

Devotions for the Advent Season

2026

CELEBRATING THE LIFE
OF JESUS CHRIST



The Joy of Christmas Begins with Jesus!

The Light of the World
Heaven's Greatest Gift
Sunday, December 6, at 5:00 p.m.
Mount Hebron Missionary Baptist Church
1233 Hwy. 66, Garland, TX 75040

Join us for a night of worship featuring FBC Garland's Worship Choir, Orchestra, Living Sacrifice Ensemble, Hispanic Choir, Legacy High School Choir, Impact Middle School Choir, Children's Choirs, and Preschool Choir.
This event will not be livestreamed and childcare is not available.

Lord's Supper Observance
Saturday, December 19, at 5:30 p.m.
Sunday, December 20, at 8:30 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.
McDonald Activity Center, Fellowship Hall

We will observe the Lord's Supper in our weekend worship services as we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Savior.

Christmas Eve Worship Service
Thursday, December 24, at 5:00 p.m.
Mount Hebron Missionary Baptist Church
1233 Hwy. 66, Garland, TX 75040

Join us as we sing and celebrate the newborn King!
This event will not be livestreamed, and childcare is not available.

Devotions for the Advent Season
A Note From Our Pastor

The Advent Season is always special each year. It is the time of waiting and preparation for both the celebration of Jesus's birth at Christmas and His return again at the Second Coming. We highlight the themes of the season of hope, peace, joy, and love in celebration of the Christ Child. The Latin word "adventus" means "arrival," thus the name Advent.

Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas; however, this booklet has devotional thoughts for a full 30 days before the celebration of our Lord's birth, beginning on Thursday, November 26. Each weekend, in the Saturday and Sunday worship services, we will highlight the theme of the week. One of the FBCG ministers will speak briefly on the theme of the day and introduce a family who has recently joined our church. They will share their thoughts on the theme, and then light the Advent candle.

In this devotional guide, the ministers and pastoral resident of FBCG have written daily thoughts for you to contemplate and reflect upon. We believe these devotionals will enhance your celebration of the Christmas season. As you read through each daily devotional, know how much this team loves you and what a joy it is to serve Christ with you in this church. We share the common bond of needing a Savior and praising God for sending Jesus!

Pastor Greg



SENIOR & ASSOCIATE PASTORS



Dr. Greg Ammons
Senior Pastor



Dennis Neal
Executive Pastor



Mark Hill
Associate Pastor
Minister of Music
and Worship



Jim Witt
Associate Pastor
Minister of Missions
Mobilization

MINISTERIAL STAFF



Amber Bryant
Recreation Ministry Director



Dane Hernandez
Minister to Senior Adults and Connections



Eli Gutierrez
Minister to Hispanic Congregation



Sarah Wyatt
Minister to Children and Families



Michael Murrie
Minister to Students



Camden Ammons
Pastoral Resident


Hope

November 26, 2026

HOPE: DAY ONE
"Do Not Lose Hope"

"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." Micah 5:8

Hope, according to Webster's Dictionary, is "the feeling of wanting something to happen and thinking that it could happen; a feeling that something good will happen or be true."

Has anyone ever made you a promise that you hoped would happen—yet it didn't? Centuries ago, a promise was made that a Savior would come, that a Messiah would be born, that a ruler of Israel would come forth. That announcement brought hope to a people who at the time had very little hope. But out of an insignificant place, Bethlehem, God brought forth the most significant person, Jesus, to fulfill a promise that He had made.

During this Christmas season, it can become easy for us to become discouraged and lose hope because things are not as we had hoped. However, as we look at the Scriptures, we must realize God is truth and He is faithful, and He will do what He says He will do. So, if you are struggling to have hope this season, realize that God gives hope. Realize that God is faithful, His promises are true, and He is waiting on you to step out and put your hope and trust in Him.

Dennis Neal
Executive Pastor

November 27, 2026

HOPE: DAY TWO
"At Just the Right Time"

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." Galatians 4:4-7

Have you ever found yourself waiting? Maybe you've been praying for something, and you're still waiting for an answer. Sometimes we even find ourselves asking, "Is God listening?" I want to encourage you today that God hears the prayers of His children. Look at the phrase, "When the fullness of time had come." Our Savior, Jesus Christ, didn't come too early or too late. He came at the exact time our heavenly Father had appointed. We may not always understand God's timing, but we can always trust His faithfulness.

God sent His Son to redeem us. Jesus Christ came because you and I could never save ourselves to be forgiven for our transgressions. But God didn't simply redeem us from our sin. Through the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ, He brought us into His family! There are three truths Paul shares with us here: (1) God has given us His Spirit to dwell within our hearts. (2) God has given us the privilege of calling Him Father. (3) God has given us a new identity. We are no longer slaves, but children of God!

None of this is because of what we have done. It's all because of what Jesus Christ has done for us! For this Christmas in 2026, may you and I remember that the same God who faithfully kept His promise by sending Jesus Christ at just the right time is the same God who remains faithful to His promises today. His faithfulness has never changed, and it never will!

Dane Hernandez
Minister of Senior Adults and Connections

November 28, 2026

HOPE: DAY THREE
"Hope That Had Become Sight"

"Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Luke 2:25-26

In Luke 2:25-32, a man named Simeon makes a brief appearance on the biblical stage. He is described as righteous and devout and that the Holy Spirit was on him. Through the Spirit, God promised Simeon that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. Scholars believe at this time Simeon was an elderly man, perhaps in his 70's or 80's. One early church tradition fixes his age at 113!

It may be that Simeon had waited many years for God to keep His promise. One might wonder how he hung on to the hope that he would someday meet the Savior. It might have been tempting to reason that God had not made the promise or that God does not keep every promise. Simeon never gave up hope. His hope was a confident expectation that he would see the Messiah because God is a promise-keeping God. His hope was not based on wishful thinking but on an understanding of the Father as one who does what He says He will. And as one who enjoyed intimacy with God, he understood God's reliability from having personally experienced that God is reliable. So spurred on by the Spirit, Simeon entered the temple and encountered the 40-day old Jesus with his parents. You can hear the joy in his words, for his hope had become sight.

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation."

May the hope of Christmas be yours this year.

Jim Witt
Minister of Missions Mobilization

November 29, 2026

HOPE: DAY FOUR
"Immanuel – God with Us"

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us)." Matthew 1:23

The anticipation of a baby being born is always exciting and filled with wonder and joy! I remember waiting with expectation when each one of our three children were to be born, and I could not wait to hold each precious baby. Children are a blessing and gift from the Lord. Can you imagine the excitement and anticipation surrounding the birth of Jesus? God's people had waited for generations for the promised Messiah to be born. The prophets had spoken of His coming, and the people longed for the day when God would send a Savior. The people were waiting for hope, deliverance, and a reminder that God had not forgotten them.

God sent His Son, and the waiting was over. Matthew 1:23 reminds us that Jesus would be called Immanuel, meaning, "God with us." Wow… Just think about those three words… God with us. God did more than just send a message of hope or send another prophet to console His people. The truth is that He came Himself. He wrapped Himself in humanity by coming into our fractured world as a tiny baby to live among us.

Advent reminds us that waiting doesn't mean God has forgotten us. Our hope is not found in the things of this world or circumstances that are perfect, but our hope is found in the One sent here to save us from our sins. I am so thankful that because of Christ, I am never without hope. We never have to face tomorrow alone, and God is always with us no matter the time, circumstance, celebration, or struggle. What an incredible gift we have been given, and Jesus will always be our hope!

Mark Hill
Minister of Music and Worship

November 30, 2026

HOPE: DAY FIVE
"Hope That Is Seen Is Not Hope"

"And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." Romans 8:23-25

In the middle of the eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans, Paul has just established the freedom from the flesh which the Christian experiences. The twin blessings of living within the Spirit and having the Spirit live within us means that we have confident expectation of receiving the inheritance as God's adopted sons and daughters. This hopeful expectation does not waver when we consider the suffering of this present world. Indeed, we find ourselves groaning alongside creation as we consider the fallen state of our world, but we who believe in Christ await redemption from our weak vessels of flesh. Paul explains that it was according to this very hope that we were saved. You might object, "How can I live in the hope of the new creation when everything I see around me is so devastating?" Paul responds, "Hope that is seen is not hope." The life of the Christian is defined by our willingness to rely on the promises of God, to retain a confident expectation, or hope, despite the realities of the fallen world surrounding us.

Perhaps, this Christmas season finds you in a reality which seems bleak. Perhaps, suffering has caused you to groan alongside creation. Perhaps, redemption feels far away. Dear Christian, take heart. It is the hope of Jesus Christ and His coming which shall guide your path. This hope is the substance of our faith. It is in this hope that we were saved.

Camden Ammons
Pastoral Resident

December 1, 2026

HOPE: DAY SIX
"Light in the Darkness"

"But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone."
Isaiah 9:1-2

In Spanish, my first language, the word for "hope" is esperanza. The verb esperar means "to wait." It's interesting how closely these two words are related. I like having hope, but I don't like to wait. Still, when we hope for something, we often have to wait for it.

That's where we find God's people in Isaiah 9. Isaiah names two places in the north, Zebulun and Naphtali, which had suffered greatly. He pictures the people walking in darkness and carrying a heavy load on their shoulders. While they were still in the dark, God promised that a great light would shine on them and that He would break the heavy yoke they carried. Then Isaiah tells them about a child who would be born. He would rule on David's throne with justice and bring a peace that would never end. Isaiah calls Him the Prince of Peace. The people were still waiting, but now they had a promise to hold on to.

At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of the child Isaiah promised, Jesus. Years later, Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, in the very region Isaiah had named. Matthew 4:13–17 tells us that this fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy. The people who had been walking in darkness saw the promised light when Jesus came to them and began to preach that God's kingdom had come near. Maybe you've been praying about something for a long time. Maybe you've run out of words. You can come to Jesus today and simply say, "Lord, I'm still waiting." The same God who kept His promise by sending His Son hears you as you wait.

Dr. Elí Gutiérrez
Minister to Hispanic Congregation

December 2, 2026

HOPE: DAY SEVEN
"Be Ready!"

"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander." 1 Peter 3:16-17

Praise God for the hope that He gives! Followers of Jesus have hope even when it makes no sense for us to have hope.

That's what Peter was telling the Christians in Asia Minor. They had been driven from their homes because of persecution…and the places to which they had gone for refuge were populated by people who worshipped other gods. Those people were convinced that their new neighbors who believed in this one God were strange. They believed in only ONE God. Strange. They responded in honorable ways to the repressive government that dominated their lives. That's strange. Their families loved and respected each other. Every member of the household seemed to be tugging in the same direction of loving each other, respecting each other, and honoring their God. That was strange. All this behavior certainly prompted questions from their new neighbors… "How can these people have hope when everything in their life is so bad?!"

That's why Peter told these followers of Jesus to BE READY to answer that question. If you live your life in a way that is characterized by trust in Jesus… If you love and respect others… If you hold onto a hope that cannot be dampened by the terrible things that happen in a fallen, sin-sick world…then you're going to look strange to people who do not share that same hope. BE READY to tell them that the reason for the hope that you have is Jesus!

Michael Murrie
Minister to Students


Peace

December 3, 2026

PEACE: DAY ONE
"The Angels Proclaim Peace"

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'" Luke 2:13-14

When you read this bit of the Christmas story, what do you picture? The sky alight with a lovely angel choir, each with sparkly wings and shimmering robes singing "angelic" praise to God? While that depiction makes a beautiful Christmas card, it doesn't line up with what we read in Scripture about angels.

The Bible describes angels as messengers. In fact, the English word angel comes from the Greek *angelos,* meaning messenger. In the Nativity story, we see God sending angels as messengers to many people including Mary, Joseph, and Zechariah. There are various types of angels described in the Bible. Archangels are warriors, some waging war against Satan himself. Cherubim are protectors whose description in Ezekiel 10 is terrifying with their bodies covered in eyes, their wings as loud as God's voice, and their burning wheels. Seraphim are angles with six wings each who have the privilege of surrounding God's throne, singing praises to Him.

Now, with all these images of Biblical angels in your head, reread Luke 2:13-14. What a sight that must have been! If these angels were indeed intimidating warriors that left those who saw them awestruck, how strange that they proclaim, "Peace to those on whom His favor rests." Or is it strange? If His favor rests on us because we know Him and have been called according to His Name, then we will have peace. The God of those angelic beings is for us and on our side. Praise the Name of the Giver of Peace.

Sarah Wyatt
Minister to Children and Families

December 4, 2026

PEACE: DAY TWO
"Peace That Passes Understanding"

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7

Christmas is a season filled with expectations. There are presents to buy, travel to arrange, recitals and programs to attend, and decorating that, if you're anything like me, has been delayed a little too long. Are we anxious about finding the perfect gift or having enough money to spend? Are we wondering what the neighbors might think if we don't hang Christmas lights? Are we so focused on our Christmas to-do lists that we lose sight of the reason we celebrate? We can become so busy preparing for Christmas that we miss the privilege of resting in the peace of the One who came.

In Philippians 4, Paul reminds us that we don't have to carry our anxieties alone. We can bring our worries to God through prayer and thanksgiving, trusting Him with what we cannot control. He doesn't promise every problem will disappear, but He offers peace that surpasses our understanding. At Christmas, we celebrate God's provision for our greatest need: a Savior who makes it possible for us to be reconciled to Him. Because of Christ, we can trust God's faithfulness even when our circumstances are uncertain and rest in the peace He offers through Jesus.

As you move through this Christmas season, pause amid the preparations and celebrations to spend time in His presence. Don't let the busyness of celebrating Christmas distract you from spending time with the Savior we celebrate. You don't have to have everything figured out to experience God's peace.

Amber Bryant
Recreation Ministry Director

December 5, 2026

PEACE: DAY THREE
"Peace From Beginning to End"

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." John 14:27

As we think about the entrance of the Christ Child into our world, shift your thoughts briefly to the ending of this magnificent earthly life. Jesus was speaking to the bewildered and traumatized disciples in John 14. He was trying to explain to them what life would look like when He was gone from this earth physically. One statement that He made grabs your attention. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

We often focus on the peace that Jesus brought into our world at His birth, and rightfully so. Yet here was Jesus speaking of the peace that He would bring at the end of His earthly life. Jesus declared not just a peace that one could anticipate because He entered our world, but a peace that would be ours even in the painful, difficult, and confusing times as well, at death.

More than 400 times, the word peace appears in Scripture, and interestingly, most of them in the Old Testament. Yet our Lord brings such peace into our lives in the New Covenant as well. In Thayer's classical Greek Lexicon, he identifies several synonyms with the word peace: tranquility, harmony, exemption from rage and hostility, and security.

This Christmas season, may the peace that Jesus brings envelope your heart and produce in your life these characteristics. His is a peace that lasts throughout your lifetime, from beginning to end.

Dr. Greg Ammons
Senior Pastor

December 6, 2026

PEACE: DAY FOUR
"Let the Prince of Peace Rule"

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6

It has been said that peace is the absence of war. Many times, there may not be a physical war going on, but there is a war going on in our hearts and minds that gives an illusion of peace to those around us when there is no peace. Those may be the times we cry out for peace.

It is interesting that many speak of the time of Christmas as being a time of peace, yet there are so many who see the Christmas holidays as being anything but peaceful, actually stressful. In Isaiah 9:6, we are told, "A son is given," and one of His names is "Prince of Peace." We are given things throughout our lifetime: birthday presents, Christmas presents, anniversary gifts, thank you cards, or even apologies. Yet, we don't always accept those things that are given.

During this Christmas season, we have been given the Prince of Peace. Will you allow Him, Jesus, to bring peace to you this season? Will you let go of the war that is going on in your mind and heart and allow the Prince of Peace to rule and reign with peace in your life? That was one of the reasons He was given… He is waiting…

Dennis Neal
Executive Pastor

December 7, 2026

PEACE: DAY FIVE
"A Peace the World Cannot Give"

"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." John 14:25-27

Have you ever noticed how busy and overwhelming the Christmas season can become? We have all these things we put on our calendars, and sometimes the season that is supposed to be filled with peace can leave us feeling exhausted and overwhelmed. And for some, Christmas can be a difficult season because of the loss of a loved one, financial struggles, or uncertainty about the future.

I want to encourage you with three truths Jesus shared with His disciples in John 14. (1) Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit. Jesus says the Father will send the Holy Spirit, the Helper, who would teach His disciples and remind them of His words. Because the gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus our Lord, is dwells within our hearts, reminding us daily of his truths. (2) Jesus gives us a peace the world cannot give. The world often tells us that peace comes when everything in life is going well, but the true meaning of peace our Savior gives is different. When we submit to the authority of the triune God, that is when we understand the true meaning of peace. (3) Jesus calls us to trust Him rather than live in fear. Maybe this Christmas you're facing something difficult, and you're afraid. Be reminded that the One who walked out of the tomb, is walking with you right now.

Hold tight to Jesus, pick up His word, pray and seek His face. This Christmas season, may you and I remember that true peace is found in knowing our Savior Jesus Christ who we obey.

Dane Hernandez
Minister of Senior Adults and Connections

December 8, 2026

PEACE: DAY SIX
"Peace with God, Others, and Ourselves"

"For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility." Ephesians 2:14

The world Jesus was born into had many similarities to our day. But one similarity stands out to me. He lived and we live in a world full of conflict and hostility: international, cultural, national, political, religious, and personal. There is no sphere of life then or now where the result of conflict, alienation, does not exist.

But Jesus came to the world to do something about all this conflict and alienation. Many would agree that He came to bring peace. But that is not quite what the Scripture teaches us. In Ephesians 2, Paul writes to explain how Christ could end the "dividing way of hostility" between Jews and everyone else. But also, there is alienation between all people and God Himself due to sin. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:14 that Christ Himself is our peace. Peace with God, peace with others, and peace with ourselves is found in Christ.

Some seek peace in things like substances, possessions, or work. All of these are at best distractions or diversions. As followers of Jesus, we understand that peace is not about escaping the conflict of this world or having an emotion of tranquility. Peace for those in Christ is an unshakeable perspective on reality that no matter their circumstances or feelings all is well because of their personal relationship with Christ.

May this amazing peace be yours during Christmas and all year long.

Jim Witt
Minister of Missions Mobilization

December 9, 2026

PEACE: DAY SEVEN
"Cast All Your Cares"

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." 1 Peter 5:6-7

Advent is a special time to reflect on the greatest gift God has ever given us and to prepare our hearts to receive Him. The Christmas season is filled with excitement and celebration along with a lot of preparation. Unfortunately, we often become overwhelmed by the schedules, responsibilities, and worries. Those who lived during the time of Christ also struggled with worry, despair, and hardship.

Peter wrote his first letter to early Christians facing severe isolation, social tribulation, and widespread persecution. He was also writing to the elders of the church encouraging them to shepherd God's people. Peter gives us some wonderful guidelines that we should put into practice daily. He reminds us to humble ourselves before the Lord, admitting that we cannot do it all and that we need Him in every area of our lives. God is asking us to trust and depend on Him in our decisions, relationships, finances, work, and health. Peter also tells us that we must cast all our cares upon Him!

I love that he says the word "all." Not just the big burdens but every worry, concern, anxious thought, and fear. The word "cast" (epiripto) in Greek means to forcefully throw or fling something off yourself on to something else. What a powerful picture of what happens when we cast everything upon Him… We experience peace! True peace can only come from knowing our Shepherd. He truly cares for you! Make a list of what you need to cast upon the Lord and spend time in prayer alone with Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Mark Hill
Minister of Music and Worship


Joy

December 10, 2026

JOY: DAY ONE
"The Joy of the LORD Is Your Strength"

"And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."
Nehemiah 8:10b

The year was 444, B.C. The Jews had returned from exile following the Decree of Cyrus. The Jerusalem temple had been rebuilt, though with only a glimmer of its former grandeur. The walls of the city had been rebuilt by Governor Nehemiah. The people had gathered to hear the law read by their resident theologian, Ezra the scribe. Yet upon hearing the law read aloud to them, the joyous occasion soon turned somber. As they listened to the words of Scripture which had been neglected and forgotten over the centuries, they realized the sin which lay within their hearts. The people began to weep. They mourned their plight and wondered if God would ever be gracious to them again. Nehemiah calmed their fears. "Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Even after everything that had happened – national punishment, divine discipline, imposed exile – Nehemiah did not underestimate the ability of the joy of the Lord to uplift the believer's soul.

As believers under the New Covenant, we behold what Nehemiah could have only imagined. The Christmas season represents the divine invasion of joy into a broken world. In the face of Jesus Christ, we find redemption from the sin that has plagued our lives, and strength buttressed by joy. Even after everything that may have happened over the past year – financial hardships, the loss of loved ones, uncertainty about the future – may you still be able to sing with the angels, "I bring you good news of great joy."

Camden Ammons
Pastoral Resident

December 11, 2026

JOY: DAY TWO
"The Joy of a Promise Fulfilled"

"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples." Luke 2:29-31

When my wife and I got married, we were excited to start a family. But we couldn't get pregnant. When the doctors told me I couldn't have children, it hit me hard. At first, I was angry. Over time, I learned to put that desire in God's hands. I prayed, "Even if you don't answer my prayer the way I hope, you are still God, and I love you." Then, in 2025, my wife told me she was pregnant. We named our daughter Eliana, which means, "My God has answered." Her middle name is Joy because that's what God filled our lives with when He answered our prayer.

In Luke 2:25–32, we read the story of Simeon, a man who lived in Jerusalem, waiting for "the consolation of Israel." Simeon was waiting for God to comfort and rescue His people. The Holy Spirit had told him that he would see the Messiah, the Savior God has promised, before he died. One day, the Holy Spirit led Simeon to the temple. Mary and Joseph had brought Jesus there to present him to the Lord, as God's law required. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said he could now go in peace because he had seen God's salvation with his own eyes. This child would bring light to people beyond Israel, too. When I picture Simeon holding Jesus after all that waiting, I remember the joy I felt when I first held Eliana.

You may still be waiting for an answer to a prayer. I know how hard that can be. This Christmas, I hope you'll remember what Simeon saw that day. God sent His Son to save us. Even as we wait for answers, we can find joy in Jesus, who has already come to us.

Dr. Elí Gutiérrez
Minister to Hispanic Congregation

December 12, 2026

JOY: DAY THREE
"Inexpressible and Glorious Joy"

"Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls." 1 Peter 1:8-9

What do you want for Christmas? Some of us will push that question away while others of us have a ready answer from a carefully curated list that we've constructed since December 26th of last year. Do you think you'll get what you want for Christmas? Maybe you will… Maybe you won't. According to some, that answer is only determined by whether your name is found etched upon the "Naughty List" or the "Nice List."

There is no such uncertainty for a follower of Jesus. If you are a follower of Jesus, then there is no doubt that you have already received the gift that is far beyond your imagination and infinitely beyond anyone else's ability to provide.

Look at what the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to write in today's passage. What is the gift that we have received? "The salvation of your souls." I couldn't earn that. No one else could give me that. Salvation is only possible because of the love that God has poured out through Jesus's atoning death on the cross and through His victorious resurrection from the dead. Praise God for His gift of salvation that is ONLY found in Jesus!

Because of the indescribable gift that God has given to me, I am filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy!

Michael Murrie
Minister to Students

December 13, 2026

JOY: DAY FOUR
"Joy For All"

"And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.'" Luke 2:10-11

It is easy to gloss over familiar passages like this, but take a moment to meditate on the words of these verses. To whom did the angels bring good news? To ALL the people! That is good news indeed! Their announcement of the birth of the Messiah was not just for Jews, or people who could recite large passages of the Torah from memory, or those who had their act together, or "good people," whatever that means.

No! The birth of the Messiah was and is good news for all people. In choosing to be born fully God and fully man, Jesus sparked the events that would lead Him to live a life of healing, teaching, and making disciples, eventually giving His life as a ransom for many, to pay the final sacrificial price for my sin and yours. Praise God! No more animal sacrifices, no more being bound by the law in attempts at righteousness, no more exclusion based on lineage. Now, salvation is available to all who will call upon His name. That is most certainly good news of great joy!

Sarah Wyatt
Minister to Children and Families

December 14, 2026

JOY DAY FIVE
"More Than A Moment"

"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Psalm 16:11

There are so many things in life that bring me joy. Cheering on my nieces and nephews as they give it their all on the field or court, celebrating their hard work, and watching them grow. Spending quality time out on our family farm, soaking in the beauty of God's creation, and enjoying the peace and quiet. Laughing until I split my sides while playing games, sharing stories, and doing life together with friends. And, of course, there is always the joy of a good Sooners' win over the Longhorns. I think I just lost some of you!

This world offers so many wonderful moments, and I am grateful for them all. But as much joy as these moments bring, they cannot compare to the fullness of joy found in Jesus Christ. Psalm 16:11 reminds us that true joy is found in His presence. He guides our paths, gives our lives purpose, and offers the promise of eternity with Him. Our happiest moments may pass, but the joy we find in Christ rests in the unchanging faithfulness of God.

As we celebrate Jesus' birth this Christmas, may we enjoy the blessings He gives us, while remembering that our greatest joy is found in Him. The moments we share in this life are gifts to cherish, but the joy we find in Christ is more than a moment; it extends beyond this season and this life. In His presence, we find fullness of joy and the promise of pleasures forevermore.

Amber Bryant
Recreation Ministry Director

December 15, 2026

JOY: DAY SIX
"The Crown Upon Your Head"

"And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Isaiah 51:11

You may not associate Isaiah 51 with the Christmas season. But listen to what the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah wrote. "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their head; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

This joyful passage focused on the anticipation of the coming salvation for Israel. As they returned to Zion from captivity in Babylon, there would be great joy that crowned their heads. The possibility of a restored relationship between Israel and God was only a dream to the exiles but became a possibility when God acted to make it happen. Pure, unadulterated joy was the result. In fact, God had already told the Israelites the same word 16 chapters earlier in Isaiah 35:10. Whenever God made a statement twice in Scripture, it was not just mere repetition. It was for emphasis. God wanted His people to know of the joy that His salvation brings.

We hear much about joy during the Christmas season, and well we should. It was a time of rejoicing when Jesus was born! Angels announced His birth with joy. Shepherds visited Him and worshiped with joy. The Magi joyfully brought the Christ Child gifts. This Christmas season, like the Israelites, we anticipate the celebration of the coming of our salvation. We are rescued from the captivity of sin through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The possibility of this restored relationship with God brings pure, unadulterated joy to us as well. Joy is the crown upon our head!

Dr. Greg Ammons
Senior Pastor

December 16, 2026

JOY: DAY SEVEN
"Spread the News! We Have Joy!"

"When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.' And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger." Luke 2:15-16

Have you ever heard some news that you just couldn't wait to share? Maybe the birth of a child or grandchild? A promotion? A bonus? Maybe hearing that a dear friend or relative is coming to see you who you haven't seen in a long, long time? Joy is defined in the dictionary as "a feeling of great happiness or pleasure; delight."

In our Scripture passage today, the shepherds had been visited by angels announcing the birth of our Savior, and they could not wait to go see Him and tell of His arrival! Their hearts were filled with joy as they made their way to Bethlehem to see the good news "which the Lord has made known to us." The Bible tells us they went with haste—I'm guessing they ran to Bethlehem and then told everyone what the angels revealed to them.

You and I as followers of Jesus have the greatest news this world has ever been told, and our hearts should be bursting with joy! This Christmas season let's make sure we share, as the shepherds did, the joyful news that has been made known to us. There is a Savior whose name is Jesus, and He came to this earth, lived a sinless life, died a cruel death on a cross, but was raised to life by our Heavenly Father in order to save a broken world! What joyful news that is for us to share!

Dennis Neal
Executive Pastor


Love

December 17, 2026

LOVE: DAY ONE
"More Than a Christmas Celebration"

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'" Matthew 2:1-2

Christmas is one of my favorite times of the year. I love how my wife and I will sit with the kids around Christmas Eve and read the story of the virgin birth. We know the Christmas story, but in Matthew chapter 2, we find a group of men who traveled a great distance for one purpose: to worship Jesus Christ. I love how these men (known as magi) weren't simply interested in seeing the newborn King, Jesus, but in worshiping Him.

Matthew tells us that the wise men opened their treasures and presented gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These gifts were valuable, and they were only fitting for a king. But, there is something that sticks out to me here that I don't want us to miss. These gifts were an expression of their worship. And these wise men didn't come simply to receive something. They came to honor the One who was, is, and always will be worthy to be praised.

This Christmas season, the greatest response we can offer to Jesus Christ is a life surrendered to Him in worship and obedience. The wise men traveled a great distance to worship Him. And today, you and I have the privilege of knowing Him through faith and worshiping Jesus right where we are. This Christmas season, I am thankful this to celebrate the goodness of God!

Dane Hernandez
Minister to Senior Adults and Connections

December 18, 2026

LOVE: DAY TWO
"An Everlasting Love"

"The LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you." Jeremiah 31:3

When Jesus was born, He was the final fulfillment of a prophecy of Jeremiah during one of the darkest periods in the history of Israel and Judah. This prophecy was included in a section of the book of Jeremiah (Chapters 30-33) known as the Book of Comfort. At this time the Northern Kingdom (Israel) had been destroyed, and the Southern Kingdom (Judah) was falling apart. Many were wondering if God had forgotten and abandoned them.

In Jeremiah 31:3, God denies He has abandoned them and proclaims His love for the people: "I have loved you with an everlasting love." He reassures the people who are broken and exiled that His commitment to them is permanent. Despite their breaking of the covenant over and over again, He will continue to love based on His character and not their performance.

And what will be the ultimate expression of that everlasting love? "In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout out from David's line" (Jer 33:15).

This is the prediction that at just the right time, God would send a new King, a descendant of David who would be known as "The Lord Our Righteous Savior" (Jer 33:16). In other words, Jesus was the ultimate expression of God's love. To all humanity.

Jim Witt
Minister of Missions Mobilization

December 19, 2026

LOVE: DAY THREE
"Rich In Mercy, Great In Love"

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved" Ephesians 2:4-5

I feel so blessed that I grew up in a wonderful home where my parents and grandparents loved and followed Jesus and taught me to do the same. I know it may be hard to believe, but I was a high energy, outgoing kid and the "poster child" for ADHD. Yet, my family, friends, and teachers were always loving, kind, and very patient. I was taught at a very young age about sin and how it separated us from God. I knew that God sent Jesus to this earth to save us from our sins because of His unconditional love!

Ephesians 2:4-5 begins with two powerful words: "But God." These two words absolutely change everything. We were lost and separated from God by sin and there was nothing we could do to save ourselves or earn our way into His presence. But God, in His abundant mercy, came to our rescue. Our God is rich in mercy, and there are no limits to His mercy and love.

I cannot thank Jesus enough for all the love He has shown to me and my family over the past year. God knew, way before we did, that I was going to be diagnosed with multiple myeloma and walk through some difficult and challenging times. "But God." He has poured out His love upon us daily, and our church family has overwhelmed us with prayer, love, and constant support! His grace is sufficient, and His great love never fails.

This is a wonderful time of the year to focus on Christ and to share His love with others. Whatever hardship or valley you are facing or will face in the future, just remember these two words…"But God!"

Mark Hill
Minister of Music and Worship

December 20, 2026

LOVE: DAY FOUR
"The Debt of Love"

"Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Romans 13:8-9

Many people cringe at the concept of debt. The reality of student loans, credit card payments, and home mortgages can leave us feeling paralyzed. However, in his letter to the Roman house churches, Paul discusses a kind of debt which actually frees us instead of leaving us in bondage.

"Owe no one anything, except to love one another." As Christians under the New Covenant, we have an obligation, a debt of love toward one another. How did we come to owe a debt of love to one another? Christ first loved us. Within the redeemed community, we do not possess the luxury of viewing our neighbor as someone who has wronged us. We must view them as what they are, an individual deeply loved by God, a soul for whom Christ died to save. This obligation of love is not new to the New Covenant. On the contrary, it was God's design even from the beginning of Scripture. "For all the commandments … are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' "

This Christmas season – amidst all of the busyness of gift-wrapping, home decorating, and end-of-year parties – remember the gift of divine love that was found in a manger. As you reflect on what God has done for you, go and do likewise. Speak the truth in love. Forgive past wrongs. Share the love of Christ with your neighbors. If I may be so bold, you owe it to them.

Camden Ammons
Pastoral Resident

December 21, 2026

LOVE: DAY FIVE
"The Love That Made Us Rich"

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."
2 Corinthians 8:9

Since becoming a dad, my heart has learned a new language. When I first held my daughter, Eliana, she couldn't say a word, but she was already teaching me something about love. I knew I would give my life for her. Becoming her dad helped me see how much love is willing to give. It also showed me a kind of wealth that money can't buy.

In 2 Corinthians 8:9, Paul writes to the church in Corinth. He is asking them to give to help other believers in need. To show them what love is willing to give, he points them to Jesus. Though Jesus was rich, He became poor for us so that through His poverty we might become rich.

At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus and remember why He came. It's a beautiful thing to picture Mary holding her baby. That baby came to give His life for us. The Son of God who lay in the manger would die on the cross for our sins and rise again. Because of what Jesus did, we can be forgiven and welcomed into God's family. That is the kind of wealth Jesus came to give us.

As you think about what to give this Christmas, think of someone who could use your help. Maybe you can share a meal, give some of your time, or help with a need they've been carrying alone. What could you give this week because of what Christ has given you?

Dr. Elí Gutiérrez
Minister to Hispanic Congregation

December 22, 2026

LOVE: DAY SIX
"Walking with My Father… Step By Step"

"If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit." Galatians 5:25

Our daughter does the sweetest thing when we're walking together. Maddie loves to match her steps with mine when the two of us are walking together. Whether it's during a walk through the trails near our house or walking between buildings at our church, Maddie is the master of synchronized walking.

For us, it is as though we stepped onto the Yellow Brick Road alongside Dorothy and friends. The perfect rhythm is melodic in its cadence, and it sounds as though it is ONE person walking.

I love walking with my daughter, and she loves walking with me. Whenever the International Olympic Committee comes to its senses and adds Father/Daughter Synchronized Walking as an Olympic event, you can mark Maddie and me down for the gold!!!

Maddie's skill at matching my walk reminds me of the way that I want to walk with my Heavenly Father. I don't want to run ahead of Him. I don't want to lag behind Him.

I want to walk in step with the Spirit Who graciously and lovingly guides me. May my steps be in perfect sync with my Heavenly Father. May God bless you as you walk in step with the Spirit. Merry Christmas!

Michael Murrie
Minister to Students

December 23, 2026

LOVE: DAY SEVEN
"God's Overwhelming Love"

"Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." John 13:16-17

As I have the immense blessing of serving the youngest members of our church family, I have heard these verses taught by loving teachers and recited by snaggle-toothed small children more times than I can count. And yet, just as it is when you read them, they never grow old.

I have four sons who are all young men and independent or very close to it. As they have grown into more freedom and less time under my care, I often feel like whole chunks of my heart are walking around outside of my body. I know many of you can relate. I cannot begin to fathom the sacrifice that our Heavenly Father made by sending His One and Only Son to leave glory to live on earth, fully God and fully man, and then eventually to watch Him suffer and die as He took on the sin of the world. Such love cannot be fully understood this side of Heaven.

I think of the vast love God has allowed me to experience – the love of the local church body and each of its members, the love of parents and grandparents who show me what God's love feels like, my love for my kids – an overwhelming type of love, and now, GRANDBABIES – the closest thing to Heaven on earth! Today I am celebrating the birthday of my husband, Brandon, who I love more and more every day. And yet, even in the richness of all this love, nothing comes close to comparing to the way that God loves each of us. "Oh how He loves you and me!"

Sarah Wyatt
Minister to Children and Families


The
Christ
Child

December 24, 2026

CHRISTMAS EVE
"A Baby Changes Everything"

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11
"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:14

The birth of a baby brings many changes, especially when it's the first baby in the family. Preparations are made, and excitement fills the room. When my niece was born, the anticipation of becoming an aunt (or Tia!) was so exciting. My schedule revolved around making sure I didn't miss a moment. I was more than eager to help buy clothes, decorate her room, and yes, even change a few diapers!

When the angel announced Jesus's birth, the message was clear: a Savior had been born. But the significance of that night goes even deeper. John tells us that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The child in the manger was not simply another baby; He was the eternal Son of God who entered His creation and came to live among us. His arrival changed everything, marking the moment God stepped into human history so we could be reconciled to Him.

Think about the wonder of that truth. The One who created us stepped into our broken world. The One who gives life came to rescue us from sin. God did not remain distant from our need; He sent His Son to accomplish what we could never do for ourselves. The manger was only the beginning of a journey that would lead to the cross and the empty tomb. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, forgiveness and eternal life became available to all who trust in Him. As we celebrate Christmas, may we never lose sight of the significance of the Christ Child. A baby changed everything because this baby was the Savior—the eternal Son of God who came to bring us back to Him.

Amber Bryant
Recreation Ministry Director

December 25, 2026

CHRISTMAS DAY
"Merry Christmas! Christ Is Here!"

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

The day of celebration which we have been anticipating has arrived! Merry Christmas everyone! We celebrate the arrival of our long-awaited hope! God truly so loved the world that He gave us His Son. He entered our world, lived a sinless life, died an atoning death, rose victoriously on the third day, ascended to heaven 40 days later, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, with the promise of His return.

William Canton was a British poet in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His daughter, Winifred Vida Canton, died of peritonitis at the age of 10. He stated that whenever she died, "all the clocks of the world seemed to stop and all the wheels of life fell still." Yet Canton found his hope in Christ. Here is the way he wrote of the birth of Jesus.

When the herds were watching
In the midnight chill,
Came a spotless lambkin
From the heavenly hill.

Snow was on the mountains
And the wind was cold,
When from God's own garden
Dropped a rose of gold.

When 'twas bitter winter,
Homeless and forlorn
In a star-lit stable
Christ the Babe was born.

Welcome, heavenly lambkin;
Welcome, golden rose;
Alleluia, Baby
In the swaddling clothes!

Merry Christmas, First Baptist Church of Garland. Our hope has arrived!

Dr. Greg Ammons
Senior Pastor

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