of the World coming in the form of a baby in Bethlehem.

When that baby was grown and had launched His mission He made the declaration, "I am the Light of the World. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Later He followed the miracle of restoring sight to a blind man by declaring, "As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the World" (John 9:5).

The Christmas tree seems to be a staple of most Christmas celebrations. However, the imagery of a tree never has so noble a reference as when it is used to speak of the cross on which Christ died. Of Christ, 1 Peter 2:24 states, "Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree."

It is possible that in all the time we might spend admiring a beautifully lit Christmas tree

surrounded by carefully wrapped gifts we do not consciously think of the other tree. Regarding that tree planted on Golgotha the Scripture reminds us there was no beauty to behold.

When looking back at that old rugged cross the words of Isaiah leap to the forefront: "There is no beauty that we should desire Him" (53:2). What was repulsive on the surface had underneath it the beauty of a loving Father making a way for His wayward creation to come home.

#### Looking ahead

If the tree at Christmas compels us to take time to think back to that tree of yesteryear that bore God's Son, might it also compel us to think ahead to what awaits us in heaven. Revelation 22:2 describes it like this: "In the middle of its street and on either side of the river was the tree of life" and then adds, "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Only then will it be said, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

May this hope burn brightly in our hearts. ✝

*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.*



## Pensacola Baptists respond after shooting on Navy base

By Carrie Brown McWhorter  
The Alabama Baptist

Following the Dec. 6 shooting at Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola churches in the area are responding with a message of hope and urging continued prayers for those affected.

"In moments like this there's a lot of confusion and a lot of anger, but the responsibility of the church is to be salt and light in a world that's broken," said Wade Rials, pastor of East Brent Baptist Church, Pensacola. "We have to be the ones to proclaim the hope that is in the gospel of Christ."

#### Remembering the fallen

East Brent took time during its Dec. 8 worship service to reflect on the shooting and remember the three victims who died. Kaleb Watson, 23, of Enterprise, a recent graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and an aspiring Navy pilot, was one of them.

"He died a hero and we are beyond proud, but there is a hole in our hearts that can never be filled," his brother, Adam Watson, wrote on Facebook.

At least eight others were injured by the shooter, a 2nd lieutenant in the Royal Saudi Air Force who also was training at the base. The shooter was killed at the scene by sheriff's deputies.

The FBI is calling the shooting an act of terrorism. When the word "terrorism" is involved, emotions run high, Rials said.

Multiple churches in the area held prayer vigils Saturday and the victims and first responders were on the minds of everyone in the city, where NAS Pensacola is part of most families' lives, he said.

"I'd venture to say nearly a third of our church has military connections and then there are many civil contractors on base," said Rials.

Rials, a native of Samson who formerly served as pastor of Thorington Road Baptist Church, Montgomery, was in a Bible study when news of the shooting broke. He said his phone "exploded" with messages as rumors began to spread but official statements from Navy personnel came much later in the day.

In the interim Rials said he got messages from church members asking for prayer for husbands, brothers and others working on the base.

"We were shepherding the immediate moment, calling to check on our people," Rials said.

No one from East Brent was injured in the shooting, but Rials said church members were among the first responders and medical personnel who treated the wounded.

During Sunday's service Rials and East Brent associate pastor James Kerr, a former army chaplain, thanked the first responders for their service during the crisis.

"The officers, the trauma nurses, the folks driving the ambulances — often they don't get remembered," he said. "So we are praying for them and I challenged our folks to find ways to show them kindness."

Rials reminded his congregation that the military personnel "defend our right to preach the gospel" and doing that, he said, "is the greatest act of gratitude."

"We can't allow the distractions of our culture to confuse us," Rials said. "Our community needs us to be gospel people because the gospel is our hope."

#### Counseling available

In a video statement following the shooting Brian Nall, executive director of the Pensacola Bay Baptist Association, called for a day of prayer and encouraged ongoing prayer for those involved in the response to the tragedy.

Nall said the association's Faith and Hope counseling ministry would be available to anyone in the community needing trauma-related counseling related to the shooting.

And as the investigation into the shooting and the healing process continues, Rials said his prayer is that followers of Jesus in Pensacola and elsewhere will remember their purpose.

"I want our people to live missionally, to recognize that we're ambassadors for Christ whose citizenship is in heaven," he said. "The answer to the divisions in our world is not ideological. The answer is the gospel." ✝



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# Reason for the season



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## Are you celebrating Christ or just fulfilling expectations during this Christmas season?

By Denise George  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**D**uring the Christmas season do you sometimes pause in the midst of the work, traffic and chaos and ask: “Am I truly celebrating Christ’s joyous birth or am I simply struggling to fulfill the expectations placed on me by others?”

Year after year many of us take a deep breath, grit our teeth and jump into the Christmas frenzy trying hard to achieve the holiday expectations of others, believing our actions alone are respon-

sible for making our loved ones happy.

But by Dec. 26 we can be stressed, exhausted and deep in debt. In the United States today many believe Christmas has become less about celebrating Christ and more about fulfilling the oftentimes meaningless expectations of others.

So how can we create a memorable and meaningful Christ-centered Christmas for our loved ones and avoid the struggle to simply fulfill expectations placed on us by others? We can:

▶ *Release ourselves from*

*the struggle.* In many homes money is tight, employed parents are already overworked and/or family members may be sick or charged with caring for the sick. Everyone has physical, financial, emotional and mental limitations. Recognize yours.

### Set limits

▶ *Limit excessive gift-giving.* We can buy fewer and less expensive gifts or plan a Christmas without material gifts, placing the primary focus on fellowship with loved ones and deeper spiritual growth. The money we would ordinarily spend on gifts we can donate to missions and to organizations that help the impoverished, the sick and the hungry.

▶ *Simplify home decorations.* We can save time and money when we keep Christmas décor simple and inexpensive.

▶ *Rethink traveling during busy holidays where long delays, flight cancellations and dangerous roads are common.* If travel has become a holiday habit and is no longer a meaningful personal/family experience make different arrangements.

▶ *Choose to give and attend fewer parties and functions.* During the holidays we will attend more than three times as many social events as normal. We can carefully schedule our holiday calendar, choosing only the most enjoyable and meaningful functions for our

family. Even though others may expect us it’s our choice to attend or not.

▶ *Concentrate on the spiritual aspects of Christmas — the reason for the season: Jesus.* We can use our precious holiday time to read Scripture, pray, worship as a family, deeply contemplate God’s love and grow closer to Christ while also teaching our children and grandchildren why we celebrate Christmas.

As we try to bring Christ back into Christmas and as we struggle to stand strong in the midst of a whirlwind of seasonal expectations we have the freedom to make choices that both show love to friends and family and at the same time honor and share Christ. ✝

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# Pastor, church walk alongside each other in time of healing

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

At first Blair McBride wasn't sure why God called him from his church in Florida to be associate pastor of Antioch East Baptist Church, Greenville. McBride just knew He had.

But he would soon find out both he and the church had a big need for healing coming in their future — and God saw fit for them to walk through that together.

"It's helped me to see how big God is," he said.

McBride hadn't been at Antioch East very long when some things happened in the body of the church and suddenly in December 2018 he was the only staff member left.

"It was quite a difficult time for the church," he said.

But an even bigger surprise came two weeks later. He discovered that something was happening in his own body — it was attacking itself. And within 36 hours the 37 year old was paralyzed from the chest down.

"I deteriorated really quickly," McBride said.

It took two and a half "dark" weeks for doctors to figure out what he had — a cousin disease to multiple sclerosis called Anti-Mog associated disease, which had caused transverse myelitis, an inflammation of the spine. While he lay in the hospital, his wife, Nicole, also was caring for their new baby and the church was moving on with no staff.

And all the while they ministered to McBride's family.

"It's humbling," he said. "God has been good and the church has been good to us."

As he went through weeks of rehab to learn how to live in a wheelchair he began to get some feeling back in his feet and legs — something that only happens to two thirds of transverse myelitis patients and rarely in such a short period of time.

"It was amazing but I was still just so weak," McBride said, and because of that the church moved his family into the parsonage, a one-level house.

Not only that — they asked him to be their pastor.

"It's been a leap of faith for both parties to trust that God is at work in this," McBride said.

He's learned to walk again and slowly the church also has begun to heal. But no one can predict when or if his disease will flare up again — it's rare and doctors

don't know enough about it to be able to guess. If it does come back it could attack something other than his spine. If it attacks his eyes, he could go blind and if it attacks his brain, he could lose cognitive function.

Damont Drake, pastor of Eden Baptist Church, Brooksville, Florida, — the church where McBride previously served as associate pastor — said it's an amazing story of a young man trusting God during a tough situation.

## 'Perfect plan'


"He gives God glory for everything," Drake said.

McBride said God is calling him and the church to trust Him and move forward.

"My plan is to be here as long as God wants me to be here," he said. "It's a complicated situation, but God is good and He's begun to heal me and this church. We're here and we're trusting the Lord that His plan is perfect and better than our plan." 🌟






McBride family




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# Ministry shortage

## Small churches needing pastors with supplemental pay on rise in Alabama

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Noel Vickers says it makes him a little nervous sometimes when he thinks about his age and looks around.

Well maybe not nervous, he said — concerned might be a better word. He's 63 and he's the youngest pastor in his association.

"When your youngest pastor is over 60 years old we're not doing something right," said Vickers, pastor of New Prospect Baptist Church, Ashland, in Clay Baptist Association. "I'm worried about the lack of younger leaders."

He's not alone in his thoughts.

On the other side of the state Gary Bonner has a similar concern.

"Back in 1974 when I surrendered to preach, there were so many of us out there looking for places to preach," said Bonner, associational missionary/director of mis-

sions for Sipsy Baptist Association. "Now it's hard to find people for the small churches."

And that's no small thing. Right at a third of Alabama's churches — more than 1,000 congregations — have fewer than 50 people in Sunday worship. Another third has between 51 and 250 in worship attendance.

### 'Building blocks'

Across the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) roughly 90% of churches have a Sunday worship attendance of 250 or less or are led by a pastor who works another job while serving as pastor. Nearly 40% of those have one to 50 people on Sundays.

Small churches are the building blocks of the SBC, but they're finding it harder and harder to secure pastors, said Rick Barnhart, director of the office of associational missions and church planting for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

"There are two major statements that I hear consistently across the state regarding availability of pastors," he said. "Bivocational or co-vocational, quality, SBC-minded pastors are very difficult to find. The second need is having quality younger men being called to pastor the churches."

Why is it such a problem? Barnhart said as he talks with associational missions directors around the state, a few possible reasons often come up.

### 1. It's possible men are not being called to respond.

Many suspect churches aren't using the invitation time in services to call for commitment to ministry anymore, Barnhart said. It seems to him that the practice "has pretty much come to a halt."

Bonner agrees with him. "I don't know if there is enough challenge from the pulpits in calling people into ministry," he said. "We challenge people as far as giving

**Roughly 90% of SBC churches have a Sunday worship attendance of 205 or less or are led by a bivocational pastor.**

to missions, but I don't know that we challenge people as a call into ministry. I can't say that we don't but I don't see it."

### 2. It's possible that even if they are

**being called, they're not responding.**

Otis Derrah, who retired from Judson Baptist Association in October 2019, said in the past it wasn't uncommon for a layperson to sense a call to preach.

"They would feel God was calling them to be intentionally bivocational, to have a business but also use their talents to pastor a small church," said Derrah, who serves as pastor of Adoniram Baptist Church, Abbeville.

But during his five years as Judson Association's leader, not one man surrendered to the call to preach.

"I can only speculate as to why, but it doesn't seem that there are very many lay-people in our churches who are answering the call to preach," Derrah said.

### 3. It's possible some men who do respond have unrealistic expectations for where they'll serve.

Sometimes when men graduate from ministerial school they expect their opportunities to look different than they actually are, Barnhart said. They don't necessarily expect to serve at a small church and work a second job.

Bonner said he sees that reality too. In his association only three churches have fully supported, full-time pastors — the other churches just can't afford that so they employ bivocational pastors.

He said it could be that fewer men want the responsibilities of having two careers.

"I understand pastors wanting to be in a church where they can be fully supported because ministry is never 'part time,'" Bonner said.

### 'Do the same thing'

Back when he was a pastor he also worked as a teacher or principal, and at times he would've loved for his ministry to have been fully supported.

"But if I had to do it all over again, I'd do the same thing," he said.

### 4. It's possible a changing culture is affecting men's response.

The fact that pastors are not revered as they have been in the past could affect a man's desire to take that role on, Barnhart said. It might also be possible that more men are aware churches can be very wounding places to serve.✝



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# 3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of University of Mobile

University of Mobile (UM) vocal ensemble Voices of Mobile performed at the White House the evening of Dec. 10. Each year the White House opens its doors to the public to enjoy the Christmas decorations and sounds but during the evening the White House is open only to special guests of the first family. This year's White House Christmas theme is 'The Spirit of America' and Voices of Mobile 'blew away the White House,' said UM President Lonnie Burnett. (UM)

## Korean pastor stabbed to death in Turkey

Korean evangelist Jinwook Kim was stabbed to death Nov. 19 in the southeastern Turkish city of Diyarbakir. A 16-year-old suspect has been arrested and an investigation is ongoing, officials said.

According to International Christian Concern, a global human rights organization, Kim was pastoring a small community of Christians.

Officials claim the incident was an attempted robbery but local believers call the attack an assassination.

Kim is the first Christian murdered in Turkey since 2007 but Christians living in Turkey have reported an increase in harassment, threats and other non-violent incidents during the past three years.

Turkey ranks 26th on Open Doors' 2019 World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. (TAB)

## Court refuses to strike down KY abortion law

The U.S. Supreme Court has left in place a Kentucky law requiring doctors to perform ultrasounds and show fetal images to patients before abortions.

In the Dec. 9 ruling justices did not comment in refusing to review an appeals court ruling that upheld the law, which also allows women to cover their ears as the doctor describes the ultrasound images.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) challenged the law on behalf of an abortion clinic in Louisville. The ACLU argued that "display and describe" ultrasound laws violate physicians' speech rights under the First Amendment.

The federal appeals court in Cincinnati upheld the 2017 Kentucky law but its sister court in Richmond, Virginia, struck down a similar measure in North Carolina. (BP)

## — NEWSBRIEFS —

### Cox celebrates 60 years of pastoral ministry, looks ahead to retirement



Henry Cox wanted to be a preacher at age 3 — at least that's what his grandmother says.

He doesn't remember saying it, but by the time he was 16 he knew it was meant to be.

And now, on Jan. 12, he's celebrating 60 years of pastoral ministry and retiring for the second time. With him every step of the way has been his wife, Barbara, who has often served as the church secretary.

"I've totally enjoyed every minute of these 60 years," Cox said. "The only word I know to describe it is I'm extremely blessed."

Through the years he served as pastor of eight churches including Central Baptist, Gardendale; Gilgal Baptist, Duncanville; Trinity Memorial Baptist, Montgomery; First Baptist, Headland; and First Baptist, Bay Minette, which named him pastor emeritus in 2006. After he retired



COX

from there, nearby Durant Chapel Baptist Church talked him into coming out of retirement.

"I just didn't know God had written this beautiful chapter for these senior years of my life," Cox said.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, called Cox a "true Christian statesman" and said he and Barbara are "Alabama Baptist treasures."

"Throughout all of the years of his ministry Henry has demonstrated a Christlike spirit even when times were tense and turbulent," Lance said, noting Alabama Baptists have been blessed by his service, including two terms as state convention president. "His God-given sense of discernment is admired by all who know him." (Grace Thornton)

### Muhammad one of the most popular baby names in US for first time



For the first time the name Muhammad has cracked the top 10 list of most popular baby names for newborn boys in the United States, according

to parenting website BabyCenter, which tracks the popularity of names.

The name, which can be spelled in several different ways, is popular among Muslims as an act of devotion to honor Islam's founder. It has long been climbing BabyCenter's annual list. This year it rose — from No. 14 in 2018 to No. 10 in 2019 — knocking Mason from the No. 10 spot.

Social Security data shows the name has climbed in popularity from 620 in 2000 to 345 in 2018, but the government agency does not combine its different spellings as BabyCenter does.



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Some of this year's top names include biblically inspired names

such as Noah, Elijah and Lucas.

Pew Research Center estimates about 3.45 million Muslims of all ages were living in the U.S. in 2017 and Muslims made up about 1.1% of the total U.S. population. (RNS, TAB)

# News near you

## BESSEMER ASSOCIATION

▶ **Eric Taylor** is the new pastor of **Bethel Baptist Church, Pleasant Grove**. He previously served at Lee Heights Baptist Church, Florence. Taylor holds degrees from University of Alabama at Birmingham and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. He is currently pursuing a



TAYLOR

doctorate at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Taylor and his wife, Sonja, have two children and one grandchild.

## CHILTON ASSOCIATION

▶ **West End Baptist Church, Clanton**, will host a Day of Renewal on Dec. 29 at 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. Charles Christmas Sr. will bring the morning message and West End youth pastor Kenny Martin will bring the evening message. James Watkins is pastor.

## DEKALB ASSOCIATION

▶ **Marshall Henderson** is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church, Fort Payne**. He previously served First, Fort Payne, as student min-



HENDERSON

ister and interim pastor. Henderson holds degrees from Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He is currently pursuing a doctorate from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He and his wife, Jill-Curry, have five children and are fostering three more.

## MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Parker Guttensohn** is the new student pastor at **The Church at Eastern Oaks, Montgomery**. He previously served as youth minister at First Baptist Church, Luverne. Guttensohn holds a degree from Troy University.



GUTTENSOHN

## MORGAN ASSOCIATION

▶ On Oct. 28, **Morgan Baptist Association** celebrated 100 years of ministry.

The celebration was held at First Baptist Church, Hartselle.

Evangelist Junior Hill was the guest speaker for the celebration. Special music was brought by Bellview Strings. A history of the association was presented by local historian Phil Wirey.



Photo courtesy of Belinda Earley

Lonette Berg presented a certificate on behalf of the

Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.

The 27 charter member churches were presented with certificates at the celebration. Morgan Association disaster relief provided a meal. Ken Blackwood is director of missions for Morgan Association.

▶ On Oct. 20, **Mount Nebo Baptist Church, Falkville**, celebrated its 150th anniversary.

Former pastor Donnie Carroll was the guest preacher and special music was brought by minister of music Geoff Halbrooks and Tammy Whitten.

Jerry Armor presented a certificate on behalf of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, and Larry Hyche presented a certificate from the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Ken Blackwood, director of missions for Morgan Baptist Association, shared his memories of the church. Greg Compton was recognized for being Mount



Photo by Jerry Armor

Nebo Baptist's longest serving pastor with 25 years at the church. Gov. Kay Ivey sent the church a certificate in honor of the anniversary and it was displayed at the celebration along with old photos of church events and former pastors. Lunch followed the service.

"It was a great day," Compton said. "We were running over with people. The Lord blessed us." ✝

## — NEWSBRIEFS —

### Alabama Baptist pastor, comedian featured on Huckabee show



On Sundays you'll find pastor Mickey Bell (pictured right) in the pulpit at Grace Church Bessemer, but during the week —

well, you'll find him just about anywhere.

Bell, whose side job is comedy, performs at churches and events around the country. And Dec. 6 he was on a big stage, warming up the audience prior to a taping of Huckabee, the weekly television show hosted by former Arkansas governor and long-time TV personality Mike Huckabee (pictured left).

Bell's observations on church and family life kept the audience laughing from start to finish and he said the opportunity was confirmation of his decision to use comedy to point people to Jesus.

"It was so exciting to meet Gov. Huckabee



Photo courtesy of Huckabee

and be a part of his show," Bell said. "To only be doing comedy for one year and to already have those doors open for me is nothing short of God elevating and accelerating." (TAB)

### Moore speaks to Beeson graduates; 29 receive advanced degrees



Beeson Divinity School graduated 29 students in commencement exercises Dec. 6. Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, gave the commencement address.

Speaking on the "Crisis of Integrity" Moore told graduates they would face temptations to see ministry in terms of results and prosperity, "but God has called you to the way of the cross, and in the way of the cross all our expectations are turned on their head."

"The integrity of your ministry will come in those deepest moments of loneliness and vulnerability and irrelevance," Moore said. "But if you listen in those moments to that thinnest silence then you will hear the voice that led you here: 'Come follow me.'"

In his first graduation as Beeson dean, Douglas Sweeney expressed gratitude for God's provision and care for the students.

Several Alabamians received their master's level degree or higher. *The Alabama Baptist* was provided the following list:

▶ **Master of Divinity** — Westby Phillip Anderson, Birmingham; Mark David Bradford, Birmingham; Taylor Alexander Brazil, Birmingham; Lauren Alexandra Byars, Birmingham; Daniel Caleb Gilliland, Birmingham; Ryan Daniel Kirkland, Birmingham; Mark Randolph Rector, Birmingham; William Casey Sorrell, Birmingham; Christopher Thomas Taunton, Birmingham; Kyle Adam Thompson, Oneonta; Amos Emory Williams Jr., Madison;



Samford photo

▶ **Master of Arts in Theological Studies** — Tichina Hope Allen, Birmingham

▶ **Doctor of Ministry** — Emanuel Lee Foster, Bessemer; Harryett Maenetta Jackson, Huntsville; Darrell Keith Ray, Andalusia. (Samford)



ONEMISSION: The Great Commission ONEPROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANYMINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

# Merry Christmas

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Please be sure that your Cooperative Program and Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering gifts are received at the State Board of Missions no later than December 31 if you would like for them to be counted in 2019.

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# Churches fund missionary 'units' through Lottie Moon Offering

When it came time to set goals for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO) Peyton Hill, pastor of First Baptist Church, Prattville, wanted to answer the question, How can we go further with our giving?

The hurdle comes when the giving is not viewed as tangible — when there is no personal connection between the money and the ministry.

While International Mission Board (IMB) missionaries make real moves in ministry every day, not every congregation grasps the connection between the money and the ministry in their weekly giving.

Hill wanted that to change. His goal was to connect the giving with specific, entire missionary units. A missionary unit refers to the support

of an entire missionary effort, whether that be a single person, a family or a couple.

The average cost to support one missionary unit for an entire year through the IMB is \$62,000.



HILL

Hill's challenge to his church was to support two entire missionary units, a financial goal of \$124,000.

Making the personal connection between the finances and the ministry gave the congregation a new inspiration to give.

The goal was to put names and faces to the giving.

By defining so precisely where the money given would go and how it would impact the gospel being spread, Hill saw his church rise up and get excited about giving again.

"The church just ran with it," Hill said.

Hill noted the offering could be viewed in a percentage form as well.

"Individuals and families are saying 'I'm going to give a 100th of a missionary unit,'" Hill said. "It's not just an arbitrary number that they write a check for."

This fresh perspective on the LMCO is a step in the right direction of being able to send more missionaries to the field, said IMB President Paul Chitwood.

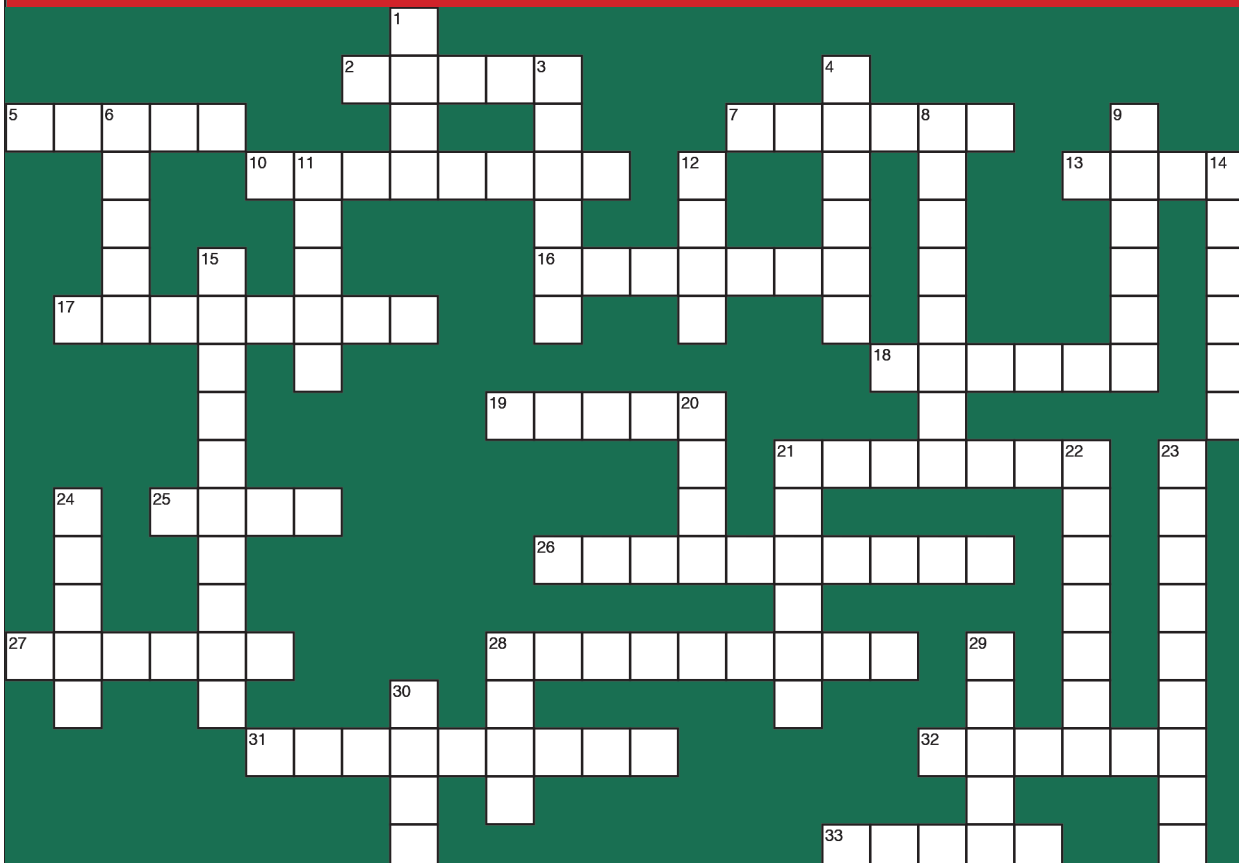
## 'More people hear'

"Simply put more missionaries means that more people hear the gospel, believe the gospel and spend eternity in heaven rather than in hell," Chitwood said. "We have a goal of sending more missionaries. Growing the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering ... is how we will meet that goal of sending more missionaries and seeing more people reconciled to God through a saving relationship with Jesus." (BP)

# Christmas Christian Crossword

An original Christmas crossword by TAB

www.CrosswordWeaver.com



### Across

2. Jesus was born in the city of \_\_\_\_.
5. Name given to Mary's son.
7. Put one on your front door.
10. Shepherds left the manger \_\_\_\_ God.
13. Husband of Ruth.
16. His name shall be called \_\_\_\_ father. (Isaiah 9:6, NASB)
17. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus became \_\_\_\_ fleeing to Egypt. (Matt. 2:13, CEV)
18. For riding in the snow.
19. Wrapped underneath the Christmas tree.
21. Lit in windows.
25. Twelve \_\_\_\_ of Christmas.
26. Red and green plant.
27. The place where Jesus lay.
28. White but each is unique.
31. Governor of Syria when Jesus was born. (Luke 2:2, NKJV)
32. Language from which Noel is borrowed.
33. Buy, sign, mail and receive.

### Down

1. Brought gifts and worshipped baby Jesus.
3. Animal that carried Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem.
4. Hark the \_\_\_\_ angels sing.
6. Do on the frozen pond.
8. How Mary felt when she was first visited by Gabriel. (Luke 1:29)
9. Visited by an angel in a dream.
11. One will go forth for Me to be \_\_\_\_ in Israel. (Micah 5:2, NASB)
12. Mother of Jesus.
14. December birthstone.
15. Christmas ballet.
20. The Lord himself will give you a \_\_\_\_\_. (Isaiah 7:14, NIV)
21. Person who called for a census. (Luke 2:1, NKJV)
22. Frosty the \_\_\_\_.
23. Town where Jesus was born.
24. A voice was heard in \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 2:18, NKJV)
28. What carolers do.
29. Ruling king of Judea
30. Place gifts under.

# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 22

## Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.  
Dean of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



### GOD SAVES Matthew 1:18–25; Numbers 21:6–9

In preparation for the celebration of Christmas we integrate the Matthew account with our continuing study on Numbers.

Matthew intentionally lays the Old Testament foundation of Jesus' genealogy in the first 17 verses of his account. Every name has a story. Every man is a sinner. Every woman needs a savior. Every promise of God has a fulfillment. Don't miss out on these critical truths about biblical genealogies.

These generations listed trace historical characters from the patriarchs and the exodus to the kingdom years and the Babylonian exile. The king ("son of David") of the Jews ("son of Abraham") fulfilled covenant promises given to Abraham and David. The promised Savior has come.

#### The Savior (Matt. 1:18–23)

The name Jesus is a Greek form of the Hebrew name Yeshua, meaning salvation. In this passage the angel told Joseph to name the child "salvation" or "savior" because He would save His people from their sins. Gabriel's visitation to Mary (Luke 1:26–31) records a similar encounter. When Jesus was eight days old He was circumcised and given His name (Luke 2:21).

This child was the result of an immaculate conception, one in which the Spirit of God produced a fertilized egg in the womb of the virgin chosen by God to bear the Messiah. Until this detail was revealed to Joseph he had planned to quietly divorce Mary of their betrothal. After all he knew he had not consummated his relationship with her. Rather than bringing to her public humiliation or even execution he would quietly end their engagement.

Mary was the virgin chosen by God to bear Jesus. Through the centuries critical scholars and unbelievers have argued that Isaiah 7:14 was mistranslated by Matthew. Interestingly enough Matthew quoted from a Jewish translation in Greek which predated Jesus' birth by more than a century. Jews first translated the Hebrew (ha 'almah) with the Greek

(ho parthenos) for "the virgin." The Savior was "conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary" (Apostles' Creed).

#### The Arrival (Matt. 1:24–25)

Details of the child's arrival are scant in Matthew's gospel account with only a few brief verses. Joseph followed through with the marriage though he did not have physical intimacy with Mary until after Jesus had been born and the days of her purification were completed.

Only two gospel accounts provide snapshots of Jesus' infancy. Matthew 1–2 records this summary of Jesus' birth, as well as the magi's visit two years later, Herod's slaughter of the Bethlehem boys and the family's flight to Egypt. Luke 1–2 record the details of the Annunciation, the Magnificat, the angelic announcement of His birth, the shepherd's visit and Mary's response, His circumcision and naming, His temple presentation several weeks later and His temple visit around the age of "bar mitzvah."

#### The Requirement (Num. 21:6–9)

Readers may wonder how a message on the birth of Jesus relates to our continuing study on the book of Numbers. The answer is this: the boy born in Bethlehem would become the man who would die as a sacrifice for His people. Jesus connected these during His first encounter with Nicodemus (John 3:14).

Israel's continual complaints invited judgment. This time God used poisonous snakes. When the people repented they asked Moses to intercede for them. God instructed Moses to construct a bronze serpent and elevate it on a pole. If the people would look upon the serpent and trust God to heal them He would.

Jesus explained: "Just as Moses lifted the snake in the wilderness" — the Hebrew name for the book of Numbers (Bemidbar) means "in the wilderness" — "so the Son of Man must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life" (John 3:14–15). Jesus connects the Torah with the gospel. Look upon Jesus and believe. ✝

## Bible Studies for Life

By Dr. Jim Barnette, Professor, Samford University  
Senior Pastor, Brookwood Baptist Church



### IS JESUS GOD? Luke 1:26–35

#### The virgin birth points to Jesus' divinity. (26–29)

God's initiative of grace chooses a young unmarried woman from an obscure village to be the mother of the Son of God.

Nazareth was a small town of about 1,500 people in Jesus' time mentioned nowhere in the Old Testament or other ancient writings. Its close proximity of three miles from Sepphoris, a city called "the ornament of all Galilee," reminds us that Nazareth was not quite so isolated.

Although Mary was not yet married, she was betrothed. According to custom, the marriage would have been arranged by her father. She would live at home for a year after her betrothal. Then the groom would come to take her to his home and the wedding celebration would last for a week. The wedding was legally binding after the engagement. In fact if Joseph had died before the wedding, Mary would have been considered a widow. Unlike Zechariah, Mary had not been praying for a child; the initiative was entirely God's.

Thus the fact that Mary is "favored" speaks not so much to Mary being "full of grace" but the fact that God graciously chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus.

#### Jesus was born fully human, but the promise of an eternal kingdom points to His divinity. (30–33)

Gabriel explains why his assurance of God's grace on Mary is so significant for her. The wording here is almost identical to the "virgin" passage in Isaiah 7:14 and to the assurance the angel of the Lord gave to Hagar in Genesis 16:11.

The name "Jesus" is derived from the ancient Hebrew "Joshua," which had been common in Old Testament times and which continued to be a popular name through the first century AD. Matthew 1:21 provides an explanation for giving the child a name that means "saves:" "because He will save His people from their sins."

The striking term "Son of the Most High" points to Jesus' divine

sonship and is thus linked to His messiahship as foreseen in 2 Samuel 7:12–14 and Psalm 2:7–9. The description is based on the Old Testament language and describes the significance of Jesus as the anointed Messiah in the line of David who would rule over an everlasting kingdom.

#### Jesus' title as the Son of God points to His divinity. (34–35)

In response to the angelic announcement Mary asks a question similar to Zechariah's query: "How can this be?" Unlike Zechariah however, Mary does not ask for a sign; she simply asked questions.

Asking questions is not itself a mark of unbelief; to ask for a sign is already marked as a sign of lacking faith. Mary has a questioning faith; Zechariah wanted a sign on which to base his faith. Later Jesus would remind us that the blessed ones are those who have not seen and yet believe, and the writer of Hebrews would remind young Christians that faith calls for the conviction of things not seen.

Gabriel's response emphasizes that the baby would be born by the power of God. Once again the Holy Spirit is mentioned, as Luke does six more times in his first two chapters.

The word for "overshadow" carries the sense of the holy, powerful presence of God, as in the description of the cloud that "covered" or "settled upon" the tabernacle when the tent was filled with the glory of God. The word is used in all three accounts of the transfiguration to describe the overshadowing of the cloud. In each account of those three Gospels the voice of God comes out of the cloud, identifying Jesus as God's Son. This declaration is a striking reminder of Luke 1:35 where the life that results from the enveloping cloud is identified as "the Son of God." ✝

The Alabama Baptist will not publish a Dec. 26 issue. Sunday School lessons for Dec. 29 will be available at [www.thealabamabaptist.org](http://www.thealabamabaptist.org).



# Media reviews

**MOVIES/TV**

## Animated tale 'The Star' leads December's family-friendly lineup

By **Michael Foust**  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**F**inding a children's animated movie about the birth of Christ isn't easy. In fact if you're looking for something feature-length — that is, a 90-minute film to watch on family movie night — it's nearly impossible.

But there's good news: The best selection in that genre is now on Netflix.

### Nativity story

"The Star" (2017) tells the story of Christ's birth from the viewpoint of the animals as they follow Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem and overcome several hurdles along the way.

The film was released by the same company (Affirm Films) that was behind "War Room" and "Courageous" and features an all-star cast, including Patricia Heaton as Edith the camel.

"The Star" leads this month's list of family-friendly media options.

The movie stays faithful to the biblical story even if it does add a few elements for laughs and plot. Mary and Joseph trust God and He providentially cares for them

on their journey. We also hear the animals discuss the significance of Christ's birth.

"People are going to remember this night," one of the camels says following Christ's birth. "What happened here around this manger will be celebrated for thousands of years. Families will come together and exchange presents and sing carols — and all to remember the grace of this moment that we are witnessing right now."

Consider this caveat: If you only like biblical movies that stay 100% true to Scripture then this one's probably not for you.

"The Star" is a comedy for children and contains plenty of laughs (although not at the expense of Mary, Joseph or baby Jesus.) It also shows the wise men arriving the night of Christ's birth. (They actually didn't get there until much later.)

But if you're wanting a Christmas film for family movie night — and you're a Netflix subscriber — it's a solid choice.

### Also worth watching:

▶ **"The Mandalorian"** — It's the most prominent



Photo courtesy of Affirm

'The Star'

original series on Disney Plus and so far, it's family-friendly. The plot follows an armored bounty hunter (the Mandalorian) who fights the bad guys and protects what is good in the galaxy. The series is set a few years after the events of "Return of the Jedi" and features famous characters from the "Star Wars" series. Here's the good news for families: Thus far it contains no coarse language and no sexuality, and the violence is tame.

▶ **Uptv Christmas movies** — If family-friendly romantic Christmas movies are your thing then you might want to give Uptv's streaming service a try in December. This holiday season Uptv features 10 premiere movies, more than 60 titles

and more than 500 hours of Christmas content. Uptv — also called "UP faith and family" — specializes in family content for children, teens and adults.

Learn more at [UPTV.com](http://UPTV.com) where you can try it for free.

▶ **"Secret Life of Pets 2"** and **"Wonder Park"** — Two animated children's films make their streaming debut this month. "The

Secret Life of Pets 2" drops on Netflix on Dec. 27, while "Wonder Park" appears on Hulu on Dec. 30. "Secret Life" examines the unique bond between pets and children. It's child-friendly minus one slang term. "Wonder Park" tells the story of a young girl who loses but then rediscovers her joy for life after her mom becomes sick. Both are rated PG.

▶ **"Overcomer"** — This sixth movie from faith-based filmmakers Alex and Stephen Kendrick received a rare A+ CinemaScore from moviegoers. The film follows a successful high school basketball coach who grows discouraged when his best players move out of town and he is forced to coach cross country — a sport he hates. He then encounters an ailing blind man who — despite being near death — is filled with joy. "Overcomer" is available on home digital platforms, Blu-ray and DVD.✝



'The Mandalorian'

Photo courtesy of Lucasfilm Ltd.

## Meet the reviewer

Michael Foust covers the intersection of faith and entertainment as a media reviewer for The Alabama Baptist. He also is the husband of an amazing wife and the father of four young children.

# ‘Spiritual marker’

## Chinese government designates Lottie Moon’s church as historical site

**T**he name “Lottie Moon” is known by many in the Southern Baptist world. From the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO) to movies, books and documentaries detailing her life of service, Lottie Moon is often hailed as a “missionary hero.”

Lottie Moon’s legacy will now be preserved beyond the Southern Baptist realm.

Wulin Shenghui Church of Penglai in Shandong province, where Lottie Moon was a member during her time in Dengzhou, China, has been designated as a nationally protected historical and cultural site by the Chinese government, the China Christian Daily reported Nov. 14.

Sandy Wisdom-Martin — executive director of national Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) which

oversees the LMCO — is thankful for the continuing impact of Lottie Moon’s missionary legacy.

“We celebrate the decision to protect this location of historical significance,” she said. “More than a century later we still feel the impact of Lottie’s legacy that helped shape our global missionary enterprise. Her sacrifice for the sake of the gospel continues to inspire new generations to fulfill His Commission.”

Built in 1872 by Southern Baptist missionaries Tarleton and Martha Crawford, the church is still in use to this day with a current church membership of about 4,000.

The church was closed to foreigners in the 1900s but reopened in 1988. WMU leaders from the United States were some of the first foreigners to visit Lottie Moon’s church once it reopened.



China Christian Daily photo

Lottie Moon’s church in China, Wulin Shenghui Church of Penglai in Shandong province, was recently named a historical site by the Chinese government.

Within the walls of the European-styled church WMU leaders discovered a monument dedicated to Lottie Moon by Chinese Christians in 1915.

### Selfless love

“Lottie Moon’s love for the Chinese people meant that she gave her best to them — and her best was the good news that she shared by her life and witness as a Southern Baptist missionary,” said International Mission Board President Paul Chitwood, reflecting on the vital role Lottie Moon has played in Southern Baptist missions throughout the years.

“The Wulin Shenghui Church of Penglai Shandong province was

‘home base’ for Lottie and we are thrilled to see this site preserved, not as a monument to a missionary but as a spiritual marker to remind the world that the gospel is worthy of your life. God used Lottie Moon to change China and also to change Southern Baptists forever,” Chitwood said.

“We’re incredibly grateful for the legacy of her work in partnership with this local church and the more than \$4.5 billion given in her honor by Southern Baptists in the past 120 years to advance the gospel toward the vision of people from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, worshipping our Lord,” he said. (IMB)



Great Wall of China