

# Advent 2009

*South Main*

*Baptist Church*

*4100 Main Street*

*Houston, Texas*

*77002-9693*

*713-529-4167*

*www.smbc.org*

*Dr. Steve Wells*

*Pastor*

***For Advent events information, visit:***

***www.smbc.org/advent***

# Advent Schedule

## **HOPE: Week of November 29-December 5, 2009**

Worship – Hanging of the Green- So All Will Know...Hope  
Sunday, November 29, 11:00 a.m.

Gathering Stones  
Wednesdays, December 2, 9, 16, Noon - 1:00 p.m. in LB 204

Kids Day Out and Youth Wrapping Mission Fund Raiser  
Saturday, December 5, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

## **LOVE: Week of December 6-12, 2009**

Worship - So All Will Know... Love  
Sunday, December 6, 11:00 a.m.

Cookies and Carols  
Sunday, December 6, Noon - 3:00 p.m.

SMILE Christmas Lunch  
Tuesday, December 8, 11:00 a.m.; Fellowship Hall

“Let the Children Sing...”  
Wednesday, December 9, 6:30 p.m.; Fellowship Hall

## **JOY: Week of December 13-19, 2009**

Worship - So All Will Know...Joy  
Sunday, December 13, 11:00 a.m.

Service of Remembrance  
Sunday, December 13, 8:30 a.m. in the Westmoreland Chapel

“You Will Know Him When He Comes”

- A Christmas Concert  
Sunday, December 13, 5:40 p.m. in the Sanctuary

MainStreamers Christmas Lunch  
Monday, December 14, 11:45 a.m.; Fellowship Hall

Youth Christmas Party  
Friday, December 18, 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.; Youth Building

## **PEACE: Week of December 20-26, 2009**

Worship - So All Will Know...Peace  
Sunday, December 20, 11:00 a.m.

Christmas Brunch for Young and Median Adults  
Sunday, December 20, 9:45 a.m.; Fellowship Hall

Camels, Sheep and Donkey: A (Giggle-Filled) Journey to the Baby  
Sunday, December 20, 12:15 p.m., Fellowship Hall

Sharing Christmas with the Homeless  
Wednesday December 23, 5:00 p.m.; Gym

Christmas Eve Worship Services:  
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, 5:00 p.m.  
Carols, Candles, and Communion Service, 11:00 p.m.

Cocoa and Carols at Peggy’s Point  
Christmas Eve—following the 5 p.m. Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

## FOREWORD

### The Adventure of Advent

Our theme for Advent this year is, “So All Will Know”. For four weeks we’ll long for and then celebrate the coming of the Christ child. This book will be our guide as we share with each other the grace of Christ. This year let us remember that Jesus came into a world where might made right, oppression reigned, and hope found no voice – until the birth of a baby in far away Bethlehem. Surrounded by stalls and celebrated by shepherds, hope came into the world. Then the shepherds “made known abroad the saying told them concerning this child” and “all that heard it wondered at those things told them by the shepherds.” Hope was born for all to see and to know, but someone had to tell the story. As Jesus grew and began telling his story for himself, he gathered a band of disciples around himself, the youngest of which wrote, “for God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John said Jesus came so that the whole world would know the love of God. Jesus said, “I have come to give them joy and to make that

joy complete,” and “Peace I leave you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives, but my peace I give to you.” Hope. Love.



Joy. Peace. These are the gifts of God through His Son, our Savior, King Jesus. They are gifts for all the world to share. The angel sang, “good news of great joy which shall be for all the people.” This Advent, let us share the saying of the shepherds. Let us share with someone we love the love of the Father. Let us seek the joy and peace of Jesus both for ourselves and for all the world. Indeed, Jesus came So All Will Know.

grace and peace,

  
Steve

# FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

## Peace, Hope and Joy in the Midst of Change

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.* John 14:27

In August, we spent time at the beach. The day in Galveston was unusual because the water was blue and fairly clear rather than brown and murky. The pattern of the waves, however, was fairly typical: constantly changing. We stood in the same place, and the water changed. Gently rolling swells changed to breaking waves then almost disappeared. Sometimes the water seemed deeper or shallower, and I'd wonder if we had unintentionally moved farther from or closer to the shore, but neither was the case. As we stood in the same place, the pattern of the waves and the depth of the water changed.

Sometimes the breaking waves were a fun and exhilarating challenge. Other times they seemed almost too much. Their force nearly knocked me down, and their salt burned my eyes. Sometimes the calm seemed peaceful and a welcome relief; other times it felt almost boring. Sometimes the depth of the water felt good, even freeing. Other times it made me feel somewhat unsafe, like we might have wandered out a little too far from shore.

In some ways, life is like this beach experience. Change is inevitable and almost constant: part of the nature of things. Even if we continue to live in the same home, attend the same church, and work at the same job—things change. Babies are born, children

grow up, health issues arise, work and financial situations change, family members marry, and loved ones move away. Sometimes these changes feel easy, comfortable and joyous; other times they don't. Nevertheless, the changes continue.

## November



This Advent, as we prepare for Christmas in the midst of change, it seems important to claim God's gift of inner peace along with the hope and joy that often accompany it by remembering scripture's messages: The angels saying to the shepherds, as angels said to others as well, "Do not be afraid..." (Luke 2:10); Jesus saying to his disciples and us, "I will be with you always..." (Matthew 28:20); and Paul in his letters wishing for believers to know the reality and power of God's grace and peace that he experienced, even in prison.

These messages continue to be as true today as when they were initially spoken/written. If we'll let them, they can help us experience peace and hope and joy, even in the midst of change.

*May God's love and presence as expressed in these truths so deeply and consistently permeate our hearts and minds that peace, hope and joy become realities for each of us. Amen.*

Linda Brupbacher, an education professor at HBU, is Hart's wife, Lee and Lori's mom, and Lauren's mother-in-law. At South Main, she is a Bible study teacher, a member of the Fellowship Community, the Pearland and Pasadena South Main at Home Groups, the Go Team and the Spiritual Growth Committee.

# The Reason for the Season

*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17*

As we approach Advent, we should be mindful of the “reason for the season.” For me, the month of December is filled with holiday plans, pressure to get ready for this or that, the frantic rush to keep up with stresses of decorating the house, Christmas cards to be mailed, schedules to keep straight, and every year thinking, “if I just started a little earlier!” A friend once sent me this revised version of First Corinthians 13:

If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls, but do not show love to my family, I am just another decorator.

If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of cookies, preparing beautiful hors d’oeuvres, arranging a beautifully adorned table for parties and fail to listen to my friends, I am just another hostess.

If I trim the tree with shimmering balls and beautiful lights and write generous checks to charity yet fail to reflect on what this is all about, I have missed the potential joy of the season.

Love stops decorating to kiss the child.  
Love is kind, though harried and tired.  
Love doesn’t give only to those who are able to

give in return but rejoices in giving to those who can’t.

Love never fails. The giving of love will endure forever.

## November



Albert Einstein once said, “We are put here on earth for the sake of others, for the countless unknown souls with whose fate we are connected by a bond of sympathy. Each day I realize that I must strive to give in return for all that I have received from those who are with me now and those who have gone before.” Let us strive during this season of Advent to venture outside ourselves and enter it with a spirit of giving that stems from an inner thankfulness for what we have been given. I hope to find some quiet time each day in which I can reflect on the meaning of this greatest gift and try not to lose sight of the true reason for the season.

*Loving God, help us remember the birth of Jesus as an example of your outpouring of love for us. Let us experience the warmth that comes with sharing and the joy that prevails with giving. May we find time to share in the song of the angels, the joy of the shepherds, and the worship of the Wise Men. Amen.*

Carolyn Williams is a member of the Optional Curriculum Sunday School Community, sings in the choir, and is the wife of Tom Williams, Administrator and Minister to Senior Adults.

# The Christmas of 1950

*Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. Luke 2:51-52*

From birth, Jimmy lived in the Baptist Children's Home, in Troy, Alabama. In July of 1950, Mr. and Mrs. Kelly Cole adopted him. He had just turned eight that April. Jim was so excited; this inquisitive child who talked non-stop finally had a home and parents to love and care for him!

Jim loved going to Sunday school and church and singing in the children's choir.

As weeks and months passed, Christmas was fast approaching. With Christmas stories, carols, and parties, Jim was overwhelmed. He had never experienced the anticipation that Advent season brings. He had never even had a Christmas tree. When the Coles began putting up their tree, Jim asked if he could help decorate it. His mother told him "yes, of course." She tells that he pulled out a little toy man dressed in a white suit out of his pocket and asked if he could put this on the tree. With the help of his dad, Jim put the little toy man on one of the very top branches. Every Christmas thereafter, they put the same ornament near the top of their Christmas tree.

After Jim and I married, our first Christmas together was imminent. Mrs. Cole gave me the little white-suited toy man, and she told me story of the Christmas of 1950. If you come to our house during Christmas, you will find the little toy man dressed in a white suit on one of the top branches of our Christmas tree.

This year as we prepare for Christmas during Advent with great anticipation, let us look at the little things that mean so much. That simple little adornment dressed in the white suit sitting at the top of our Christmas tree is not just a simple plastic toy, but an expression of unconditional love and the joy of a first Christmas!

*Heavenly Father, during this Advent Season help each of us find that feeling of unconditional love and joy of a first Christmas. Amen.*

Barbara Cole is wife of Jimmy, mother of Angie Durand, Katrina Bigham and Ken Cole, and grandmother of Amy and Sally Durand and Katelyn, Ashleigh and Taylor Bigham. She is active in the Marytha Sunday School Community.

## December



# Get Our “Linus” On

*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. Luke 2:8*

Watching *A Charlie Brown Christmas* is part of our annual family tradition. Whether it airs in November or it airs in December, it does not matter. We have to watch it “live.” Now, I know you’ll say it comes in tape and DVD form so we can watch it whenever we want. But it is not the same. We interrupt our lives to watch it whenever it airs. We have missed rehearsals, parties, and worst of all...dinner parties!

Each year when I watch the program, I try to find a representational character of my Christmas season. Sometimes I am Lucy—well-intentioned, yet hyper-critical and unfulfilled with every outcome. Sometimes I can identify with Charlie Brown’s sister. “All I want is what I have coming to me,” she says. Often times, I am Snoopy, into all the distractions and trappings of the season and oblivious to anything else. This year, I am afraid I am Charlie Brown himself. I am the one shouting in frustration... “Does anyone know what Christmas is all about?”

Some Christmas I would like to play the role of “Linus.” I will be the still, small voice. I’d like to be in that theoretical spotlight for twenty seconds

declaring with simplicity and power that I know what Christmas is all about, and my life is offered as proof. I am confident about that first part, but the proof in the living? That is the uncomfortable part. There’s scrutiny out there in the spotlight.

## December



I have always assumed the creator of this wonderful story, Charles Schultz, probably considered himself to be the “Linus” to the world because that is the role he filled for me and millions of others. But I learned recently he was no saint. He was far from it. He was just a man, a person looking for God. That makes me feel better. He was one of us, and God used Schultz’ gifts simply and powerfully.

*Dear Heavenly Father, Free us to tell the Christmas story using whatever gifts you have given us. Help us to get our “Linus” on. Amen.*

Sandra Cutsinger serves as the donut director for the College Department. Mitch is her husband of thirty years. They live in Katy with their daughter Emily who is a senior at James Taylor High School.

# Finding Our Bethlehem

*Joseph went up...to register in the city of David called Bethlehem...with him went Mary...his betrothed who was expecting her first child. While they were there...she gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger for there was no room for them at the inn. Luke 2:4-7*

During the darkest days of World War II, my engineer dad was hired to work on a defense project that involved deepening the ports on the Mississippi River. Knowing this was an enormous undertaking that would take several years to complete, my parents leased our southeast Texas home, and our family, including the cat and dog, moved to Greenville, Mississippi.

We arrived to find Greenville burgeoning with people from the nearby military base. There were no vacant houses, apartments, or even hotel rooms. We had no place to live! Our only option was to remain in the motel my dad had secured as “temporary,” and though my parents searched the paper daily and questioned realtors regularly, no housing was available.

Days turned into weeks; December arrived. My dad lamented our situation, but my wise mother began her holiday preparation. She placed a wreath on the door and found a small Christmas tree which filled a corner. Each day I watched as colorfully wrapped gifts appeared beneath its decorated branches.

When Christmas morning came, we opened our gifts with laughter, shared the delicious feast my mother had prepared in the tiny kitchen, and in my childish heart there was no doubt that we had “kept Christmas” in this unlikely place.

## December



As I sift through the memories of Christmases past, this one in a strange place, in uncomfortable housing, and in the midst of a world war was one of the best of my childhood. For the crowded room had become a new Bethlehem where loved ones shared the joy of simple gifts in the presence of the One whose birthday we celebrated. For Bethlehem is not only a dot on the map of Judea; it is also the place in our heart where we worship the newborn King.

*Father, while we long for the comfort of the familiar, change and insecurity often swirl through our lives taking us to unfamiliar places and experiences. This Advent lead us to our own Bethlehem to see that the everlasting light of Christ shines on the streets of our lives showing us the path to the manger. Amen.*

Carmen LePere is a member of the sanctuary choir and the Pilgrimage Sunday School Community. She and Gerald have two daughters, Leslea and LeeAnn, and five grandchildren.

# Children's Advent Reflections

*"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is." 1 John 3:1-2*

When I hear the word Christmas I think of God. I think of Jesus and Mary. My family usually travels or at least see my family at my house. I think that we do that most Christmas Holidays because we want to be with family at a special time. Sometimes at Christmas we have a big feast.  
Chase Fisher is a 5<sup>th</sup> grader and the son of Andy and Courtney Fisher.

On Christmas Eve part of South Main Baptist Church goes out and brings hot chocolate, tamales and blankets [to the homeless]. Then we go home and go to sleep. On Christmas morning, I wake up early and go to my brother Andrew's room and I start jumping on him. Then he wakes up and we wake up our parents.  
Abby Cline is a 5<sup>th</sup> grader and the daughter of Wade and Lainie Cline.

Christmas to me is good. We get to get together with family and friends. We eat and we have fun. When

the children are waiting for their presents. Imagine the excitement they feel when they first see those gifts. How would you feel if you were that little kid? Well, I already know how it feels. How would you like to feel if it were you opening those presents on Christmas Day? My family and I always go to the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service after that we go to our house and eat. Then we go have fun after a while we go check on our presents. We find all these different types of bags and gifts we are all happen then we all stay for a couple more minutes to enjoy the rest of the night and we all fall asleep pretty quickly. Then in the morning we all go home and enjoy the rest of our lives.  
Lucia Silva is a 5<sup>th</sup> grader and the

daughter of Lucia and Eduardo Silva.

*Almighty God, Make us wise, to wait for thee, to watch for thee, to wish for thee, until the breaking of the day. May we have the faith of children, now and always. Amen.*

## December



# Boot Prints

*Do not be afraid, for I am with you.* Genesis 26:24

Like many children, life's wonders are nothing less than adventure. My younger brother, Mom, Dad, and two Dalmatians named Beep and Bunny lived in a newly built home in Birmingham, Alabama. Our new home had a brick fireplace. Magic took place there every Christmas Eve. My brother and I were good all year (I promise!). Tucked away snugly in our beds, we anticipated what the morning would bring, or more precisely, what Santa would bring.

Rushing to the living room early Christmas morning, our eyes as wide as saucers, we enjoyed Santa's surprises. Clearly visible in the fireplace pile of ashes were the fresh imprints of Santa's boots! Beep and Bunny validated the evidence with enthusiastic sniffing and barking.

Anticipation and adventure are not solely reserved for children. While our lives in Christ are abundant and full, we are still stretched and challenged, given new and sometimes terrifying life experiences. We are overwhelmed by the reality of being forgiven, loved, and held in God's embrace. Over and over again in

God's calling, scripture shows timid servants assured and empowered by God's promise of being together with them. "Do not be afraid for I am with you," God tells us. The Chinese characters, Yi Ma Nei Li, Emmanuel, "God with us," are displayed at the front of registered Chinese Christian churches across Sichuan Province in the People's Republic of China. Anticipation, adventure, overcoming our own fears and failures, even these are made "full" through the presence of God with us.

## December



*Dear Lord, through your promise of companionship we are comforted, encouraged, enabled, and strengthened for that to which you have called us. Thank you for filling our lives with the wonder and joy of your presence. Lord, may we be bold servants knowing that we are not*

*alone. Amen.*

Bill and Michelle Cayard are members of South Main and since 2003 have served as Cooperative Baptist Fellowship field personnel living in Sichuan Province, China.

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

# His Hope for Me

*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together... but encouraging one another... Hebrews 10:23-25*

I think we all have our hopes for the Christmas season. “I hope I can get all of my shopping done.” “I hope Dolores likes her present.” “I hope I get a chance to relax this Christmas.” But those are just the day-to-day desires that run through my head. What about the bigger “hope?” When I look around the world today, there are many things that seem “hopeless:” global warming, recession, political gridlock. The list goes on.

Then I remember. My hope lies in my God. Not in God as a concept, but in my relationship with God as my father, friend, and partner. I can get distracted by personal stresses or lost in the vast problems of the world. But when I focus on my relationship with Him, it all becomes simple and clear. All of this other stuff comes and goes, but God is always there, always wanting the very best for me, always ready to step in if I ask.

It’s easy to think of what I hope for my girls. I hope they are happy, make wise choices, have wonderful relationships, and know God’s amazing love, peace, and joy. I see their potential for a full and wonderful life. I know they will mess up or have difficulties, but I know I’ll love them through all of it.

## December



I know God has a hope of what my life can be. I just have to continually let him lead the way. The great thing is that I don’t have to go it alone. I have my “Family of God” at South Main who support me, remind me, encourage me, accept me, and love on me.

*Dear God, Thank you for seeing our potential and believing in us when we have trouble believing in ourselves. Help us to surrender control to you so you can use us fully. Help us to bind together as the Family of God. Amen.*

Steve Rader is married to Dolores and has three girls, Anna, Abigail, and Lauren. He teaches Sunday school, works with FPU, and plays with the South Main Brass.

# Thinking and Thanking

*“Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God.”*  
Philippians 1:3

The Holcomb Reunion was started and held for many years at my family’s cabin near Taos, N.M. About 100 family folk would stay in R.V.’s, trailers, or at Vi’s Travel Lodge about a mile away.

We talked, ate, caught-up, pitched washers, and ate again in the cool summer mountain air. A family craft auction was a more creative and enjoyable alternative to a per-person cost for food and utilities. We hand-made things like quilts, wooden toys, games, jellies, and kitchen towels. The original 10 brothers and sisters thought taking home a yearly family keepsake was a greater gift than simply paying for “2 adults and 2 children.”

Before starting home, we sang and prayed together as we had church with our larger family. Those heart-prints are precious memories now. They are indelible markers to me of love, joy, and encouragement.

Paul tells the Philippian church that every time he thinks of them, he gives thanks to his God. Memories made and loved shared are the hallmark of this living relationship for Paul. With sweet memories wrapped

in love for the future, he was encouraged by the faith they shared in Christ. He could face anything knowing he had been so loved.

## December



Advent reminds us to give thanks for the Promise wrapped in love for our future. It is also to be a heart experience of being loved and an encouragement to share that love with others. Paul didn’t know what the future held. He did know, however, Who held the future.

Be encouraged by being so loved.

Believe the adventure of knowing Christ as the blessing of your life.

Born in Shamrock, Texas, Toni Richerson joined South Main in January 1974. She currently teaches in the adult communities. She has served on several committees,

sings in the choir, and is a deacon.

# Away With the Manger

*And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.*

Luke 2:40

It was Thanksgiving Day, 2008. The feast had been consumed, the table cleared, everyone sated. The men and granddaughters had retreated to the family room to indulge in football. Only my daughter and daughter-in-law remained with me at the dining table, catching up on girl talk.

I looked across the foyer to the living room to see a baby doll perched on the piano bench, boosted atop two thick phone books, tiny fingers placed on the piano keys. Puzzled by knowing there were no dolls left in my house, I was shocked to realize it was my porcelain Baby Jesus doll! I was horrified to think that someone had lifted him out of the manger and placed him in such a contemporary setting.

Immediately, I knew who that someone was: my forty-five year old boy-child who earlier in the day had set up my Christmas tree, ready to be decorated.

Well, Baby Jesus did look really cute, sitting there as if performing Bach or Brahms! I began to laugh at the humor of it. But, I still had to deal with the

perpetrator. Putting on my most stern “mother posture,” I confronted him. In his defense, knowing that her involvement might very well save his skin, he quickly confessed that his twenty-three year old niece had assisted in the caper. Then in all seriousness, he said, “Mom, he’d been in that old manger way too long, and he was sick of it!”

Is that what we do with that tiny peaceful baby who never cries? Do we leave him trapped in that manger, or do we get him out, wrap him around our lives until his story becomes a part of who we are? The wonder of it—God living within us—bursting our hearts at the seams to get out, waiting for us to share His love to everyone within our reach!

*Lord Jesus, forgive us when we become passive by leaving you in the manger. In everything we do this Advent Season and beyond, make us aware that we do it for your purpose, to further your Kingdom, here and for eternity. Amen.*

Bobbie Lott, a deacon, and a teacher of children for most of her forty-eight years as a South Mainer, has graduated to teaching adults in Sunday school and as facilitator in a South Main at Home group.

## December



# The Center of My Orbit

*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."*  
Matthew 2:1-2

Some people take the time to observe and act on things unseen by the majority. Three wise men made a journey thousands of miles to celebrate the fulfillment of a promise they had seen in the stars and the change they knew it heralded.

Recently it was reported that an amateur astronomer in Australia witnessed an impact event that forever changed the face of Jupiter. Images from the Hubble telescope now clearly show the magnitude of a powerful collision from an outside force on the face of the largest planet in our solar system. These celestial bodies, Jupiter and whatever landed there so forcefully, have been moving in space since creation. When they met one spent itself completely and the other is certainly marked forever. Studies will continue to examine and determine the extent and content of the change.

## December



We celebrate a celestial arrival this season, an impact event of even greater magnitude. If we are observant and see the promise, how can we remain stationary in our course when kings have left their kingdoms and shepherds left their flocks. Then, ourselves and our course forever changed, we begin to make our own journey as testimony to our unfettering. How many bodies will be affected by our passing? We are blessed to be impacted and impactful. Who can witness the arrival of the deliverer from above and not make the journey in celebration of release?

*Lord, you have set me on a journey, laid the path at my feet, and you sent your Son to light my way. Let me be moved through faith and the Holy Spirit, fearing not to bare witness to you, my Creator, and Jesus. Let me place you at the center of my orbit. Amen.*

Ken Kolter is husband to Bobbye and father to Katlyn, Madison, and Alison.

# Love

*This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they’ve done to our relationship with God. I John 4:9-10*

Love is a wonderful thing. The Creator of the universe was filled with so much love that He wanted to share it not just with the angels, but with whom? He decided to create a world, fill it with people and give them a choice between good and evil. That is just what He did. But, mankind chose only evil, and this grieved the loving Creator. The power of evil and sin was so strong that God had to empower man himself to overcome sin; He had to recreate Himself in us.

This advent season we will celebrate Christ’s arrival to a sinful world. His personal son, God’s ultimate gift of love to humankind, came to the world in the form of an infant child to be raised totally human yet fully God, to live and breathe just as we do, to grow up sharing our pain, to teach us how to make good choices, and to be a role model for humankind. Then, as an adult he died in our place.

No clearer way is there to show love than this: to live for somebody and then to die for them. That is exactly what Christ Jesus did for those who will just believe. For over twenty years, making bad choices was my life until during one of my times in jail the Lord Jesus Christ came into my heart. With Christ in me and loving me, I am now able to make good choices and live a life I never knew before. During this advent season, let us remember in the simplest yet most gracious way what the Creator has done for us and share it with those around us.

*Father, this advent season do not let us miss the opportunities that you give us to share your love with those you have placed in our lives. Fill us with the spirit of love so that we can draw this dying world to the greatest*

*gift of love, your son Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Joseph Kelsay is on the properties staff at SMBC.

## December



# Second Blessings

*I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessings.* Ezekiel 34:26

A recent conversation with friends concerned times in our lives when our prayers have been doubly answered, when we have experienced serendipities, when we have had second blessings. Every time I hear about second blessings, I think of my cousin Arnold Joe.

It was summer and five-year-old Arnold Joe, whom we called J-Boy, had come to spend a long vacation with us. He was a city boy and quite taken with farm life. Yet he had difficulty keeping up with his cousins and was forever losing track of time.

J-Boy loved meal time at our big dining room table with everyone vying for food and conversation. On this day when we gathered for noon-time dinner, J-Boy was missing. Questions went around: “Do you know where he is?” “Where did you see him last?” But on a busy farm, summer meals can not wait. My dad said, “Well, we’ll have to start without him; he’ll be here.

Sure enough, five minutes later through our back door came a surprised, obviously sad J-Boy. He looked around the table and through tears cried, “You said the blessing without me.”

My father motioned him to his chair between cousins. I was sure Daddy would say, “Well, J-Boy, it’s your own fault; you should have been on time.” But from the blessed recesses of my father’s soul came the words, “Well, there’s certainly nothing wrong with saying the blessing twice.” Which he did. At the end, I looked across the table at a beaming J-Boy wiping his tears with the back of a dirty hand.

In years since then, I have often thought we could have missed that blessing, and all it took was an extra minute and a loving uncle.

This memory often comes to me at Christmas, “in season” as the Ezekiel scripture says, as our family sits around our Christmas table. I think of the seasonal blessings that tie generation to generation – often the gift of a loving earthly father and always the gift of our loving Heavenly Father.

*Father, help us, like J-Boy, to anticipate with joy the blessing of gathering together to give thanks to you, to recognize and appreciate our second blessings. Amen.*

Yvonne Garrett has been an active member of South Main since 1947. She is a member of the Reba Sunday School Community, Bible study leader for South Main at Home, a deacon, a busy wife, mother and grandmother.

## December



# Traditions

*You have heard...how in the practice of our national religion I was outstripping many of my Jewish contemporaries in my boundless devotion to the traditions of my ancestors.*

Galatians 1:14

This past Christmas was the first Christmas that Angie and I spent together as husband and wife. Previously, we had spent time with each other's family, but this past year we were able to spend Christmas alone. That meant that, for the first time, the traditions of our two families went head-to-head. When do we decorate the tree? Do we put items in our stockings? When do we do that? When do we make gingerbread men?

In the same way, the Christmas story is chock full of tradition. The traditions are not just those Christian ones of a stable birth, wise men from the East, and angels singing a holy chorus on such a peaceful night. There are the neighbors that thought John should be called Zechariah, after his father according to tradition, and Joseph wanted to divorce Mary quietly, after the traditions of Moses from the Pentateuch. Tradition permeates the story.

Tradition is important because it reminds us of who we are, and it anchors us when so much around us is

in flux. It helps us to weather the storm and comforts us too. It points back from where we came, but it points forward to where we are going as well. Paul spoke of being zealous for the traditions of his forefathers, and certainly Jesus came to fulfill the Law. Let us not forget that great cloud of witnesses that cheers us all on.

## December



So, this year, Angie and I will be working to blend the traditions from both our families. We'll also be looking to start our own traditions. But, whether we spend time with her family – and compete at building gingerbread houses – or with my family – where we're more likely to sit around and visit – we'll be confident in those traditions because of their legacy.

*Lord Jesus, we wait for you. As the traditions unfold around us, we wait for your presence here on earth to bring peace to a hurting world. Amen.*

Stephen Fox is married to Angie. They currently work together in the children's Sunday School Department.

## THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

### Reflections and Touchstones

*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11*

Advent is a time when I look back to see what God has done in my life—a time for me to reflect on the year’s “touchstones” - the things which have impacted my life in profound ways.

Last summer while serving as an intern in Guatemala with Buckner International, I had the opportunity to experience first-hand the extreme poverty of The Dump. This was more than a city dump; it was a neighborhood of shacks where people live, work, and survive in the mountains of garbage. Touched to my very core, I saw people go through their daily routine of picking through the mounds of trash hoping to find food for their families. Back home, working at Mission Waco’s Meyer Center, I was touched by the faces of the homeless as they stood in line to receive a free lunch. Time spent with indigent mothers-to-be at Care Net in Waco left a stamp on my heart. I know that God allowed me to experience these things not just to feel sadness for the world in general, but He wanted me to realize I can make a difference in particular.

# December



The song “I Saw What I Saw” by Christian artist Sara Groves makes me think of all of these things which have had a great impact on my heart. Groves sings:

*I saw what I saw and I can't forget it  
I heard what I heard and I can't go back*

*I know what I know and I can't deny it*

*Something on the road cut me to the soul*

*Your pain has changed me ...*

*Your courage asks me ...*

*What I know of love.*

I believe these lyrics truly describe how God uses unsettling experiences to put a fire in our hearts.

When we open ourselves to be servants to one another, we can use even the most undesirable situations to share His love and meet the needs

of others. What are your touchstones for 2009? What has God intended you to see and never forget?

*Father, guide my reflections, inspire me to make a difference and bless those who need a helping hand. Amen.*

Molly Dethrow is a senior Child and Family Studies major at Baylor University. She has attended South Main since birth and has a heart for missions.

# Eyes of Hope

*I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs.* Isaiah 41:18

Soaring live oak branches surround the raised walkway that connects the Loessner and Chafin buildings. I always enjoy the feeling of walking through a forest canopy. The foliage is always lush and green, even during Houston's hot, dry summer.

But the elegant curve of the branches is marred by shriveled brown patches. I used to wonder why our landscapers left the ugly clumps in place. Shouldn't they clean off the dead growth to better display the beauty of the living plants?

Then I went on a tour of the Houston Arboretum. At one point our guide showed us some familiar patches on an oak branch. Resurrection Fern, he called it. When moisture is plentiful, the delicate fronds thrive and spread. As the weather grows hotter and drier, the ferns wilt, turn brown, and curl up. If you don't know better, they appear dead. But when dark clouds fill the sky and rain pours down, then the ferns uncurl, flush green, and begin to grow again. They were never really dead, only dormant. Their seeming death is an adaptation that allows them to survive

the extremes of our weather.

## December



After the next rainstorm, I went up to the church walkway and looked. All the ugly dead patches had transformed into beautiful green ferns. Ever since then, those withered brown clumps look different to me. Where I used to see unsightly trash cluttering my pretty view, now I see a marvel of God's creation, and a reminder of faith.

When the hope of Christ is in our hearts, we see the world with different eyes. What looks like despair and death can really be hope and life, waiting for the right time to emerge. An unwed pregnancy can conceal a miracle. A makeshift bed in an animal's feed trough can become a sign proclaimed by angels. An unjust execution and a Messiah's grave can lead to an empty tomb.

*Lord, help us to see through eyes of hope. Help us see your hand at work even in dry and withered times, and keep hope alive while we wait for rain. Amen.*

Angela Holder came to South Main in 1987. She sings in the sanctuary choir and helps teach Music Makers II.

# Exalt the Lord in Song

*But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.* Malachi 3:2-3

My favorite scripture is the one I'm singing at the moment. During the Christmas season, that means anything from Handel's oratorio "The Messiah."

I have had the privilege of singing with Golden Gate Seminary's Oratorio Chorus and the Marin Symphony performing "The Messiah." My score is now worn and yellowed, paperclips have rusted, and the sale price has doubled. However, I look back at years of practice and performance notations and vividly recall how an artist's musical interpretation of what God wants us to understand through scripture helped me form a deeper understanding of those scriptures.

With Air No. 6 and Chorus No. 7, we sing Handel's expression which tells of God's love for us and asks if we are ready for Christ's coming. Christ will refine and purify us so our work done in his name will be

done with a pure heart. Hypocrisy and fraud cannot endure his fire. Just as a metal smith uses heat to strengthen and fire to eliminate impurities, Christ will do the same with us. He will remove the dross, the foreign matter, which has no place in his kingdom.

## December



God's promise is that we may go to him and he will forgive us. It is not too late! His refining, although often an unpleasant look within, is the love he has for us. Just as a loving parent takes the time to discipline a child, God takes the time to refine us because he wants us to have all the blessings of heaven -- so much so that we do not have room enough for all of it and that we may give him an offering in righteousness.

*Dear Heavenly Father, During what is almost always a fast and busy season, grant us the willingness to slow down each day to reflect on the enormity of the wonderful gift of your son's life, your immense love for us, and how we may offer ourselves to you in righteousness. Amen.*

Meredith Pinson-Creasey and her husband David recently joined South Main. At Baylor, they have a senior, Austin, and a freshman, Brooks.

# A Sense of Belonging

*But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. Isaiah 43:1*

As a child I couldn't help asking myself the same question on Christmas morning: “Which one is mine?” My parents seemed to catch on, and every year my presents were wrapped in unique paper to keep me guessing. Ironically, the meaning of Christmas was overshadowed by my sense of entitlement. I must have noticed this subconsciously because phrases like “But I was good this year!” and “It's a tradition!” flooded my thoughts.

During my teens I began to enjoy methods of gift procurement more than opening presents. Driving to Macy's for Doorbusters at 6:00 a.m. and Ebay sniping—bidding at the last minute to win auctions—were my preferred methods. The hysteria of last-minute shopping was also infectious. Why not go to the mall one more time? Marketers had surely chosen the right age demographic for advertising!

Years later the whole experience has become much more symbolic. I'm much more excited to give gifts and watch loved ones enjoy them. After being away at college, I'm glad to be home and watch the seasons change. I'm blessed to have a church home

with so many opportunities for worship. On Christmas morning I no longer rush to open gifts before sunrise. I've come to appreciate sleep more as a working adult!

## December



I'm proud to acknowledge that my newfound maturity about this holiday is a milestone in my spiritual journey. I look forward to growing and learning at every opportunity. Each day is a celebration because I have another opportunity to fulfill my purpose. At times the future is frightening but it doesn't last long because I know that God is guiding my steps. I wonder about certain things, but I never question the fact that I have been “summoned for duty.”

As Christians we have the opportunity to remember and refocus during Advent. We are reminded to immerse ourselves in a celebration of Christ. Commercialism will never replace this

sacred time and society will never do it justice. Our gift will surpass all others because we know to whom we belong.

*O God please help us to remember our calling. Let us never forget that you will be with us each and every day. Remind us that we are truly yours. Amen.*

Chelsea Wade is the Buckner Ministry Coordinator at South Main. She is also a member of the Young Adult Community.

# God's Faithfulness

*The Lord's loving kindnesses indeed never ceases for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness.*

Lamentations 3:22-23

Music, an integral part of our Advent celebration, plays a special role in our worship all year long. One of my favorite hymns, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," speaks of God's constant provision for His children. In the second verse, the writer focuses on the faithfulness of God as seen in all seasons and through all nature. For the last six or seven years around the beginning of Advent, Carl and I observed that an osprey comes to our neighborhood. Albeit an unlikely place, he uses a big drainage ditch as his source for food. Driving on one of our busiest streets, we are lucky enough to watch occasionally his amazing diving skill and aerial acrobatics. He swoops down to the surface of the water, darts back up with a fish in his talons, then perches on a light pole to consume his catch seemingly undisturbed by the hustle and bustle of suburbia and unnoticed by the people below.

In a most unlikely place, we observe a spectacular example of God's faithfulness. The hymn writer eloquently states that there are "manifold witnesses" in nature which support the amazing provisions God

has for us. We look forward to our next sighting of the osprey. We also remember that we gain strength as we wait on God, we mount up with wings like eagles, we run without being tired, and we walk without being weary. (Isaiah 40:31).

## December



I can't help wondering where this osprey spends the rest of the year. How far did he fly to get here? How does he find his way back each year? How does he know when it is time to return from whence he came? When I see him for the first time each year, I get excited. 2009 has been a year with many uncertainties in my life, but just as God provides for this osprey, He is faithful in providing for me.

*Father, thank you for allowing me to see your provisions for the birds of the air, the animals of the earth, and creatures of the sea. Although they do not sow, reap, nor gather into barns, you feed them. Help me remember that you will provide for me just as you provide for them. Amen.*

Lou Wilks is married to Carl. She has one son, Jonathan who is married to Sonia. Lou is a part of the Pilgrimage Sunday School Community and the Pasadena-Clear Lake-Pearland South Main at Home Group.

# Sharing Togetherness

*Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.*

Hebrews 2:11

Family gatherings are always special— at Christmas or at other times. During each, we gain a sense of joy and fulfillment that sustains and uplifts us well beyond the event itself. As the get-together approaches, we plan and anticipate. We carve time from our busy schedules to make these events occur. We all seize an element to share with others. Small houses, that have meaning for all of us, are stuffed well beyond their capacity so we can all be as one. Late night meetings around the kitchen table are common where we continue to stay abreast of each other's lives, share key issues, and encourage each other.

We experience this same sense of togetherness, sharing and discovery, through our church family. Sunday school events are special because of the preparations and expectancy ahead of time, and we all find a way to communicate, encourage and revel in the warmth of each others' company. If there is a

service project, we all participate. We discover that the result amplifies itself, and it exceeds everyone's expectations.

During these busy holiday times, we must enjoy the planning and anticipation. We must also seize a moment to sense the sharing, discovery, and accomplishments that strengthen and sustain each of our families and our family in Christ at South Main Baptist Church.

*Father, thank you for the sense of togetherness, sharing and discovery that occurs whenever we are together as a family. Help us to share this same sense of joy and discovery with those that we encounter throughout our busy lives. Amen.*

Alan Smith is currently chairman of the Stewardship committee, a member of the Shirl Sunday School Community, a deacon, and a greeter. He and his wife have two children, Lynsey and Brian.

## December



# Children's Advent Reflections

*“Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.” 1*

Peter 2:2-3

When I hear the word Christmas I think about the nativity scene and buying a tree at the nursery. I think about decorating the house and the cinnamon candles that my mom lights. I think about stockings and the Christmas Eve service and how Jesus came into the world.

Ned Swart is a 5<sup>th</sup> grader and son of Sam and Lisa Swart.

During See the Manger [Camels, Sheep and Donkey: A (Giggle-Filled) Journey to the Baby] I help out as a Shepard. After the service I go with others to help the homeless in the cold. It's important because I get to help little kids understand the story more and I help others.

Joshua Wells is a 5<sup>th</sup> grader and son of Steve and Missy Wells.

On Christmas day I wake up and go see the presents under the tree. Then I run to my parents bedroom and wake up my mom and dad. Then we all run to the tree and I give out presents 1 to my mom, 1 to my dad, 1 to me and so on and so on. We always have a tree! Then I give out stockings and we open stuff inside of our stockings. Then my parents let me play with my

toys and eat breakfast. After we're dressed and stuff we go to my grandmas. At my grandmas we visit with my cousins, my aunt and uncle and grandparents.

Everyone comes to my grandmas house. First we visit with each other then we eat lunch and dessert. When we're all ready we open presents. After my cousin Angela and I hand out presents the adults watch us open our presents. Then we play with all of our toys and games. When everyone has left except for my Aunt and Uncle, my grandparents, my mom and dad and I. My parents decide to let me sleep over because I want to visit with my cousins, Scott and Angela. Then when my parents leave my grandma makes us hot chocolate and we go to bed.

Isabella Baar-Hill is a 5<sup>th</sup> grader and the daughter of J Hill and Hillevi Baar.

## December



*Dear God, You are good to us. May we be reminded to look for you in the simple joys and true unwrapped gifts of this Advent and Christmas season. Prepare our hearts and minds for your presence among us and may we prepare our lives for your great gift of love to be born on Christmas day. Amen.*

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

### How Near is Our God?

*Don't worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, and the peace of God, which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ Jesus. Phil. 4:4-7*

One of life's lessons experienced early in my adult life occurred when my son arrived prematurely. His mother had developed severe complications, slipped into a coma, experienced convulsions, and was revived several times before doctors delivered Gary by cesarean section.

As I watched my wife facing death, I was absolutely terrified for her and our son's safety. Several days after Gary's traumatic but safe arrival, my wife was still in a coma. My faith was at a breaking point. Sleepless days and nights ran together in exhaustion. Fear gripped my life as never before. Questions raced through my mind about God, His will, and the meaning of life. I was sinking in a well of doubt, my faith being squeezed out of me.

Saturday morning the pastor of Broadway Baptist Temple and my spiritual mentor, Brother Jenkins, appeared. If ever I have known a "prayer warrior," he was. He told me he felt compelled to assure me that

God would see us through this ordeal. At that moment peace swallowed all the raging fear that had gripped my being. In those few minutes the heavy weight of doubt lifted, and my "heart and mind" began to "rest in Christ Jesus." That night restful sleep finally came. By Sunday afternoon, my wife began to pull out of the coma.

# December



Several months later as Christmas arrived, the gift of peace and joy were truly alive in our home and in my life. How fortunate we as Christians are to have such a God, such a promise of peace and rest! During this advent season will we claim that promise for our lives and rest in Christ Jesus?

*Heavenly Father, thank you for being as near as our very thoughts. Guard our hearts and minds from fears and worries that so insidiously rob us of our joy. Make us aware that your lasting peace can only come as we rest in your beloved son, Christ Jesus. Amen.*

Gary Inman is a graduate of Baylor University, president of Mainland Construction Inc., and a member of South Main's Pilgrimage Sunday School Community. His daughter, Skyler Inman, is a member of the Tenth Grade Youth Department.

# A Broken Hallelujah

*...How I hate the shepherds of Israel who care only for themselves! Should not the shepherd care for the sheep? Ezekiel 34:1*

My parents have Alzheimer's and I can't communicate with them the way I used to. I can't bring them to the Christmas Eve service like I used to even a couple of years ago. It's too difficult and something bad is bound to almost happen if I try. My mother liked all the songs and hummed along which was nice and implied peace. My dad tended to get up because his legs bothered him when he had to sit still for too long. I think he liked the whole outing though even if he couldn't make it to the candle part at the end.

When we go over to my folks' house now for Christmas, it's not like it used to be. There may be outbursts or frustrations about clothes or more likely something new and unforeseen. Eventually though we will open the presents we bought for them and tell them what they are. We also bring gifts for them to give to each other because they would have done this if they were both okay.

I sometimes wonder, especially around times like this, if the part of my parents that is no longer here is maybe somewhere else, in heaven already or

something, looking down, waiting for the rest of them to catch up. Maybe that doesn't make sense, but nobody is able to tell me what the rules are for this and the thought gives me comfort.

## December



Often it feels there's not much peace in our hearts except the intermittent kind that tells us that we don't really have it. But we look for it, sometimes glimpse it and even grasp it fleetingly. More often though, if we are able to sit still, it gracefully settles upon us in an unexpected way. For those moments, partly in heaven and partly here, as quiet as the delivery of a thought, we offer a broken hallelujah.

*Father, we pray that our efforts to give comfort to others will bring a sense of heaven to earth, a foretaste of your true and perfect peace. Amen.*

Greg Funderburk is the husband of Kelly and the father of Hank, 11 and Charlie, 6. He is a lawyer and the President of the Board of Directors of Amazing Place, an adult day center for those with mild to moderate Alzheimer's or related dementias.

# Garden of Joy

*Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with his love, He will rejoice over you with singing.*  
Zephaniah 3: 14-20

Looking at my “to-do list” this Christmas season, I wonder if I will feel fulfilled and nourished by the tasks I have chosen, or will I simply be drained and exhausted by completing each “necessary” task?

The very core of Christmas is the gift of Christ to us from God. What better joy could I find? But do I see it? In all of my busyness, will I actually show up? Will I worry that my cookies are a little “dark,” my shoes are from last season, and the bows on my presents are not perfect? Will my shell arrive with my joy and spirit elsewhere? I have a choice of engaging in the life God has given me or going through the motions.

Barbara Holland says, “Gloom we have always with us, a rank and sturdy weed, but joy requires tending.” Tending to the garden of my life, I want to pluck the weeds. I want to be quieted by God’s love in order to see the flowers of my life. I re-examine my

to-do list. I see the gloom that I have cultivated, and I want to nurture the joy. Blowing my budget on gifts is gloom; sacrificing rest for meaningless gatherings equals gloom. But, making treats with family, sipping hot cocoa, and going on Christmas light tours with friends are joyous. Finding Christ in the manger is pure joy!

God, I am choosing you. Rejoice over me with singing! I want to sing boldly for you! I will delight in Christmas and all the wonder it holds. This year, I want to experience the joy of this season. I want to rejoice with all my heart because God has saved me and restored me.

*Dear Heavenly Father, awaken my soul that I might not miss the opportunity to experience your joy.*

*You have given me so much, and I often miss the point. I see all the weeds and rarely the blooms. I praise you for restoring my soul! Cultivate your joy in me today. Amen.*

Melissa Carty is a member of the Young Adult Sunday School Community. She is involved in Watershed and co-teaches Kids on Mission-Kindergarten.

## December



# Praise Him, Praise Him, Praise His Holy Name!

*Hallelujah! Praise God...praise with a blast on the trumpet, praise by strumming soft strings; praise him with castanets and dance, praise him with banjo and flute; praise him with cymbals and a big bass drum, praise him with fiddles and mandolin. Let every living, breathing thing praise God. Psalm 150*

Advent to me has always equaled music and is one of the most meaningful forms of worship; something about it just touches my soul in ways that other forms of worship cannot always match.

Christmas music, especially, is expressive. Our society has an entirely separate set of music for the holiday season. Even outside the church, music must resonate with people. While I love “Winter Wonderland,” “I’ll be Home for Christmas,” and “Santa Claus is Coming to Town,” the real power of Advent lies in tunes like “O Holy Night,” “What Child is This,” and “Do You Hear What I Hear?.” Advent songs are powerful because of their connection to the life-bringing event that was Jesus’ birth.

The beginning of all we stand for as Christians was 2009 years ago in a cold stable. The music of the season helps me to express how much that one event

changed my life. Without that one single birth, our world would be lost, without guidance, unable to defend itself against the temptations that circle around us attempting to lure us away from God’s path for our lives.

## December



Psalm 150 tells us to “Praise the Lord!” In the complete six verses the author of the Psalm uses the word “praise” thirteen times. What more reason do we need to praise him than that he sent his son, our Savior, to the earth to save us all? Christmas music is meaningful to me because it allows me to praise, even when I do not have the words I need. I can celebrate the birth of Jesus through song. What better way to “Praise the Lord?”

*Dear Lord, we want to praise you as you taught us, but we do not always have the right words. Thank you for giving us the gift of music to help us celebrate the birth of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Jonathan Moore, a senior in high school, is active in the youth group. He is President of Revelation as well as a member of Maranatha and the Righteous Ringers.

# The Bottom Line of Christmas: Gifts!

*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.* Romans 12:6-8

During the first years of my nursing career, I worked every holiday. These holidays were marked not by a particular gift under the tree, nor if it snowed, nor where dinner was hosted, but by the patient who was hospitalized and often died around the holiday. I was an inpatient nurse working in oncology. No elective admissions; the patients that were hospitalized had to be there and were usually very ill.

The family members were cared for as much as the patient. The rooms were decorated with whatever was available including garland made from ECG strips on IV poles. There would be a big Christmas dinner with staff, patients and families. Everyone contributed. The families were even glad to make an ambrosia salad out of canned fruit from the convenience store.

I would see family members after the death of the

patient. The wife of one particular patient thanked me for being a gift to her that Christmas. I iterated to her then what I still feel—the gift was entirely the one that I received from them. I was allowed to do what little I could to ease them through a most difficult time. I was privy to intimate moments and emotions. I was allowed to be part of the will of God.

Our society is clear on one thing about Christmas...the bottom line: gifts. I couldn't agree more!

*Gracious Father, thank you for the gift of Christmas and the birth of our Savior who would willingly give his own life that we might have eternal life. Thank you for each of the gifts that you impart to us as your creation; thank you for expecting us to be obedient and use those gifts to fulfill your will and your purpose. Thank you for loving us and teaching us how to love ourselves and others. Amen.*

Lore Lagrone is married to Chris Speasmaker. They are the parents of Latham and Caleb.

## December



# You Will Find a Way

*By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of praise. Luke 1:78-79*

As a WWII veteran and a patriot, my father—along with Mommy—helped Hungarian refugees who escaped the ravages and terrors of war adapt to life in America.

Two refugees suddenly appeared to be part of our family. One day when I was five, Mother sent me to ask the newcomers to bring their dirty clothes for washing and to come to breakfast. I did not know HOW I was going to ask them anything. I certainly did not speak their language; they did not speak mine. Mommy assured me as she always did, “You’ll find a way.”

I finally acted out eating to our new “brothers.” Then I showed them my brother Michael’s dirty shirt—his clothes were ALWAYS dirty! Steve and Charles seemed a bit confused, but they followed.

“You’ll find a way” seemed to be a common directive from my parents as we opened our home to more Hungarians and rented rooms from our neighbors to provide for these refugees.

Opening our home and hearts to them forever changed our Christmases. We learned how valiantly

they fought for political freedom, religious freedom, and the freedom to be able to own and read a Bible.

Our new family members truly understood my Mother’s directive, “You’ll find a way.” They told how they found ways to hide their Bibles, fight for freedom to worship God, and finally to escape to a country they had never seen before. To achieve their goal of freedom they had to sacrifice much, leaving their parents, brothers, and sisters behind.

On this day of Advent, I think of Mary and Joseph. Like our refugees, they must have been questioning their future. Mary was an ordinary girl who loved God when an angel of the Lord appeared to her and told her she was going to become the mother of the Son of God! Because Mary and Joseph loved God and trusted Him, the angel said they would be able to “find a

way.” Although my mother is no longer physically with us, I continue to hear her resounding words, “you’ll find a way.”

*Dear God, thank you for sending your Son to show us the way when unexpected things happen and for showing us your grace in this season of hope, joy, love, and peace. Amen.*

Pamela Humphries is married to Gordon. They have three children, Adam, Elyse Thompson, and Connor, as well as two grandchildren Chase and Reid Thompson.

## December



# Everlasting Energy

*But those who look to the Lord will win new strength, they will grow wings like eagles; they will run and not be weary; they will march on and never grow faint.*  
Isaiah 40:31

Excitement breeds boundless energy in even the most exhausted folks. We work ourselves to the bones, crossing the “t” and dotting the “i” in “tired” thus becoming founding members of Club Burnout. But at the thought of the “v” word—vacation—our tired minds come to life. We make “to do” and “to get” lists which become the focus of our attention and rob us of precious brain cells needed for the work unfinished and yet to be started. Still, there is something invigorating about the thought of time off. Proper preparation is the prelude to successful “down” time. We hope that all will go as planned, that all will have lots of fun, and that all will be safe. As much energy can be devoted to the preparation for time off as the actual time taken.

If one is willing to give so much for such a short time, what is one willing to give for eternity? On the spectrum of eternity, we experience two points: the beginning and the end of this life. One specter looms over us: the uncertainty of how much time we have between those two points. Because of this uncertain

factor, some do not prepare for the long run at all. Our time here is but a grain of sand on the beach of eternity, and preparation for what lies beyond is vital.

## December



So what does this have to do with Christmas? Simple. For those who believe in the gift of salvation through Christ Jesus, we prepare for a celebration of His first coming—as an infant. It is through His birth, life, passion, death, and resurrection that we will be brought face to face with Him in His next coming. Being mindful of this, we anxiously anticipate, wait, trust, and hope in Him, finding everlasting energy to prepare not only for the here and now, but also for what is to come.

*Dear Lord, help us to wait patiently for all that you have in store for us; and as we wait, help us to work for the building of your kingdom. Amen.*

Andrea Hoxie is a member of the Pilgrimage Sunday School Community and sanctuary choir. She is a member of the Houston Choral Society and is working on a recording of favorite hymns. A multi-disciplined professional, this ordained minister focuses on conflict resolution, working as a certified paralegal, and insurance consulting.

# Lessons Learned

*Delight thyself in the Lord and he will give the desires of thy heart.* Psalms 37:4

When I realized I have experienced ninety-two Christmases in my life, I was completely inundated with memories.

As a child, no matter where we lived, we always went to Grand-Ma's for Christmas. My Mother was one of nine Gary children born and raised in the ole Gary "Home Place." This old home, built soon after the Civil War, still stands in Kentucky and proudly displays a Kentucky historical medallion. It had one most unusual feature: the second story was divided in halves, a girls' side and a boys' side. You could not go from one side to the other without going back downstairs! What with five girls and four boys and frequent visiting cousins and friends, this prevented many complications.

Grand-Ma was a staunch Christian lady who influenced my life with actions and scripture lessons as did my mother. If it were Sunday, we always went to church—with our shoes properly polished and shined! One of Grand-Ma's frequent admonitions to me as a child was "Never ask anybody to do for you what you can do for yourself." From early on I was taught Deuteronomy 31:8, "The Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you." I think Romans 15:13 is the scripture that describes life at

Grand-Ma's house: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace."

## December



In later years when I no longer lived at home, my Mother frequently wrote to me. She ended every letter with Philippians 4:8, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Because of Grand-Ma and my family heritage, I have always known Jesus loves me.

I am very grateful for my happy heritage and I often remember:

For yesterday is but a Dream,  
And tomorrow is only a Vision;  
But today, well lived

Makes every Yesterday  
A dream of Happiness,  
And every Tomorrow a vision of Hope.

*Dear Lord, help us be ever grateful and sharing with others. Amen.*

Edith George has been a member of SMBC since 1944. She has three daughters, five grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. She is a teacher in the nursery area.

# Acknowledgements

## **Discipleship Committee**

Linda Brupbacher, Hart Brupbacher, Ruth Campos, Elizabeth Contreras, Mitch Cutsinger, Angie Fox, Amy Grizzle (staff liason), Brad Lankford, Barry McCarty, Dave McNiel (chairperson), Lu Shan, Melinda Villaseñor, Cindy Woods

## **Editor**

Bettye Carpenter

## **Website Designer**

Kelly Cook

## **Publications Manager**

Eric Peterson