

THE NEWSLETTER

A Ministry of Cornerstone Fellowship of Coatesville Pennsylvania

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CHRIST'S BELL

THE BELL

I KNOW WHO I AM

I am God's child (John 1:12)
I am Christ's friend (John 15:15)
I am united with the Lord (1 Cor 6:17)
I am bought with a price (1 Cor 6:19-20)
I am a saint (set apart for God) (Eph 1:1)
I am a personal witness of Christ (Acts 1:8)
I am the salt & light of the world (Matt 5:13-14)
I am a member of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27)
I am free forever from condemnation (Romans 8:1-2)
I am a citizen of Heaven. I am significant (Phil 3:20)
I am free from any charge against me (Romans 8:31-34)
I am a minister of reconciliation for God (2 Cor 5:17-21)
I have access to God through the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:18)
I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph 2:6)
I cannot be separated from the love of God (Rom 8:35-39)
I am established, anointed, sealed by God (2 Cor 1:21-22)
I am assured all things work together for good (Rom 8:28)
I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit (John 15:16)
I may approach God with freedom and confidence (Eph 3:12)
I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil 4:13)
I am the branch of the true vine, a channel of His life (John 15:1-5)
I am God's temple (1 Cor 3:16). I am complete in Christ (Col 2:10)
I am hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3). I have been justified (Romans 5:1)
I am God's co-worker (1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 6:1). I am God's workmanship (Eph 2:10)
I am confident that the good work God has begun in me will be perfected (Phil 1:5)
I have been redeemed and forgiven (Col 1:14). I have been adopted as God's child (Eph 1:5)
I belong to God
Do you know
Who you are?

THE INFANT JESUS

The purpose of our preparation during Advent is to celebrate and seek to understand the birth of Jesus. No words were spoken that night by the Son of God. No miracle or signs were given by

him whom we claim is Emmanuel, God with us. The sign to the shepherds was that he would be wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. The swaddling cloths were strips of linen, or other material, wound about a newborn baby. This was a

common practice. What was not so common was to find such a baby, lying in a manger, which was a trough, or box, used for the feeding of the cattle.

The baby Jesus, at the time of his birth, did not even have his own bed. Imagine the cattle, coming to eat, and finding not food but a newborn baby. Imagine shepherds, coming to see the Savior, who is Christ the Lord, and finding such a humble setting. It is not what would be expected.

In like fashion, we must approach our life with God with eyes open to the unexpected. God works in wondrous ways. He works in mysterious ways. He often uses common, ordinary things to convey his message. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). We need to pray to God to help us see things in his light. We need to ask for guidance so that we can make the right interpretations of the signs and symbols that are around us. We need to seek that sensitivity that will enable us to see God in every event and every person as we meet them in our journey through life. Think about it.

*What child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, While shepherds watch
are keeping?*

*This, this is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard and angels
sing!*

Haste, haste to bring him laud, The Babe, the Son of Mary!

*So bring him incense, gold and myrrh; Come, peasant, king, to
own him.*

*The King of kings, salvation brings; Let loving hearts enthrone
him.*

Raise, raise the song on high! The virgin sings her lullaby.

Joy, joy, for Christ is born, The Babe, the Son of Mary!

–William Chatterton Dix

JOSEPH and MARY

The earthly parents of Jesus were simple folk. Very little is known about Joseph. We assume he was a carpenter since Jesus was referred to as the son of the carpenter (Matthew 13:55). The genealogies in the New Testament trace his family tree back to King David. Other than that, all we can assume about him is that he was a man of faith in God, who was the protector and provider for the Christ child in his infant years. He also was responsible for the meaningful name of "Jesus" that was given to this baby (Matthew 1:20,21). Jesus is the English form of the Latin translation of the Greek. However, the original Hebrew form was Joshua which means "God is salvation," or "God will save." It was Joseph who took Jesus and Mary to Egypt so that King Herod could not get to him (Matthew 2:13-23). Joseph was essential to the life of Jesus. He did what he felt he needed to do to protect and provide for his family. He did not do it for special glory. He simply did what had to be done.

Of Mary, we have more information. The Magnificat, recorded in Luke 1:46-55, allows us to know her thoughts before the birth of Jesus. She saw herself as a simple servant of God. She pondered the early events in her child's life, keeping them in her heart (Luke 2:19-51). She was present with him at the time of his first miracle, at the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1-11). And she was with him at his death (John 19:26-27). There were times when she did not understand what Jesus was doing or why he did it (Luke 2:41-48).

We are like Joseph and Mary. Most of the people we know – including ourselves – are common, ordinary people. We hope

that our life will count for something, but it is not necessarily our task to say what that specialness will be. It may be, as with Joseph, that our importance will center on what we can do for someone else. By helping that person survive and strive, we may be assisting God to accomplish his will. Like Mary, we may not always understand how what we do will fulfill God's purpose. Perhaps all we can say is, "He who is mighty has done (and will do) great things for me (and through me), and holy is his name." Think about it.

*Silent night! holy night! All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon virgin Mother and Child! Holy Infant, so tender and
mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.*

*Silent night! holy night! Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face, With the dawn of redeeming
grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.*

– Joseph Mohr

WHO IS THIS JESUS?

In **Genesis**, Jesus is the Ram at Abraham's altar.

In **Exodus**, He is the Passover Lamb.

In **Leviticus**, He is the High Priest.

In **Numbers**, He is the Cloud by day and the Pillar of Fire by night.

In **Deuteronomy**, He is the City of our refuge.

In **Joshua**, He is the Scarlet Thread out Rahab's window.

In **Judges**, He is our Judge.

In **Ruth**, He is our Kinsman Redeemer.

In **1st and 2nd Samuel**, He is our Trusted Prophet.

In **Kings and Chronicles**, He is our Reigning King.

In **Ezra**, Jesus is our Faithful Scribe,

In **Nehemiah**, He is the Rebuilder of everything that is broken.

And in **Esther**, He is the Mordecai sitting faithful at the gate.

In **Job**, He is our Redeemer that ever liveth.

In **Psalms**, He is my Shepherd and I shall not want.

In **Proverbs and Ecclesiastes**, He is our Wisdom.

In the **Song of Solomon**, He is our Beautiful Bridegroom.

In **Isaiah**, He is the Suffering Servant.

In **Jeremiah and Lamentations**, it is Jesus that is the Weeping Prophet.

In **Ezekiel**, He is the Wonderful Four-Faced Man.

In **Daniel**, He is the Fourth Man in the fiery furnace.

In **Hosea**, He is my Love that is forever faithful.

In **Joel**, He baptizes us with the Holy Spirit.

In **Amos**, He is our Burden Bearer.

In **Obadiah**, Jesus is our Savior.

In **Jonah**, Jesus is the Great Missionary that takes the Word of God into all the world.

In **Micah**, He is the Messenger with beautiful feet.

In **Nahum**, He is the Avenger.

In **Habakkuk**, He is the Watchman who is ever praying for revival.

In **Zephaniah**, He is the Lord mighty to save.

In **Haggai**, He is the Restorer of our lost heritage.

In **Zechariah**, He is our Fountain.

And in **Malachi**, He is the Sun of Righteousness with healing
in His wings

In **Matthew**, Thou art the Christ, Son of the Living God.

In **Mark**, He is the Miracle Worker.

In **Luke**, He is the Son of Man.

In **John**, He is the Door by which every one must enter.

And in **Acts**, He is the Shining Light that appears to Saul on
the road to Damascus.

In **Romans**, He is our Justifier.

In **1st Corinthians**, He is our Resurrection and in **2nd**

Corinthians, He is our Sin Bearer.

In **Galatians**, He redeems us from the law.

In **Ephesians**, He is our Unsearchable Riches.

In **Philippians**, He supplies every need.

In **Colossians**, He is the Fullness of the Godhead.

In **1st and 2nd Thessalonians**, He is the Future for all who
believe.

In **1st and 2nd Timothy**, He is the Mediator between God
and man.

In **Titus**, He is our Blessed Hope.

In **Philemon**, He is the Friend that sticks closer than a
brother.

In **Hebrews**, He is the Blood of the Everlasting Covenant.

In **James**, it is the Lord that heals the sick.

In **1st and 2nd Peter**, He is the Chief Shepherd.

In **1st, 2nd, and 3rd John**, it is Jesus Christ who has the
tenderness of love.

In **Jude**, He is the Lord coming with 10,000 saints.

And in the book of **Revelation**, lift up your eyes, Church, for
your Redemption draweth nigh.

Jesus **IS** King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

HE is the faithfulness of God from the beginning of time.

Let us celebrate His birth with **JOY!**

CHRISTMAS EVENTS

CHRISTMAS CAROLING AT HIBERNIA MANSION

Friday, December 2, at 6pm. Join others from Cornerstone as we
Christmas Carol for those visiting Hibernia Mansion.

ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

Sunday, December 4, 4pm

You are invited to come to Cornerstone's annual Christmas
Program. This year we will again share in the JOY of the
Christmas season through this service of word and song. You
won't want to miss this highlight of the Advent/Christmas season.
MARK THE DATE – Sunday, December 4, at 4pm.

SO – please invite your friends, family and neighbors to join you
for this special Christmas program. Following the program will be
a time of refreshment and fellowship. Come one, come ALL!
FREE tickets are available for you to use in inviting your friends!

SWAG NIGHT

Ladies & Men -- are you looking forward to SWAG night? The
date is Monday, December 5. Come to the church to create your

own holiday swag. Bring your greens, ribbons, decorations, etc.,
(there will also be some supplies available to share) and enjoy
this evening of fellowship and creation. We had a GREAT time
last year. Plan on coming this year. It's OK to bring a friend. Sign
up NOW so we have an idea of how many to set up for.

A NIGHT UNDER THE STARS

Friday, December 9, at 6pm. Children in grades K through 5 are
invited to spend *A Night Under the Stars* (a lock-in at the church),
culminating the next morning at Breakfast with the Wise Men.
Register by November 30.

BREAKFAST WITH THE WISE MEN

Saturday, December 10, at 9am. Children up through 5th grade
are invited to come to the church to enjoy breakfast with our
special guests, **Balthazar, Gaspar and Melchior**. Bring your
FRIENDS.

PUNK ROCK CHRISTMAS PARTY

Wednesday, December 14, at 7pm. Come to the church for a
GREAT TIME of worshiping and caroling. **EVERYONE SHOULD
COME!!!!** (Please bring an appetizer or a dessert to share.) Bring
your FRIENDS!

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

A FAMILY CHRISTMAS SERVICE

December 24, 2016 - 4 pm

Bring the whole family for a wonderful puppet show,
written by Gaye Lynn Criswell Griffith to welcome in the
Lord's Birthday.

CANDLELIGHT COMMUNION

December 24, 2016 - 11 pm

We will gather around the Lord's Table for a service of
candles, carols and readings from scripture as we
welcome in the day of our Lord's birth.

This very special service is also an opportunity for you
to invite family and friends to join you!

**THIS IS THE VERY BEST WAY TO BEGIN YOUR
CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION!**

CHRISTMAS DAY SERVICES

**DON'T FORGET TO INCLUDE THE LORD IN YOUR
CHRISTMAS DAY CELEBRATIONS!** Christmas is on
Sunday this year. What better way to thank the Lord
for His indescribable gift than to worship Him on that
day. Cornerstone will have services at 8:15 and 10:45
am, with Bible classes at 9:30am.

NEW YEAR'S DAY SERVICES

**BEGIN THE NEW YEAR IN THE HOUSE OF THE
LORD!** Before you watch the Mummies or Rose Parade
and before the Bowl games begin, join your church
family as we begin the year 2017 praising the Lord!
What better way to begin the year than to thank God
for His many blessings, especially our Cornerstone

Family. Cornerstone will have services at 8:15 and 10:45 am, with Bible classes at 9:30am. See YOU then!

THE STORY OF THE CANDY CANE

We all like to enjoy this wonderful confection that is only around at this special time of year. But of all the beautiful traditions of Christmas few are so ancient in meaning and so rich in symbolism as the Candy Cane.

From the beginning of the tradition of the Christmas Tree, it was customary to decorate the tree with symbols of the newborn Christ. Candles represented the Light of the World, the star recalled that first Christmas night, and the shepherd's crook symbolized the humble shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem who were first to receive the news, "Unto you is born a Savior."

Christmas tree decorations in Europe from which our tradition comes were customarily made of food, principally cookies and candy. This symbolically expresses thanks for "our daily bread" as well as providing a Christmas treat for the children. Thus, the shepherd's crook became the candy cane.

As time went on, many ornaments took on a more permanent nature but the Candy Cane retains the original use and meaning of Christmas Tree ornaments.

Candy Canes on the Christmas Tree symbolize the shepherds in the fields on that first Christmas night, – shepherds who heard the angel chorus and came to worship at the crib of the newborn King. They are also a sign of our thanks to God for the food He has given us all during the year.

A Candy Cane is more meaningful than just a "sweet" treat at Christmas. It can remind us of Jesus. It's shape is like a shepherd's staff, for Jesus is The Good Shepherd. Its wide red stripes remind us that Jesus shed His blood on the cross to forgive all sinners. Its narrow red stripes remind us that "by His stripes we are healed" (1 Peter 2:24). There are many stripes to remind us that Jesus suffered many wounds to save us. Its white stripes stand for purification, for by His death we are made pure. The white color stands for Jesus' sinlessness. He is the sinless Son of God. The peppermint flavor is similar to hyssop which was used in Biblical times for purification (Psalm 51:7). Its taste is sweet, as it is "sweet to walk with Jesus." Turn the candy cane upside down... it becomes a "J" for Jesus, a great reminder of our Savior.

Candy canes are a great GIFT, just as Jesus is God's GREATEST gift!

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

THANK YOU for your generous response to Operation Christmas Child. You generously provided **410 shoe boxes** filled to overflowing for children around the world, plus money for postage. May each child who receives a box realize that it was prepared with love and given in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. **THANK YOU SO MUCH!**

THE BRIGHTNESS OF BETHLEHEM

David & Stephen Olford

What is important and remarkable about the wise men of the Christmas story is their faith, their search, and their achievement. In their hearts was a deep longing for the appearance of a Savior-King, and when they saw His star there was only one desire which possessed them and that was to fall at His feet and worship Him. The birth of Christ, to them, was a call for:

Directed Worship - *We have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship Him* (Matthew 2:1). Wherever there are hungry hearts and questing spirits, God directs. His word to men is: *Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart* (Jeremiah 29:13). God is waiting to direct us to His beloved Son, Jesus Christ the Lord. Just as the star appeared to guide those seeking men to the cradle of the Christ, so the Holy Spirit longs to lead us to the feet of the Savior, where we worship and adore.

Determined Worship - *We have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.* Have you ever sat down with your open Bible and attempted to work out the journey undertaken by those Magi? Wherever they came from, it is evident that they faced vast distances and dangers. How this story condemns those of us who live in the West! Nothing inconveniences us. Oh, that there might be more determination in our acts of worship not only at Christmastime, but all through the year.

Devoted Worship - *When they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshiped him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh* (Matthew 2:11). These were tokens of devotion and dedication. As far as the wise men were concerned, the Babe of Bethlehem was the King of kings, and therefore worthy to receive their best and their all.

Can you and I give Him any less?

THE BROWN-BAG CHRISTMAS

Joe McKeever

When I asked our newlyweds Sunday school class to share a favorite Christmas story, Carrie Fuller said, "Our family has one we call the 'Brown-Bag Christmas.'" When she finished, I had to hear more. Two days later, I called a member of her family for more details.

It was the early 1930s during the Dust Bowl days of Kansas, in the heart of the Depression. The Canaday family – Mom, Dad, and seven children – were having a tough time existing, so there would be no luxuries at Christmas that year. Mom told the children to go outside and find a Christmas tree and decorate it. After a lengthy search, they returned with a dead branch, the only thing they had been able to find. They stood it up in a bucket of sand and decorated it with pieces of paper tied with string. Little Judy, almost four, did not know how a Christmas tree was supposed to look, but somehow she knew it wasn't like that!

As Christmas approached, the Canaday children, like children everywhere, pestered Mom and Dad about what presents they might get under their "tree." Dad pointed out that the pantry was bare, that they did not have enough to live on, and there certainly would be no money for gifts. But Mom was a woman of faith and told her children, "Say your prayers. Ask God to send us what He wants us to have." And pray they did.

On Christmas Eve, the children watched out the window for visitors, but no one came. "Blow out the lamp and go to bed," Dad said. "Nobody is going to come. No one even knows we're out here."

The children turned out the lamp and got in bed, but they were too excited to sleep. Was this not Christmas? Had they not asked God to send them the presents He wanted them to have? Did Mom not say God answers prayer?

Late that night, when one of the children spotted headlights coming down the dirt road, everyone jumped out of bed and ran to the window. The commotion woke up Mom and Dad. "Don't get excited, children," Dad said. "They're probably not coming here. It's just someone who got lost."

The children kept hoping and the car kept coming. Then Dad lit a lamp. They all wanted to rush to the door at the same time, but Mr. Canaday said, "Stay back. I'll go."

Someone got out of the car and called, "I was wondering if someone here can help me unload these bags." The children dashed out the door to lend a hand. Mom said to her youngest: "Stay here, Judy, and help Mom open the bags and put up the gifts."

A deacon from the church in town had gone to bed that Christmas Eve, and lay there tossing and turning, unable to get the Canaday family off his mind. Later, he said, "I didn't know what kind of shape you folks were in, but I knew you had all those kids."

He had gotten up and dressed and went around town, rousing people from their sleep to ask for a contribution for the Canaday family. He filled his car with bags of groceries, canned goods, toys, and clothing.

Little Judy got a rag doll which remained her favorite for years.

The next Sunday, Mrs. Canaday stood in church and told what the members – and one deacon in particular – had done for her family. There was not a dry eye in the house.

Years later, the oldest sister, Eva, wrote up this story about her family for a school project. Eva said, "We were so thrilled by all the wonderful things in the bags, for a while we lost sight of the most special gift. The best gift that Christmas was not in brown bags at all. It was Mom's faith, as she taught her children to bring their needs to Jesus and trust Him to meet them. And Dad's love that wanted only to protect his children from hurt and disappointment."

When Carrie finished telling her story, she added, "Little Judy is my wonderful grandmother."

At Christmas, we celebrate praying mothers, and caring fathers and believing children. We give thanks for sensitive deacons and generous friends and sleepless nights.

And we praise God for the hard times that teach unforgettable lessons, stories of faithfulness that get told and retold through the years, inspiring each new generation to place their faith in a loving Savior.

THANKSGIVING TO CHRISTMAS

There is a practical reason Thanksgiving always precedes Christmas: it sets in motion the ideal mental attitude to carry us through the weeks in between. In other words, a sustained spirit of gratitude makes the weeks before Christmas a celebration rather than a marathon.

Maybe these few thoughts will stimulate you to give God your own thanks in greater abundance.

Thank you Lord: for your sovereign control over our circumstances, for your Word that gives us direction, for your love that holds us close, for your understanding when we are

confused, and for your Spirit that enlightens our eyes.

– Charles Swindoll

ANGELS & SHEPHERDS

Few things are more intriguing than the contrasts of life. They remind us that, at some level, we live in a world of extremes that are in tension but balance one another: opposites that attract, light counteracting darkness, the negative to balance the positive.

In the Christmas story, we see a profound contrast – a contrast that is drawn between two of the most recognized groups of figures in the Bible: angels and shepherds.

The contrasts between these two groups could not be more extreme:

- Angels are otherworldly in origin, but the shepherds were, in human terms, the lowest of the low.
- The angels were bright and glorious with heavenly light but the shepherds were dirty and covered in the filth of carrying out one of the most unpleasant occupations in biblical times.
- The angels knew what it was to exist in the very presence of God Himself, but the shepherds were excluded from worship even in the temple they served.
- The angels exploded onto the scene with loud, dynamic declarations of praise and worship that stunned the poor shepherds into silence.

Despite these differences, however, in the most important thing of all, the angels and the shepherds displayed a marvelous similarity: they both responded to the birth of Christ with expressions of celebration.

Their celebrations on the night Jesus entered our world were the precursors of the celebrations that have followed for centuries – including ours. Remembering the coming of the Messiah - Redeemer causes deep joy and delight, awe and wonder.

As we look at the angels and the shepherds responses to the birth of Jesus Christ, we will see reasons for us to join in the celebration with all our hearts.

Angels are seen throughout the Scriptures and are called by a variety of names, including cherubim, seraphim, and living creatures. Sometimes they are described as men, often in shining garments. They are seen guarding Eden, waging war, rescuing Peter from prison, worshiping in the presence of God, and, tragically, in the case of some angels, rebelling against God. They carry names like Michael ("who is like God"), Gabriel ("warrior of God"), and Lucifer ("light bearer," before he became Satan – the Adversary). They are the often mysterious, sometimes mercurial servants of God that are at the center of many of His dealings with men and women in the Bible.

The word *angel* itself comes from the Greek term *angelos*, which is defined as "a messenger, envoy, one who is sent, an angel, a messenger from God." The primary definition is messenger, and that is exactly what they often are seen doing in the pages of the Bible:

- Sometimes they carry a message of warning, as with Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19).
- Sometimes they carry a message of rescue, as with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace (Daniel 3).
- Sometimes they carry a message of instruction, as with Hagar, Sarah's handmaiden (Genesis 16).

In each of these instances where we see angels active on earth, they are delivering messages from God. While angels unquestionably do more than simply carry messages, it's impossible to underestimate their critical role as messengers bringing announcements from heaven to earth. This may be why the New Testament word for "preaching the gospel" (announcing God's message to people) is *evangelizo*, which comes from the same word as "angel." The gospel (good news) was first delivered to the world by angelic messengers during the events surrounding the birth of the Savior.

- an angel appeared to Zechariah declaring the news about the forerunner of the Messiah.
- an angel came to the village of Nazareth to give a message from God to a young woman named Mary declaring that she had been selected for the privilege of giving birth to the promised Messiah.
- an angel visited Joseph and gave him the same message – Mary's child was of God, not man.
- an angel appeared in the Judean skies over the shepherds' fields of Bethlehem.

While angels carry messages to us from God, they also exist to worship God. So, when the angel announced the arrival of the Son of God in human form, the heavenly host could remain silent no longer. They raised their voices in exaltation of God for His glory, for His Son, and for His plan to rescue the lost, tired, and confused race of men and women who, like the sheep guarded by the angels' bedouin audience, had long since gone astray. But angels were supposed to appear to priests not shepherds! No one could have anticipated that shepherds would be among the first to hear the angels proclaim the good news of the Messiah's birth.

Shepherds were simple men who lived simple lives. That night when the angels sang, they found the shepherds "out in the fields keeping watch over the flocks." The shepherds were doing what shepherds do. The scholars say that more than 250,000 lambs would be offered in atonement for sin on the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem that year. Surely some of those lambs would come from the flocks in the fields that surrounded Bethlehem, the very flocks that these shepherds tended. But their work as shepherds brought them into contact with blood when the lambs were born and death when they disposed of the sheep harmed by predators in the wild. The very act of tending the sheep that might be offered as part of Temple worship rendered the shepherds who tended the sheep ritually unclean. And since the shepherds were required to stay with their flocks for extended periods of time, they could not even attend the Temple services that would restore them so that they could worship there. But it was to these simple men living their simple lives that God sent the angels.

But life is filled with amazing moments even for simple people like shepherds, and those moments often come right in the middle of simple lives. This must have been such a moment for those shepherds. The "angel of the Lord" appeared to them shining in all the splendor of heaven. The shepherds were overwhelmed, "filled with fear." For hundreds of years the glory of the Lord had not been seen in Israel, but that night it was revealed to shepherds. And so those who had been ostracized and excluded from the religious system found hope. Isolated from their people and their Temple system, the shepherds found hope and discovered that they were not cast out by God. Though lowly and simple, they heard the good news from the mouths of angels!

How surprised Mary must have been that night when, tired from

childbirth, she was visited by a ragtag band of shepherds fresh from the hills all smelly from sheep. She must have been astonished when these rough and tough men fell down in worship before the baby's manger bed. But what other response could the shepherds have made but worship? To have been visited by angels sent from God and told the news of the Messiah's birth, what else could they do but join the heavenly hosts in praising God?

Now, some people prefer cathedrals to barns in which to worship. And yet this simple comparison shows the truth. All who hear and understand the news of the Christmas season -- from the splendid beings who carry the messages of God to the simple shepherds -- worship him for the message they received! The Savior had been born -- has been born! Through the years that news still comes. It comes to us both great and small this Christmas season and calls us all to worship and bow down. "O come, let us adore him... Christ the Lord!"

O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL

"O Come, All Ye Faithful," is our personal invitation to come and accept God's greatest gift - the gift of His own Son - "For unto us is born this day, a Savior."

There was a gift, for each of us, left under the tree of life two thousand years ago, by Him whose birthday we are preparing to celebrate. That gift is for everyone! But some have left the package unclaimed. Some have accepted the gift, but have failed to remove the wrappings and look inside to discover its hidden splendor - the love, the joy, the forgiveness. The packages are all alike, and in each is a small scroll on which is written, "All that the Father hath is thine."

Christmas is for **GIVING** - God's giving His Son for our sins - our giving ourselves to His Son to serve Him and others. Will you dedicate this Christmas to Christ and give Him your very best? But Christmas is also for **RECEIVING**. Is that hard to understand? It shouldn't be. The Bible says that "God **so** loved the world that He gave His only Son," and that "as many as received Him to them gave He power to become children of God." As many as received Him! When we understand that, receiving is even more important than giving at Christmas.

As we approach the birthday of Jesus, may we receive Him more fully into our lives. As we meditate on God's marvelous Gift, may the gift of our lives reflect our love and gratitude.

The beautiful Christmas season is the time to come closer to our blessed Lord, both in prayer and in faithful attendance to the services of His Church. It is the time for renewed dedication to the task of keeping His Church strong and alive. As we approach Christmas, let us remember that it is much more than Santa Claus, a Christmas tree, beautiful decorations or even the exchange of gifts. Christmas means, Immanuel - God with us. The joy of Christmas is the joy of the soul renewed with the blessed hope of unto us is born... a Savior. Christmas means "God so loved that He gave..." Indeed, to love is to give!

GOD'S GIFT TO US!

The custom of giving gifts at Christmas time originated in a lowly stable in Bethlehem when God gave His Son that we through Him might have eternal life. Because God gave, the Wise Men from the East brought gifts as symbols of their love and devotion to the new-born King.

Unfortunately in the endless rush of this busy season, the true

spirit of Christmas is neglected. Too often we exchange our gifts with one another and forget Him whose birthday we are really celebrating.

From Bethlehem to Calvary is only a few miles, but without Calvary, the Babe of Bethlehem would have little meaning for us.

OUR GIFT TO GOD!

It is true, of course, that however large our gift to Him may be, it cannot fully repay Him for all He has done for us. He asks that we give ourselves - and when we do, we will desire to give and our gifts will be acceptable to the Lord. So, at Christmas time, may we realize that each of us can:

Rededicate our lives to Him and in His service...

Resolve in the coming year to know Him better and follow Him more closely...

It is with heartfelt prayer that we seek God's blessing upon each of you at this Christmas season. "O Come, Let Us Adore Him, Christ, the Lord!"

THROUGH THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

CONGRATULATIONS! For those of you who have taken this opportunity and have been following the reading schedule – at the end of December you will have completed the entire Bible

December

- 1 Hosea 1 & 2; Revelation 1
- 2 Hosea 3 & 4; Revelation 2
- 3 Hosea 5 & 6; Revelation 3
- 4 Hosea 7 & 8
- 5 Hosea 9 & 10
- 6 Hosea 11 & 12; Revelation 4
- 7 Hosea 13 & 14; Revelation 5
- 8 Joel 1-3; Revelation 6
- 9 Amos 1 & 2; Revelation 7
- 10 Amos 3 & 4; Revelation 8
- 11 Amos 5 & 6
- 12 Amos 7-9
- 13 Obadiah; Revelation 9
- 14 Jonah 1 & 2; Revelation 10
- 15 Jonah 3 & 4; Revelation 11
- 16 Micah 1 & 2; Revelation 12
- 17 Micah 3 & 4; Revelation 13
- 18 Micah 5-7
- 19 Nahum 1-3
- 20 Habakkuk 1-3; Revelation 14
- 21 Zephaniah 1-3; Revelation 15
- 22 Haggai 1-2; Revelation 16
- 23 Zechariah 1 & 2; Revelation 17
- 24 Zechariah 3 & 4; Revelation 18
- 25 Zechariah 5 & 6
- 26 Zechariah 7 & 8
- 27 Zechariah 9 & 10; Revelation 19
- 28 Zechariah 11 & 12; Revelation 20
- 29 Zechariah 13 & 14; Revelation 21
- 30 Malachi 1 & 2; Revelation 22
- 31 Malachi 3 & 4

CHRISTMAS DAY - A WOMAN'S STORY

(Based on Luke 2:1-20)

And Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart (verse 19)

The story of Jesus' birth is told in elegant simplicity. There are three different scenes in this lesson. The act which sets this part of the story in motion is a decree from the foreign government occupying Israel at that time. Everyone had to return to their place of origin to be registered for tax purposes. The setting is first in Bethlehem where Mary and Joseph arrive and Mary gives

birth; then in the surrounding hills where shepherds hear angels; and finally back in Bethlehem where the shepherds come to see Mary, Joseph and the new baby. As we reflect on this story, we seem to hear Mary retelling what had happened, retelling her story.

It was a difficult birth. I was so tired – I ached all over from the trip. For the last month I was so big, I couldn't wait for the baby to be born. I was so tired of always being off balance – of my lower back aching – of not being able to see my feet when I bent over – of never finding a comfortable position for resting.

Of course, that is when we had to make the trip – in the last month, the most awkward time.

We are simple people. We don't have any power or influence. We don't own land – We are not rich merchants – No one in the government really listens to us – What some government decree means in the lives of people – the simple people – no one seems to care. This idea of having to travel to another town just so the government can collect more taxes is – well, it's crazy – everyone's life has been thrown upside-down. But to people in power, that isn't important.

We started out in a group of family and friends, but I had to make frequent stops. I got so stiff riding that I had to get off and stretch. Everyone else went on ahead. We arrived late and the inn was already full. What were we going to do?

I was so tired I was at the point of despair, when someone suggested that we might try one of the near-by caves used to shelter the animals from the cold. This was one of those blessings in disguise. It was certainly quieter and, with the fresh straw, much cleaner and sweet smelling. The animals took the chill off the air.

A lot had happened in the months following the messenger's visit. At times it was hard to hold onto the joy and peace, hard to remember that it would somehow be all right as God had promised. Even now, if I close my eyes, I can just remember the sense of God's love enveloping me, the wholeness and peace which penetrated to the very center of my being. This fullness of God, this joy must be what heaven is like, not just a moment but never-ending.

My contractions began in earnest and Joseph did the best he could. It was hard not being with my family – hard not being at home – hard not having the mid-wife I had known most of my life to be with me for my first child. We managed. The baby was healthy, and I had packed clean cloths to wash and to wrap him.

After I had had some time to rest, the strangest thing happened. Some shepherds came with the wildest story – some angels had appeared while they were out on the hillside and told them about my baby being born. They were simple people – people that no one but their friends and family would notice or care about. They had rough, strong, yet gentle hands. Experienced hands, able to find where the sheep were cut and apply the healing ointment. They were hard working, with little money. One young boy, no more than ten, was so cute – his eyes so big and brown. He didn't say a word, but he didn't miss anything that was going on. His eyes danced with excitement. After a while they left, with renewed hope. God was at work; we were not forgotten. God was with us.

Christmas blessing–

The shepherd's have returned to their fields.

The wisemen have returned home another way.

May we too return home having worshiped the Christ.

May Simeon's words be ours–

"Lord, you have set your servant free to go in peace as you have promised. For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior, whom

you have prepared for all the world. A light to enlighten the nations and the glory of your people Israel....”
 May the wonder of Christ’s coming into our world be with you. May the knowledge that God is at work in this world strengthen you. May the love of God envelope you and give you peace. Amen.

CHURCH ENVELOPES FOR 2017

Envelopes for 2017 will soon be available. Please remember to pick yours up and use them in the coming year. If you do not currently use church envelopes but would like to begin, please speak to Lois or use the form found on the table at the back of the worship center to make your request known.

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

TODAY, there is a sense of expectation, of excitement. God is at work. No Roman Empire could stop what God wanted to do then. And no government can stop what God wants to do now. **God cares about us. God intervenes for us;** we are not forgotten. God cares about the simple people, the poor people – people without power or influence. God came to us as a poor baby, born homeless, to an unwed mother in a temporary shelter.

Hope is born today. Hope which saves us from death and despair. Hope which brings us to God.

Whenever we think of the Christmas story, we are aware that those who came to see the Christ Child that first Christmas all left filled with the wonder and excitement of the love that God has for each of us and the hope that love brings to our lives. Because they were all filled with love and hope, they worshiped the Christ.

This season as we worship together at Cornerstone, may the same wonder, love, and hope fill us as did those who sought Him that first Christmas. As we worship, may the wonder of Christ’s coming into a world filled with sin, and inhabited by sinners like us, fill you. May the knowledge that God is at work in this world now, just as He was then, strengthen you. May the love of God envelope you and give you peace.

May you and all those near you have a happy and blessed Christmas. It is with heartfelt prayer that we seek God’s blessing upon each of you now and always.

The Elders & staff of Cornerstone Fellowship

JESUS IS BETTER THAN SANTA

Santa lives at the North Pole;
 JESUS is everywhere.
 Santa rides in a sleigh;
 JESUS rides on the wind and walks on the water.
 Santa comes but once a year;
 JESUS is an ever present help.
 Santa fills your stockings with goodies;
 JESUS supplies all your needs.
 Santa comes down your chimney uninvited;
 JESUS stands at your door and knocks. And then enters your heart.
 Santa makes you stand in line to see him;
 JESUS is as close as the mention of His name.
 Santa lets you sit on his lap;
 JESUS lets you rest in His arms.

Santa asks, “Little boy or little girl. What is your name?”
 JESUS knew our name before we did.
 Not only does He know our name. He knows our address too. He knows our history and our future and He even knows how many hairs are on our heads.
 Santa has a belly like a bowl full of jelly;
 JESUS has a heart full of love.
 Santa offers HO! HO! HO!
 JESUS offers health, help and hope.
 Santa says, “You better not cry;”
 JESUS says, “Cast all your cares on me for I care for you.”
 Santa’s little helpers make toys;
 JESUS makes new lives, mends wounded hearts, repairs broken homes and builds mansions.
 Santa may make you chuckle;
 JESUS gives you joy that is your strength
 Santa puts gifts under your tree;
 JESUS became our gift and died on the tree. It’s obvious there is really no comparison.
 We need to remember WHO Christmas is all about.
 We need to put Christ back in Christmas.

Jesus is still the reason for the season!

CHRIST IS BORN

Find the hidden Christmas story words

J	L	P	J	C	H	I	L	D	B	H	L	F	S
O	E	Y	E	J	U	D	A	E	A	L	R	T	Z
S	E	S	I	A	R	P	M	T	I	A	A	I	S
E	A	H	U	O	C	M	R	W	N	R	Z	N	T
P	B	E	L	S	A	E	D	K	R	E	B	F	F
H	E	P	X	N	A	O	I	U	V	J	N	A	I
N	T	H	U	S	O	N	O	F	G	O	D	N	G
E	H	E	U	G	C	I	S	I	I	I	X	T	O
M	L	R	R	E	V	T	G	T	L	C	H	I	L
E	E	D	N	A	A	M	A	N	G	E	R	D	D
S	H	S	S	B	Z	V	O	D	I	M	G	I	O
I	E	E	L	I	L	A	G	N	O	K	A	N	U
W	M	E	B	A	B	D	N	M	A	R	Y	G	A
M	E	S	S	I	A	H	R	R	Y	M	E	S	I

- | | | |
|--------------|----------|------------|
| ADORE | INFANT | PEACE |
| ANGEL | JESUS | PRAISE |
| BABE | JOSEPH | REJOICE |
| BETHLEHEM | JUDAEA | SALVATION |
| CHILD | KING | SAVIOUR |
| EMMANUEL | LORD | SHEPHERDS |
| FRANKINCENSE | MAGI | SON OF GOD |
| GABRIEL | MANGER | STABLE |
| GALILEE | MARY | STAR |
| GIFTS | MESSIAH | THE INN |
| GOLD | MYRRH | TIDINGS |
| GOODWILL | NAZARETH | TREASURES |
| | | WISE MEN |

HAVE A BLESSED AND JOYOUS CHRISTMAS!