

Advent Devotional Guide

2011

Promises Kept

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First Baptist Church Fairdale
Advent Devotional Guide
2011

Josh Wamble
Editor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Introduction: How to Use this Devotional Guide</i>	4
Week One Theme: Promises Needed	
Hymn: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”	5
11/27 Genesis 3.....	6
<i>Jason Fowler</i>	
11/28 Genesis 6:1-9:17.....	7
<i>Janet McDonald</i>	
11/29 Exodus 1-2.....	8
<i>Josh Wamble</i>	
11/30 Isaiah 59:1-20.....	9
<i>Peter A. Witkowski</i>	
12/1 Psalm 15.....	10
<i>Jason Fowler</i>	
12/2 Romans 3:9-20.....	11
<i>Josh Wamble</i>	
12/3 Jeremiah 31:10-34.....	12
<i>Annette Darnell</i>	
Week Two Theme: Promises Made	
Hymn: “Blessed Be the God of Israel”	13
12/4 Genesis 3:15.....	14
<i>Nate Martin</i>	
12/5 Genesis 12:1-3.....	15
<i>Andrew Berry</i>	
12/6 2 Samuel 7:8-17.....	16
<i>Josh Greene</i>	
12/7 Micah 5:1-6.....	17
<i>Valeria Greene</i>	
12/8 Isaiah 9:1-7.....	18
<i>Michele Fowler</i>	
12/9 Isaiah 11.....	19
<i>Josh Greene</i>	
12/10 Deuteronomy 18:15-22.....	20
<i>Josh Wamble</i>	

Week Three Theme: Promises Anticipated	
Hymn: “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus”	21
12/11 Isaiah 40:9-11, 27-31.....	22
<i>Josh Greene</i>	
12/12 Micah 7:1-10, 18-20.....	23
<i>Josh Wamble</i>	
12/13 Zechariah 6:9-14.....	24
<i>Jason Fowler</i>	
12/14 Zephaniah 3:14-20.....	25
<i>Peter A. Witkowski</i>	
12/15 Zechariah 9:9-13.....	26
<i>Jason Fowler</i>	
12/16 Luke 1:26-38.....	27
<i>Jonathan Law</i>	
12/17 Matthew 1:1-17.....	28
<i>Jason Fowler</i>	
Week Four Theme: Promises Kept	
Hymn: “Joy to the World”	29
12/18 Revelation 5.....	30
<i>Michele Fowler</i>	
12/19 Matthew 1:18-25.....	31
<i>Andrew Berry</i>	
12/20 Matthew 2:1-12.....	32
<i>Terry Stivers</i>	
12/21 Philippians 2:5-11.....	33
<i>Nate Martin</i>	
12/22 Hebrews 1:1-3a, 2:14-18.....	34
<i>Dalton Stivers</i>	
12:23 1 John 1:1-4.....	35
<i>Peter A. Witkowski</i>	
12/24 Luke 2:1-7.....	36
<i>Annette Darnell</i>	
12/25 (AM) Luke 2:19.....	37
<i>Josh Wamble</i>	
12/25 (PM) John 1:1-18.....	38
<i>Josh Greene</i>	

Introduction:

How to Use this Devotional Guide

The word “Advent” means “coming.” Historically in the Church, the season of advent has been celebrated the four Sundays leading up to Christmas. It is a time to look back and celebrate Jesus’ coming to earth and a time to look forward to Jesus’ return. The observance of Advent is meant to bring people, families, and churches to a better understanding and appreciation of the truth that the holy, majestic, mighty God who created the universe and all that is in it became a man so that he might live and die to save his people.

As we look back to this event in history, we are reminded of several things. First the fact that a savior has come reminds us that we need a savior. Salvation and the incarnation (Jesus taking on flesh and becoming a man) only make sense in the context of a fallen sinful world that is desperately in need of salvation. Secondly, we are reminded of the mercy and grace of our God. God was not obligated to save us. He did not owe anyone anything. When Adam and Eve disobeyed, rebelled, and sinned in the garden, God would have been completely right and justified to write humanity off and leave us in that sinful condition. He did not do that. He had mercy and grace, and out of his own goodness, mercy, and grace, love and forgiveness flowed. Thirdly, we are reminded that God is a faithful, covenant-keeping God. He does what he says he will do. Immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God promised that a deliverer would come from the descendants of the woman. Throughout the Old Testament, this promise is repeated and clarified. Advent is the celebration of God fulfilling this promise—keeping his word.

The season of Advent helps us to look back and rejoice that God has kept his promise to redeem his people from sin and to look forward with anticipation of the day when He will keep His promise to return to earth to judge the world, finally remove all sin and its effects, and gather his people to be with him forever.

This devotional guide was written to help you do just this—look to Jesus during this time of year. The passages have been carefully chosen to fit together and tell the biblical story. The book is organized within four weeks. Each week has a particular theme: *Promise Needed*, *Promises Made*, *Promises Anticipated*, and *Promises Kept*. Also, a hymn has been chosen for each week that fits within the theme. Singing or reading the hymn each day before or after the devotion is recommended.

The devotions are useful for individual reading, but we encourage you to use them with your spouse or family as a family worship time. Each day has a scripture reading and devotional thought (Christmas Day has one for the morning and one for the evening).

Each of the devotions was written by a member of First Baptist Church, Fairdale who loves Jesus, His Church, and His Word and wants to encourage each of us during this time. It is our hope that this book would help to remind us how unbelievable it is that God became a man and that this would encourage you to love Jesus more.

Week One: Promise Needed

It is difficult to celebrate the coming of salvation without first thinking about what we need to be saved from. We cannot know how great our Savior (and salvation) is until we understand how great our sin is. Over the next week, we will look at what the bible says about the extent of our sin and the terrible mess that we were in.

Each of the passages for the next week focuses on our sin. We will see that our condition is hopeless. Because of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, we are all utterly and entirely sinful. Nothing we do, say, think, feel, or want is free of sin's influence. No matter what we try or how good we think we are, we can never reach God by our own efforts. If we are to be reunited to God, it must be by his action and initiative not our own.

The glorious truth is that even in these passages that are so focused on the depths of our sin, we find a hint of hope that is to come. In the midst of the worst acts of rebellion and treason against God, he has chosen to make a way to bring us back to him!

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel

O come, thou Wisdom from on high, and order all things, far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show, and cause us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel

O come, Desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease; fill the whole world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel

PROMISE NEEDED

November 27, 2011

Genesis 3

Jason Fowler

*Oh, there's no place like home for the holidays,
'cause no matter how far away you roam,
when you pine for the sunshine of a friendly face,
for the holidays, you can't beat home, sweet home.
—Perry Como*

Ask most people what they love most about Christmas, and they will likely mention family and home. Christmas is thick with the memories of family and home. At Christmas, we sing songs about them and watch movies about them, and we generally expect to spend Christmas in a home with family. Christmas isn't *just* about family and home, but these seem integral to Christmas. If Christmas is about family and home, Genesis 3 is about their loss, as well as the promise of their restoration.

We know the story of Genesis 3. God made the world and everything in it. It was all very good. He set up a garden and put a man and woman there to work and keep it. The first family was in a *perfect* starter home, furnished with all they needed, and they lived there in a state of innocence. God gave them one command, not to eat fruit from one particular tree in the garden. To eat of that fruit meant death for them. They could eat from any other tree, but they could not eat from that tree. A serpent – a *talking* serpent – was also in the garden. The serpent deceived the woman, convincing her to eat some of the fruit by holding out the promise that the fruit would give her the “knowledge of good and evil.” The woman, later called Eve, gave some of the fruit to her husband, Adam, and he ate it as well. God showed up. He cursed the serpent and pronounced judgment upon Adam and Eve. The judgment on them was multifaceted. They started dying and they would eventually die. Their innocence was lost. Sin affected every part of their lives. Their work became difficult. Their relationship with each other was frustrated. Their lives had pain. They were evicted from the garden. They were separated from God. This judgment not only affected them, but it cascaded down to their descendants – all of humanity. The first family literally descends into chaos and loses the first home.

Yet in the midst of this judgment scene, God interjects hope in an unlikely place. While pronouncing the serpent's curse, he promises that the woman's offspring would bruise the serpent's head and the serpent would bruise her offspring's heel. In other words, God promises to send someone – a human being – to do battle with the serpent, Satan. The outcome is already decided. Both will receive wounds. The serpent's wound will be tantamount to a head wound. The offspring's wound will be like unto a heel injury. Heel injuries are painful. Head wounds are deadly.

In short, God promised to send his son Jesus, the very radiance of his glory, into the world to defeat the serpent and save fallen humanity. And he did it in a most remarkable way. He did not enter as Adam did – the ruler of a pristine world with a prepared home. Rather, he entered the world outside the garden. He was born in a stable and spent much of his life having “no place to lay his head.” He lived in a world of frustrated family relationships where his earthly parents and siblings failed to understand exactly what he was doing for them. He came to his own people, but they did not receive him. Worse than that, they killed him. And yet, through his incarnation and death, he defeated the work of Satan, brought people into God's family (John 11:52), and restored the family to a home (John 14:2). Praise be to God.

November 28, 2011

Genesis 6:1-9:17

Janet McDonald

The book of Genesis is rich in the promises given by God to his people, and is rich in warnings to unbelievers. The book of Genesis is germane to many, if not all, the great doctrinal truths given in the New Testament. In the illustration that follows, I hope that will be clearly seen. The historical account of the great deluge can be seen not only for what it was in actuality, but also as a picture of God's warning to unbelievers, and a picture of the refuge God makes available to those who would come to him for salvation. Read again Genesis 7:1. Now, envision a stained glass window. The name of the window is "Come."

Come sinners, God has promised forgiveness

The bottom of the window is cast in dark colors, shades of black and dark red, red the color of blood. This scene causes us to weep, because it shows the flood. The deluge has begun. The ark, covered with tar, is dark and floats above the dark waves. There is, however, a red glow over the ark, red the color of blood. Dark flood waters are filled with terrified unbelievers trying to enter the ark. But it's too late. God has shut the door. There is no hope for them. The day of mercy has ended.

Noah had been obedient to God and has built the ark as God commanded him. He finished the work God gave him to do. Noah was called a preacher of righteousness, but the people of his generation wouldn't listen. Now, the day of wrath has come. It is too late to call sinners to righteousness any more.

Come righteous ones, God has promised safety

This scene is the inside of the ark. It is cast in colors of life: the colors of white sheep, the mottled colors of the big cats, the gray of the elephants, the bright blues, purples, greens, reds, and yellows of the living things God has brought to live in the ark. The walls of the ark are black. Noah and his family rest and wait. They are safe in the ark. All they need is found in the ark. You see, at the time appointed, God had commanded Noah to come into the ark. God had promised Noah a place of refuge, and he brought Noah to that place of refuge.

Come, look at the rainbow

The last and top scene in the stained glass window is of Noah, his family and the animals outside the ark, standing on dry ground. Noah and his family are gazing up at a beautiful rainbow. It is a sign of God's promise that he will not again destroy the earth with water. With that promise God also promised that he will destroy the earth again, but the next time he will destroy the earth and everything in it, with fire.

Come, receive salvation

Once again, God offers salvation to all who come to him by faith in Christ Jesus. Today God is saying "Come." It matters not how far away from God you are. Reach out to him. His hand remains outstretched to you now. He invites you to accept his free gift of salvation. While there is time, you come. Come to Christ and be saved.

PROMISE NEEDED

November 29, 2011

Exodus 1-2

Josh Wamble

The Christian Life seems to be full of paradoxes. We worship a God who is three and one. Our King is a servant. We are truly free only when we become slaves of Christ. Our Savior died to give us life. And, often in the bible, the greatest hope comes only from the deepest despair.

This is true of Job. It is true of Jonah. And, it is true of the Israelites in the book of Exodus. These people had grown up hearing story after story of how God had chosen and preserved them. He had called their ancestor, Abraham, when he was seventy-five years old and told him to leave his family and travel to a land that he did not know. God promised to make him into a great nation, to bless him, to make his name great, and to bless all the nations of the world through him. Abraham believed and followed.

In every circumstance, God was faithful to his promises. He gave Abraham a son in his old age and allowed him to see several generations of his descendants prosper. After Abraham's death, God continued to bless his sons and to fulfill the promise he had made to their father through their lives. He supplied wives for them and many children. He providentially saved Israel from destruction when he raised Joseph from a slave to the second highest power in Egypt.

And yet, at the opening of Exodus, the Pharaoh had died, the Israelites were trapped in slavery, and their male children were being slaughtered. They were, no doubt, in the depths of despair! How could this be happening? Where was God? What had happened to the promises that he had made to Abraham? Had he forgotten his covenant? Had he forgotten his plan? How would the nations be blessed? These questions, and many others, seemed to have no answers.

The people were groaning under the Egyptians' cruel slavery. They were crying out for help. They were crying out for rescue. Worst of all, their God seemed to have abandoned them. In this moment, the deepest possible depths of despair yielded the greatest of hopes. God was not standing idly by. He had not forgotten his covenant with Abraham. His plan was not a failure. Even in the midst of their sin, he heard their groaning. He remembered his covenant. He saw the people of Israel, and it says, "He knew." There is a huge contrast here. A new king arose in Egypt in Exodus 1:8. This king did not know. He was unaware of God's promise—his plan. But God knew!

All men find themselves in this same situation of despair before God. He has told us the standard that we are to meet if we will be accepted by him; yet, we find that no matter how hard we work, we cannot measure up. In the midst of our despair, our hope comes from the same place as that of the Israelites. "But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off, have been brought near by the blood of the Christ. For he himself is our peace (Ephesians 2:13-14)." Let us look to Christ through the gospel and hope in the God who keeps his promises!

November 30, 2011

Isaiah 59:1-20

Peter Witkowski

Separation! It is one of the words that no one wants to talk about or think about during Christmas. We want to hear the laughter of young children, hug our grandparents, and smell the aroma of great food coming from our mom's Kitchen. We want to be near to the ones we love on Christmas.

A few Christmases ago, this truth hit home. My brother was deployed with the Air Force during the holiday season. My family still had all of the same traditions. We watched Christmas movies, had our Christmas Eve buffet with a great assortment of shrimp and fresh Texas tamales, and sang the *Twelve Days of Christmas* in rounds. But his absence was still felt by all! We did everything possible to include him in our celebration. We called him on Christmas Eve and then video chatted with him on Christmas morning. But try as hard as we might, there was no substitute for him being with us. Our family was separated.

However, separation is not limited to the realm of family and friends this Christmas. The holiday is actually concerned with a much larger separation. In Isaiah 59:1-20, we learn that we have been separated from God. The prophet wrote, "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God and your sins have hidden him from you so that he does not hear (59:2)." You see the God of the Bible is a holy and a pure God. He cannot tolerate sin because then he would become dirty like us and would cease to be a good God. Now according to Genesis 2, God made the first humans pure like him and they lived in holiness and happiness. But, they sinned by disobeying God's commands. Consequently, all their offspring—including you and me—follow the pattern of our first parents. We sin. As we sin, we separate ourselves from God. Now everyone wants to be right with God and to feel good about his actions. Thus, we try to do good things. We volunteer, we try to stop cursing, and at Christmas time we try to be extra nice to everybody for at least 24 hours. But we cannot erase or escape our sins. Isaiah noted "Our transgressions are with us (59:12b)." Just as my family could not bring my brother home for Christmas that year, we cannot wipe away our sins. We cannot bridge the gap between us and God. We need a savior!

The great news is that at the end of this passage, God makes a promise. He has not left us in this state. He had mercy on us! He declared that a 'Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgressions' (59:20a). In the coming weeks, we will see that he has kept that promise. He has made a way for men and women to come back to God. If you flee from your sin and cling to God you will be saved. The Redeemer will reconcile us to God by paying the penalty for our sin and making us white as snow!

December 1, 2011

Psalm 15

Jason Fowler

*O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?
Who shall dwell on your holy hill?
(Psalm 15:1 ESV)*

The most detrimental effect of Adam's sin in Genesis 3 is the loss of God's presence. When God ejected Adam and Eve from Eden because of their sin, humanity lost the privilege of being in his presence within the garden. Sin caused this separation from God, and humanity's greatest problem is that we are separated from God because of sin. God is so holy that he will not look upon evil (Hab. 1:13), much less dwell with it (Psalm 5:4).

In light of God's holiness and man's separation from him, what hope is there for sinful humanity? How can people overcome this devastating effect of the fall? Who is qualified to dwell in the presence of our holy God? Those are the types of questions that David asks in this Psalm. The very questions that he asks demonstrate that there is a fundamental problem in the relationship between God and humanity.

David's answers to these questions are about what we would expect. If God is so holy that he is unwilling even to look at evil, then only those who are holy can dwell in his presence. David describes the person who can dwell in God's presence as being the picture of perfection. His feet walk blamelessly. His heart speaks truth. His tongue does not slander. His eyes view evil people and those who honor the Lord appropriately. He has right thoughts that are reflected in right actions. Every part of him is right and good. This is what we expect the person who can dwell in God's presence to be like.

Contrast this description with what Paul says about sinful humanity in Romans 3:10-18. Paul indicts every part of us as corrupt – our minds, throats, tongues, lips, mouths, feet, and eyes. No part of us is without sin, and if this psalm were the end of the story, it would make any hope we have about dwelling with God pretty bleak. Psalm 15 may reflect what we want to be, what we hope to be, and what we should be, but it does not reflect what we are.

Although Psalm 15 does not reflect who we are, it does reflect an actual person. The Old Testament longing for one who lived up to this psalm is ultimately realized in Jesus, the God-man. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life that measures up to the standard set forth in Psalm 15. Among the children born of woman, Jesus alone deserves to be in God's presence.

So, if only Jesus deserves to be in God's presence, what hope do we have in being there? Our hope for being in the presence of God is the same one we sing about at Christmas, namely Jesus. He is the perfect high priest who by his own death made a perfectly acceptable sacrifice for the people (Heb. 7:26-27). He went into God's presence on our behalf (Heb. 9:24), and he is the only way that we are able to enter God's presence, both in this age (Heb. 10:22), and the one to come (Heb. 9:28). As we celebrate the one who came to dwell with us (John 1:14), let us remember that only he qualifies us to dwell with God.

December 2, 2011

Romans 3:9-20

Josh Wamble

It would be hard to find a more depressing passage in the whole bible. It is exhaustive in its scope. No one is left out. None is righteous—not one single person. Of all the billions of people who have ever been born, there has never been a single person who is righteous. No one understands or even seeks after God. No one meets the standard of perfection required to be acceptable to God. But, it's even worse than this.

Paul says that every single person on the face of the earth is worthless. We, like Onesimus before us are completely useless to God. None of us does good. God gave us a tongue to use to praise him, and we use it to deceive our neighbors and ourselves. We use it to defame God and his creation. We use it to curse and blaspheme. As hard as this is to hear, we all know that it is true. We know from our own experience that there is a major flaw in us. We are messed up. In many ways, our lives are wrecks. We want to do good and please God, but it seems that whenever we try to do good, we find with Cain that sin is crouching, waiting, ready to destroy. As hard as we try we cannot master it.

We know what it is that God requires from us; and yet, we cannot do it. No matter how hard we try, we cannot live up to the righteous requirements of the law. We are in a truly desperate situation. This is where the good news of this passage comes in.

We are in a desperate situation if we are trying to keep the law to gain favor with God. Paul says that no human being will be justified before God by works of the law. No one can obey well enough to enter God's presence. But, even if someone could, that would not undo or make up for his former disobedience.

As paradoxical as it may seem, the good news is that we are far worse than we often think. It is not as though we are just tainted by sin and have to work hard to overcome it. No, freedom comes in knowing that we are completely defiled. There is nothing in us that could even begin to work our way to God. No, if we are to be saved it will have to be a completely external salvation. It cannot come from within us; it must come from outside of ourselves.

This is the very good news of Christmas. Romans 3:21 and 22 say, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." In the person of Jesus, righteousness was manifested. Righteousness has a name. Righteousness has a personality. The righteousness of God is Jesus.

Jesus lived a perfect life never knowing sin. The bible says that God made this one who knew no sin to be sin for us. That is, if we trust in him alone, he takes our sins from us. This is only half of the gospel though. He not only takes our sins, he also gives us his righteousness. Now we can come into God's presence—not because we have earned righteousness but because we have been given an external righteousness—an alien righteousness. We are righteous only because he is righteous and we are found in him!

This is the good news of Christmas. We can rejoice and look with great joy for Jesus to return because when he came the first time, he dealt with sin. Let us believe what we often sing: "My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin, not in part but the whole, is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more! Praise the Lord, praise the Lord oh my soul."

PROMISE NEEDED

December 3, 2011

Jeremiah 31:10-34

Annette Darnell

Every year in early December we begin to ask friends, family and complete strangers, “Are you ready for Christmas?” It was in 336 AD that the Roman Emperor Constantine declared December 25 as the day to celebrate the birth of Christ. I find it hard to understand why we aren’t ready for something that has come on the same day for the past 1675 years!

That having been said, it seems we always have one more Yule log to put on the fire or one more wassail to sing. We are never satisfied with how much we have done to prepare for the big day. As I was thinking about this common conversation starter, I wondered if I *was* ready for Christmas. Not ready as far as custom and social decorum dictate but was I ready for the Incarnation of Christ and what it means?

The prophet Jeremiah brought the message of impending destruction on the house of Judah more than 2500 years ago. Through her rebellion and disobedience, Judah had broken her end of the covenant God had entered into with Moses some 850 years earlier. In that covenant, God promised Israel that they would be His “treasured possession among all peoples” if only they would “obey His voice and keep His covenant.”

From the beginning, God knew that because of sin that entered the world through Adam, His people could never keep their part of His covenant. Today that same sin makes us unable to be obedient to God. In His wisdom, He had been planning all along to give us the gift of a new covenant that was to be fulfilled in the God-man Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah brought this good news to Judah. He told them that the same God who had destroyed Israel now promised to gather her together again. He promised to ransom and redeem His people; He promised to turn their mourning into joy and their sorrow into gladness as well as rest for every weary soul.

“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, “know the LORD, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.” Jeremiah 31:33-34

This new covenant would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ 600 years later and is God’s gift to us. All we have to do is accept it. What greater gift could we have than for God to forgive our sin and “to remember it no more”? The gift of Himself made Incarnate in Jesus, in a tiny baby, would be the only Christmas gift we would need.

Mankind was ready for Christmas since the beginning. God promised us His gift of the new covenant and delivered it to us, wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger in Bethlehem.

Now when people ask me if I’m ready for Christmas, I get strange looks when my answer is “I surely was!”

Week Two: Promises Made

When we think of Christmas, we have a tendency to immediately think of the birth of Jesus and the New Testament passages in Matthew and Luke that tell this story. However, that is not where the story begins. The coming and birth of Jesus doesn't come all of a sudden out of nowhere. In fact, Ephesians 3:11 says that God had a plan from before he made the earth. What we so often tend to think of as "the Christmas story" is only the beginning of the final step in the story of redemption that God had planned and began orchestrating so long ago. He did not keep this plan a secret either. We begin to see hints of it as early as Genesis 3:15. It is not clearly and fully explain at this point, but it is there nonetheless.

As we read through the Old Testament and see time passing along, we see God renew this promise several times. Another thing seems to happen as well. The more we read, and the closer we get to the time for the Christ to be born, the more fully and clearly the plan is unveiled. We begin to see not just *that* God will save his people but *how* he will do it as well.

The devotions for the next week are all based on some of these passages where God repeats the promise that he has made to rescue his people from the depths of sin. We can rejoice and worship as we read and think about these promises knowing that God was faithful to do what he said he would do!

“Blessed Be the God of Israel”¹

Blest be the God of Israel, who comes to set us free,
Who visits and redeems us and grants us liberty.
The prophets spoke of mercy, of freedom and release;
God shall fulfill the promise to bring our people peace.

Now from the house of David a child of grace is given;
A Savior comes among us to raise us up to heaven.
Before him goes the herald, forerunner in the way,
the prophet of salvation, the messenger of day.

Where once were fear and darkness the sun begins to rise,
The dawning of forgiveness upon the sinner's eyes,
To guide the feet of pilgrims along the paths of peace;
O bless our God and Savior with songs that never cease!

¹ This hymn can be sung to the tune of "The Church's One Foundation."

PROMISES MADE

December 4, 2011

Genesis 3:15

Nate Martin

All went wrong. The glory of peace that flowed like streams of water had been sucked dry by sin. Adam and Eve deliberately sinned against God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Immediate shame came upon them; so they sought to cover themselves with leaves. They knew that they were naked and became very embarrassed. This is what sin does. It strips you bare and exposes you to shame as if you have no hope. Adam and Eve were scared to death because of the wrong thing that they had done, but God sought them out.

After the disobedience of Adam and Eve, God delivered the punishment for sin. As you read in week one, the penalty for sin is death! Can there be any hope of being delivered from death? In the middle of God sentencing the guilty, we find an amazing promise! It is a promise of hope. It is a promise that one will come to free those who are dead in sin. The one who is coming is the offspring of the woman. His name will be Jesus!

In Jesus' coming, he will die for all those who have no hope, all the sinners—for you and me. By dying on the cross and rising again, Jesus conquered Satan and death allowing everyone who repents and trusts in him to be forgiven of their sins! Genesis 3:15 is the first promise of hope for sinners! Even in the very beginning God was planning to save his people! How amazing!

As we approach Christmas remember the promises of God. That even in the midst of judgment against sin God promised His Son Jesus Christ to be the redeemer! Maybe you are struggling with sin, doubt, unbelief, or weariness. Remember, God has promised the coming of Jesus!

We have the wonderful advantage of being on the other side looking back at this promise. We know that Christ not only died for our sin, but is also still alive ready to minister to his people as needed. So, let's be thankful this season that God is a God of promises and that he is a promise keeping God even when we, like Adam, fail to keep ours!

December 5, 2011

Genesis 12:1-3

Andrew Berry

We are all familiar with what a promise is. From the pinky promises that we made when we were children to the marriage vows that we recited to our spouses, all of us can recall some of the promises that we have either made, kept, or reneged upon. With just a simple, broad understanding of the Bible, we know that God's promises to His people play a huge part in its overall story. In Genesis 12:1-3 we encounter one of the most important promises in the entire Bible, a promise that traces throughout the entire Old Testament, into the New Testament, and directly to us today.

The Bible is the simple story of how God saves His people. In Genesis 12:1-3 God calls Abram out of the land of Ur and promises him descendants, a land, and blessings. God's covenant with Abraham is the continuation of His initial promise with Adam and Eve after the Fall in Genesis 3:15. Through the succession of Abraham's family—who were not always the best of people—we see God's promises take shape as Israel becomes a great nation and takes possession of the Promised Land. But, as we see repeatedly throughout the story, the Israelites often fail to keep God's commandments, revealing both God's wonderful grace and the need for a new and better covenant.

The story then shifts into the New Testament. Throughout the Gospels we see that God ultimately fulfills His promises to Abraham through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, the promised seed of David. We also see that although God's former covenant was reserved for Israel and carried with it national and ethnic distinctions, now God's plan of salvation goes out to all peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations. As God promised that in Abraham "all the families of the earth shall be blessed," so now they are with the long awaited arrival of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

This holiday season keep God's promises at the center of your mind. Although there are many things that can divert our attention away from Jesus, many which are really good (family, friends, work, etc), keep in mind that we're celebrating the fulfillment of all of God's past promises. Also, trust in the certainty of God's promises (Heb 6:13-20). While as sinful human beings we often fail at keeping our promises, God always keeps His word.

PROMISES MADE

December 6, 2011

2 Samuel 7:8-17

Josh Greene

Most people really like the Biblical man and hero King David. He seems in so many ways to be like us. He was in many ways a 'normal' man. We are drawn to him.

He was the underdog in the household of Jesse. When the LORD sent Samuel to Jesse's house to find the next king, there were seven sons that seemed to look like a king, but God did not choose any of them. Then Samuel asked Jesse if that was all of his sons (1 Sam. 16:11). Jesse told him he had one more. This son was the youngest and the smallest. He was outside tending to the sheep. This was David. This was God's man. This was Israel's next king.

David turned out to be a good king. He served God and his people well. They liked him. He reigned for forty years (2 Sam. 5:4). But just like all leaders, his time came to an end. What would this mean for God's people? What would come next?

In 2 Samuel 7, we have God making a covenant with David. He makes him a promise. A promise is a commitment by someone to do something. In this passage, God is making a promise to David and all of his people that he will do something.

In 2 Samuel 7:8-17, God speaks to King David through the mouth of Nathan the prophet. The context is about building a house for God. It has been a while since God has had a house to dwell in (2 Sam. 7:6). The people of Israel had been on the move continuously and God was dwelling in a tent. But God would tell David that he is not the one to build the house. God goes on to tell David that He will do it himself. God will build the house. God will establish the throne. God is making His covenant, His promise to David in this way- "***And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever*** (2 Samuel 7:16)."

This promise means everything to us. As I have said already, a promise is a commitment by someone to do something. God's promises are the difference between life & death, heaven & hell, peace & turmoil, joy & misery, forgiveness & condemnation. When God saves us and we put our faith and trust in Jesus that He will save us and be a good God and King to us forever, we need it to be true. We believe that it is true.

God's promise in 2 Samuel 7 that David's throne & reign will last forever is one that we are trusting in. Moreover, Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise. Jesus is the King from David's line that will reign forever. Christ's reign will conclude human history.

In Luke 1:32-33, the angel Gabriel is speaking to Mary about her coming son Jesus and says "***And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.***"

This passage directly connects God's promise of 2 Samuel 7 with Jesus. This Christmas, trust God and His promises. Jesus, like David but even better, *much better*, is a good King to you. He will reign over you, for your good and His glory, forever. Amen!

December 7, 2011

Micah 5:1-6

Valeria Greene

God's beautiful promise of the Messiah in this chapter of the book of Micah comes right in the middle of a time of siege, destruction, and even with further doom and fall to come. All due to God's deserved judgment for sin. Yet, what does the prophet Micah reassert at a time like this? –The eternal, standing, covenant promise of God to bring forth a ruler (v.2), a deliverer (v.6) for His people.

No circumstances, as horrible as they may seem, or even having been brought about due to our own selves, can nullify God's word and His unbendable, unbreakable promises. Even when judgment is real and awful, God's mercy shines brighter. God does not leave His people without hope. And that hope is not just of a Savior, but of a Savior who will shepherd His people. This ruler "from of old, from ancient days" will protect and comfort His people. Right in the middle of so much turmoil (war, sin, and judgment), God's promise is that "he shall be their peace" (v. 5) and therefore, God's people can dwell securely without fear, in spite of everything and anything that surrounds us. How beautiful is that!

God's beauty is magnified even further in the way that He will bring about this promise of a Savior. The one who "shall be great to the ends of the earth" (v.4) will come from a place "too little to be among the clans of Judah," (v.2) a small town hardly worth considering. What a contrast!—from little, old Bethlehem to the ends of the earth. A ruler who will be great will come from an unlikely place hardly worth recognizing.

As seen many times throughout Scripture, this only serves to highlight the glory of God's grace and mercy. He did not choose the biggest, most prominent and advanced city to be the birthplace of the Savior. His election was and is not dependent on man's greatness or achievement. Just as justification by faith, which comes from God, apart from works, magnifies God's glorious mercy, so does His election of the little town of Bethlehem to be the humble birthplace of the one who "shall be great" (v.4) magnify the glorious freedom and mercy of our God. We cannot look to anything, anyone, or any place but Him, our glorious God.

In conclusion, this passage holds a great promise from a great God of a great Savior. The promise is sure and the hope is sure because it all comes from a God who acts according to the glory of His name because of His unfathomable mercy and grace. When all of this is brought to mind, we truly are led to do nothing else but join with the angels at the birth of our Savior, King, Messiah, in saying "Glory to GOD in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill among men" (Luke 2:14).

PROMISES MADE

December 8, 2011

Isaiah 9:1-7

Michele Fowler

I love to study the Old Testament passages that promise the Messiah. It is amazing to see God's plan of salvation and his promise of a Rescuer from the very beginning of Scripture. In such passages, the reader is often taken from despair to hope, from hopelessness to hope, from weeping to joy. During the time in which Isaiah prophesied, the nation of Israel was in a despairing, hopeless time. The sins and idolatry they had committed over the years were about to be punished. As was the case of many prophets, Isaiah had the unenviable task of going to the people and warning them to "turn or burn"; if they did not repent and trust in God and follow His ways, God would allow the Assyrians to take them into exile. In chapter 8, God tells Isaiah that the Assyrians will attack and will succeed. Isaiah's heart must have been very heavy with this message of doom.

The Israelites were God's covenant people. Living in obedience to the covenant would entail blessing and protection from the nations around them. As Israelites, their very identity was wound up in their covenant with God. However, they had chosen to live in rebellion instead of obedience. Verse 2 says that they were in darkness--a deep spiritual darkness, much like the state we are all in before we trust in Christ for salvation.

The threat of an attack by the Assyrians would not just be a slap on the wrist meant to get their attention. That time was past. God had sent prophet after prophet after prophet to warn them to turn from false gods and serve Him. Now He was poised to pour out a measure of His wrath for their sin and unfaithfulness. The situation seemed hopeless.

In the midst of this hopelessness, God gives the promise of a Rescuer who will come. In verse 2, he describes this Rescuer as a light in the darkness. Often in the Bible, light represents God's presence. This Rescuer (Jesus) would be God's very presence (the light) come to live among men. John describes Jesus as the light that "shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:5) No matter how hopeless the situation seemed, no matter that the Assyrians would uproot the nation of Israel, no matter that God's covenant people had hardened their hearts and were living in spiritual darkness, that darkness could never, ever overcome the Rescuer who was to come. His light, God's presence, would prevail in the end. Israel would not be rescued from the Assyrians at this point, but an even greater rescue was coming. The Messiah would rescue His people from the bondage of sin and spiritual darkness.

In verses 6-7, Isaiah beautifully describes this Rescuer. He calls Him the Wonderful Counselor. The Hebrew word for "wonderful" means "beyond understanding." He understands our hearts and can give us counsel that is beyond any understanding we could achieve on our own; none teaches us like Him. Proverbs teaches us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The Rescuer would testify to this. He is called Mighty God, the Everlasting Father. Jesus is God and is one with the Father. No other God could bring about this plan of redemption in such an unbelievable way. This Rescuer would come to save us from the power of sin and reconcile us to God. This salvation would bring peace to our hearts because we would no longer be under condemnation.

These promises of God given through Isaiah were not only made for the Israelites; these promises are for the nations—for anyone who would believe. These are promises worth singing, which is probably why Handel based the most famous piece in his *Messiah* on these verses. As we reflect on the promise to Isaiah of our Rescuer, we sing, "Hallelujah!"

December 9, 2011

Isaiah 11

Josh Greene

As bad as I might wish and long to be a skilled gardener, I am not one. I am not good at taking care of plants. I do not have a green thumb. My plants often die on me.

This puts me in awkward positions quite regularly. What I mean is that I have found myself on several occasions examining a plant that I thought was dead. Or maybe it was barely alive. I don't know. And so I did not know what to do with it. Maybe it was still alive but just wilted, and if I had not given up but continued watering and caring for it, it would have survived and done well. Or, maybe it was dead already, and so all the time and energy spent moving it into sunlight was a waste. I don't know. I know this much—sometimes plants can look dead and not be. **There is still a bit of life and hope left in them.**

This is the case of the line of Jesse in the history of the people of Israel. In the book of Isaiah, it appears that the people of Israel are down and out. Captivity had come. Judgment had come. The kingly line was falling apart. In Isaiah 10:33-34, God metaphorically is saying that Israel the forest and trees has been cut down. Now they are nothing more than just a bunch of stumps—chopped down, dead, tree stumps. Or, so they appeared.

This is a problem because the line of Jesse is the line from which the forever king was to come. Remember, Jesse is David's father. And God had already promised that there would be a king on the throne forever (2 Samuel 7:16-17) from the sons of David.

In this passage today, Isaiah 11, we have another promise from God. This is a life giving promise. In 11:1, God says "*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.*" We need to hear this. Though God's plan and redemption story looked all but over and done, there was still life there. The plant looked dead, but God the gardener knew what he was doing. Life was coming. That stump of Jesse was about to sprout forth a shoot and become a branch and bear fruit.

Now, the 'Branch' in verse 1 is a title for the Savior Messiah Jesus. We learn this in Isaiah 4:2 "*In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel.*"

So here is the point—this Christmas be encouraged and celebrate the truth that God keeps His promises. He will bring them to pass. He will not let us down. Our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus, is the fulfillment to the promises we see in Isaiah. He is the Davidic King on the throne forever. He is the shoot bearing fruit from the stump of Jesse. **There is life in God. And, it is found in the Son and Savior—Jesus.**

December 10, 2011

Deuteronomy 18:15-22

Josh Wamble

With his people, Israel, God established three offices. Each office had a very distinct function. The king was the man who ruled over the people. He was God's representative—His substitute so to speak. The priest was the people's spokesman. He was Israel's representative before God. He was the middleman—the mediator between Israel and their God. He offered sacrifices on their behalf. He prayed for them, and he purified them. The third office was that of prophet.

The prophet was, in many ways, the opposite of the priest. Instead of representing the people before God, he represented God to the people. He was God's spokesman. When God had a message for his people, the prophet delivered it. The prophet was a man who knew his God and knew him well. He easily recognized his voice and knew how to respond.

When we think of prophets, Moses immediately comes to mind. He was God's first prophet. He wrote the first five books of the bible. He led Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness to the edge of the Promised Land. He really knew his God. He performed miracles. He stood up to Pharaoh, the most powerful man in Egypt. When it comes to prophets, he is it. He is *the* prophet. He is *the* representative of God.

That is what makes Deuteronomy 18 so weighty. It is not just anyone; it is Moses who is directing the people to look away from him and look to the future when another prophet would come. Moses said the day is coming when God would raise up a prophet from their brothers. He will be a good prophet. God will put his words in his mouth, and he will speak every word that the Lord gives him. God warns against refusing to listen to this prophet. If anyone does refuse his words, God says that he, himself, will respond.

Looking back from our position in history, it is clear to see what Moses was talking about. This prophet that was so long awaited, has come. And, he proved to be much more than a prophet. He was not less than a prophet, but he was much more than just a prophet.

Hebrews tells us that long ago God spoke to us through the prophets. But, today he has spoken to us through his son—Jesus Christ. God has finally and fully revealed himself to us—not by only telling us about himself, but by actually becoming one of us. Moses said that his prophet would come “from among his brothers.” This is exactly how it has happened. In fact, this is exactly what we are celebrating this Advent Season leading up to Christmas.

God has revealed himself to us not only in words or writings but also in a person—Jesus. In the person of Jesus, God has made himself knowable, accessible, and understandable. This is what we celebrate in a few weeks. God has become a man. No one has ever seen God. However, the one and only God has made himself known.

He has given us his words, his message—repent and believe because the kingdom of God is at hand. We do well to listen and obey his words.

Week Three: Promises Anticipated

God first promised to bring salvation to his people 6000 years ago in the Garden. That salvation came in the person of Jesus around 2000 years ago. That means that for 4000 years, the people of God were looking and waiting for the day when God would do what he had promised to do.

Many of the passages in the prophetic books of the Old Testament are records of this longing. The prophets looked at the world around them and saw the sins of Israel. They saw God's judgment being poured out in response to this sin. Yet, they still believed what God had said to their fathers. They knew that one day would do what he had promised to do. They looked ahead to that day when God would keep his promises and save his people.

Their preaching and writings bear this out. They were constantly calling for the people of Israel to repent of sin and warning them that God would not tolerate it forever. God is slow to anger and full of mercy, but in his timing he will judge sin. In the same breath, they were urging their hearers to trust in the Lord and not lose hope. They wanted the nation of Israel to turn back to their faithful God who would keep his promises.

This week we will look at several of these passages. I pray that you will feel the excitement and anticipation that the prophets felt—the feeling of waiting and looking frantically for the only one that has any hope of helping you. I pray also that this would excite us and make us long for the day when our Savior will come back to gather his people to himself. Let us say with the prophets, Come Jesus, our long-expected, long-wanted, long-awaited savior!

“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”

Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our sins and fears release us; let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art;
dear Desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit raise us to thy glorious throne.

PROMISES ANTICIPATED

December 11, 2011

Isaiah 40:9-11, 27-31

Josh Greene

Every year, once the college basketball season begins, I begin looking down the road to March. It is awesome! I know what is coming. A jam-packed three weeks with as much basketball as any fan can digest. Even though it is only December and the young season still has a lot of games to be played, I find myself anxiously anticipating the great 64 (now 68) team tournament that we all know as March Madness.

Anticipation can be a thrilling feeling. It is the act of expectation or hope filled with excitement. It is sensing that something great is coming, and then being on the lookout for it.

In Isaiah 40:9-11, we read about Isaiah being in a state of anticipation. Isaiah is looking forward to the day when our Savior will be to us a King and Shepherd. **He will rule over us in a most glorious way, and He will lead us in a most tender way.**

The familiar Psalm 23 speaks of God shepherding us: *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake (Psalm 23:1-3).”*

Then, in John 10, Jesus speaks of himself as the good shepherd *“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me (John 10:14).”* And then Peter calls Jesus the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). Is Jesus your Shepherd?

Shepherd is a great term for our Lord Jesus, and Sheep is a great term for us, his people. We are like sheep. We need help and leading. Jesus is the one to lead us. This is what Isaiah is anticipating. He is looking forward to the day when God will be our God and we will be His people. He will be our Shepherd leading us, his sheep. **It is best this way.** We should not want to be in charge. We will end up lost and going the wrong way. But, with Christ as our Shepherd, we can trust His leading. As Isaiah 40:11 says *“He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”*

This Christmas season as you anticipate the celebration of the birth of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ, I urge you to rest fully in the arms of Jesus your shepherd. He cares for us, and He can lead us well. Do not be caught trusting in yourself and following your own lead, or worse following nothing. Instead, **let’s all commit this Christmas to following the one who we know can lead us: our Good Shepherd, Jesus.**

December 12, 2011

Micah 7:1-10

Josh Wamble

When I was a kid, I discovered BMG music service. The advertisement was simple—I got to pick out 10 or 15 CDs. Once I did this, they would send those CDs to me for free *and* I would become a member of their club. It seemed like the best deal ever. It wasn't long after I received my free CDs in the mail that the bills started coming along with the explanations that I had obligated myself to buy several more CDs within the next year. Things are not always as they seem!

This is the case in life too. Life is not always as it seems. Micah knew that very well. He knew that God had promised Abraham to make a great nation from his descendants. He knew that God had promised David that he would have a son reigning on the throne of Israel forever. He knew that God had promised to undo the curses that sin had brought. Yet, when Micah looked around him, this is not at all what he saw.

In fact, his world was about as bad as it could have gotten. Food was nowhere to be found. Men were lying in wait to commit murder. They planned how to accomplish evil and do it well. The rulers and judges were utterly corrupt. He could not trust anyone. Neighbors and friends were not reliable. Even wives were not committed to their husbands' secrets. Sons and daughters were against their fathers and mothers. Family members were rising up against family members. The houses were divided among themselves. Even Micah himself was not free from these types of sins. In verse 9, he says, "I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him."

This passage becomes even more amazing when we read what Micah does in the midst of these circumstances. When all seems lost, Micah does not abandon hope. When it seems that God has rejected his promises, Micah does not reject his God. Micah says that he will wait on his God. He is confident that his God will hear him and answer his cries. He doesn't stop there. His confidence is very specific. He says that God, himself, will plead his case and execute judgment *for* him. How can this be? In his sinful condition, Micah ought to be saying that God will come and execute justice *against* him. How can God come and execute justice on Micah's behalf?

God can be for Micah, and for us, because he set himself against Jesus. 2000 years ago, a baby was born. Although there were some extreme circumstances (virgin conception, visitations from angels, wise men coming to worship) he was born just like all of us. He had a mom and a dad. He had extended family—cousins, aunts, and uncles. He had brothers. He cried when he got hungry. He laughed when he was tickled. And yet, he was no 'normal' boy.

This boy was none other than God himself—God become man so that he could trade places with us. Now, God is for us because he is against our sin in Jesus. When Micah looked ahead to the day when this baby would be born, he was all but overwhelmed. He spontaneously burst into a song: "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old (Micah 7:18-20)."

Amen! Who is a God like ours?

PROMISES ANTICIPATED

December 13, 2011

Zechariah 6:9-14

Jason Fowler

*It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD
and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne.
And there shall be a priest on his throne,
and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.
(Zechariah 6:13 ESV)*

What a strange sight it must have been when the Magi, the Wisemen from the East, arrived to deliver gifts to the child Jesus and his family. From the biblical accounts we know that Joseph was a poor carpenter from the line of Judah. His family was as far as you can imagine from the royal courts, and the line of Levi was set apart for priestly service rather than the line of Judah. Yet the Magi brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh, gifts that would be associated with royalty and priesthood. Even after hearing the angelic proclamations about Jesus, Joseph and Mary must have been wide eyed with wonder at this strange event. To understand it, though, one need only look at the promise God gives us in the Old Testament of a priestly king to come.

If you have not done so yet, take a moment to read Zechariah 6:9-14. The prophet Zechariah records a wonderful prophecy about a kingly priest who would build God's temple. God commanded Zechariah to make a crown of gold and silver and set it on the head of Joshua, the son of the high priest, Jehozadak.

There are three main promises given in this prophecy, and all of them are fulfilled in Jesus. First, God promised that the offices of king and priest would be combined in a "Branch" who "branches out." The "Branch" of whom Zechariah speaks is none other than Jesus, and the branching out is nothing less than his taking on a role that was foreign to the tribe to which he was born. You see, Jesus was born from the tribe of Judah. This was the family from which King David came. Kings came from the line of Judah, but priests were supposed to come from the line of Levi. The picture of Joshua, who was from the priestly line of Levi, wearing a crown and sitting on the throne in the temple points to the one who is "King of the Jews" (Matt. 2:2) and a "high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:10). The very name of Joshua points to Jesus, for the name "Jesus" is just the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Joshua." Jesus is both king and high priest.

The second and third promises go together. God promised that the "Branch" would build the temple of God and that "people far off would come and help to build the temple of the Lord" (6:15). This promise is fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus himself, speaking of the temple of his body, promised that he would rebuild it in three days. His resurrection is in one sense a fulfillment of this promise. Yet in another sense, Jesus' resurrection was the beginning of the church. And the church, of which Jesus is both builder and cornerstone, is the very "temple of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16) made up of people who once were not a people, but now are God's people (1 Peter 2:10).

When we celebrate Jesus at Christmas, we're celebrating God sending his priestly king.

December 14, 2011

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Peter Witkowski

One year while I sat on my bottom bunk bed relishing the joy of the *Wish Book*, I saw a glorious P-40, G.I. JOE airplane 1/54 scale. At that moment, my little heart was smitten. I wanted that toy with every ounce of my body. But somehow, as the scent of fresh baked cookies and cinnamon candles announced the rapid approach of Christmas, I neglected to let my parents know about the toy. That Christmas came and went without any sign of the P-40. Slightly crushed, I determined not to let that mistake happen the next year. The following November, I grabbed the *Wish Book* with marker in hand. I was going to highlight my toy of choice for all to see. But, I could not find the P-40! I scanned through every one of the pages a second and a third time. To my horror, I could not find the plane! I looked in other catalogues, but it was nowhere to be found. Many more Christmases came and went without the P-40. But every year, I kept searching for that toy, trusting that one day I would find it!

In a much more meaningful manner, the story of Christmas is also about longing. As generations of Jews before him and after him, the prophet Zephaniah longed for the coming Messiah. Zephaniah looked at ancient Israel and saw evil succeeding. The rich took advantage of the poor. The prophets lied and cheated. And the priest openly defied God. Even pagan nations mocked the God of Israel. The world needed a savior!

Many of us can empathize with Zephaniah. As we prepare for this wonderful Christmas season, we too see the effects of sin. We are rightfully saddened when we notice empty chairs that were once filled with the pleasant smiles of loved ones who have passed away. We groan quietly under our breath as we hear about crimes committed against innocent people. Lastly, we have to deal with the ugly sins that plague our own lives, families, and communities.

But here is the exciting news: We have hope! Zephaniah encouraged those around him to, “Be Glad and rejoice with all your heart,” because the Savior is coming (3:14b). He will punish the wicked. More importantly he will save! “The king of Israel, the Lord is in your midst.The Mighty One, who will save (3:15b,17b).” The prophet looked forward to the coming Messiah because he would remove the reproach of sin from those who believed on Jesus’ name. He would quiet people’s cries for help with his love. He would exalt the lame and the hurting, gathering them to himself. Lips that were once filled with moaning would be turned to joy!

At Christmas, we celebrate the arrival of this long awaited Messiah. We recognize that Jesus offers eternal happiness and peace for every person who repents and trusts Jesus as his savior! Admittedly, not all sorrow has ended. While Jesus initiated his kingdom at his birth, it has not been fully established. However, he promises to return and to fully reign.

Today we look forward to the complete fulfillment of God’s kingdom when all of the promises that Zephaniah spoke of will be reality. This Christmas let us rejoice that Christ has come to save and that he comes again to reign!

PROMISES ANTICIPATED

December 15, 2011

Zechariah 9:9-13

Jason Fowler

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
(Zechariah 9:9 ESV)*

Zechariah 9 is frequently associated with the celebration of Easter, but not so much Christmas. Without Easter and Good Friday, however, Christmas would not be much of a celebration. When Jesus Christ took on flesh, he did so with a purpose. The child in the manger would become the derelict on the cross and the triumphant risen king; this was God's intention from eternity. So, we do not demur from meditating on a passage traditionally associated with Palm Sunday during Advent.

This passage clearly predicts the coming of Jesus. Both Matthew and John quote the passage in reference to his entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of Passion Week. Zechariah called upon Israel to rejoice at the coming of their king, the one who would save them. He described the king who comes to them in several important ways.

The king to come was righteous; he kept the law of God. He did not come as one who was guilty before God, a transgressor. He was unlike us. He kept the law of God perfectly. This is the king who came to rule over us. He brought righteousness with him. This is Jesus, our righteous king.

The king to come was coming with salvation. He did not come just to leave his people in their sins. He came in order to save them. Although he was righteous, he knew his people were not. Their greatest enemy was their own sin, and he came to save them from it by his death. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on that Sunday, his will was firmly set on the cross he would face the next Friday. Jesus, our king, brought salvation with him.

The king to come was coming humbly. He did not come riding a charger as a warrior king might. Rather, he came as an Israelite king in the line of David. Like Solomon before him, Jesus came into Jerusalem riding a lowly donkey (1 Kings 1:33, Matt. 21:2). And why wouldn't he? His whole life had been a life of humility. The very Lord of the universe took on flesh and was born to a poor Jewish family. The maker of all things lowered himself for our sakes and endured not only the cross, but also the manger.

Jesus, our king, came humbly.

December 16, 2011

Luke 1:26-38

Jonathan Law

In the gospel of Luke chapter 1:26-38 we have an appearing of the angel Gabriel who comes to inform Mary that she is going to conceive a child. In verse 28, Gabriel says, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” The words, ‘O favored one’, brings into my mind Genesis chapter 6:5-8. There God promises to destroy the earth and everything He made, for He was sorry that he had made man on earth. But, by God’s infinite grace, Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. The days of Noah served as a foreshadowing of the day when the Lord would descend to save his people from sin and destruction. In this same magnitude, by the grace of God, Mary found favor with God.

In verses 31-32, Gabriel explains to Mary the reason and purpose for her to have found favor with God. Gabriel says, “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.”

I want to stop right here and clarify that the coming of Jesus points even more towards the beginning when God in Genesis 3:15 promised to reverse the curse that happened in the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3:15 says, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Jesus came to crush the head of the serpent. Jesus was born to establish the throne of David that would be an everlasting kingdom. Jesus came to do what Adam couldn’t do in the garden, and Jesus came to do what the ark couldn’t do in the flood. Jesus came to *fully* save his people from the works of the devil.

In Luke 1:26-38, we all are greatly anticipating the coming of the messiah. The one and only Son of God, the King of kings, the great I AM, the only one who is capable to crush the works of Satan and reverse the sin that occurred in Genesis 3—the only one who is capable to justify a guilty sinner in the presence of the Father—the only one who is capable to bear the sins of the world, satisfy the wrath of God, and three days later rise victoriously over sin and death. This God-man's name is Jesus, and this Jesus' birth is in fact the most important birth in the history of the world.

PROMISES ANTICIPATED

December 17, 2011

Matthew 1:1-17

Jason Fowler

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.
(Matthew 1:1 ESV)*

One of the most popular Christian worship songs of the last decade declared that Jesus “came from heaven to earth to show us the way, from the earth to the cross my debt to pay.” The song is true, but it leaves the impression that Jesus’ coming was a direct and quick event similar to Superman swooping in out of thin air and saving the day. But Jesus did not just swoop in as a god out of heaven to save the day. In the incarnation, God became man. He lowered himself. He was intimately connected to humanity. He became flesh and blood. He had a family, a genealogy.

Matthew’s genealogy shows us who Jesus is. He is not just another human. He is Jesus, the Christ. Many people misunderstand the term Christ to be Jesus’ last name. Actually, Christ is a title much like King, President, or CEO. Another word for Christ is the word messiah, which means “anointed one.” In the Old Testament, God promised that he would send an anointed one, a messiah, who would be both the Son of God and the ruler and protector of God’s people (Psalm 2). For Jesus to be Christ means that he is the anointed one that God has sent to rule over and save his people. Jesus is the Christ, God’s only hope for people to be saved from their sins.

For Jesus to be the son of David means that he is the king that God promised who would be in the line of David. David was the greatest of Israel’s kings in the Old Testament. He was a man after God’s own heart, and he was considered the standard for any king seen to be following after God’s word. God promised David that after his death he would have a son who would build a house for God and whose throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13). While this promise initially appears to be fulfilled in Solomon, David’s immediate son, the ultimate fulfillment is found in Jesus. In the end, Solomon dies, and his kingdom is quickly divided following his death. But God made Jesus, who came from David’s line, the king over a kingdom that will endure forever. He rules and reigns over a people even now. King Jesus is David’s son.

For Jesus to be the son of Abraham means that he is the inheritor of the promises to Abraham. Like the promise to David, the promises that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12-17 find their initial fulfillment in Abraham’s son Isaac. God promised Abraham that he would bless all nations through him and that God’s people who come from Abraham would dwell in God’s place under God’s rule. But the totality of the blessings that God promised to Abraham was not fully fulfilled in Isaac; only Jesus fulfills them. Jesus is in the familial line of Abraham. In Jesus, God has blessed all people. In Jesus, the promise of God’s people being in God’s place under God’s rule finds its fulfillment. Jesus is the son of Abraham, the inheritor of the promises.

Week Four: Promises Kept

When we think of the Christmas story, our minds go immediately to the first chapters of the New Testament. We often think or act as though Jesus' birth comes out of nowhere. We have been reminded over the past few weeks that this is not at all the case. The Christmas story begins in Genesis 1, 2 and 3 and ends in Revelation 21. The Bible is one big overarching story. What God began promising and predicting in the early chapters of the Old Testament, he began fulfilling and doing in the first chapters of the New Testament.

As we approach Christmas and look to some of these New Testament passages, let us remember that God does nothing spontaneously. None of his acts are reactionary. Our God is deliberative and faithful. He does what he says he will do. Everything for the 4000 years before Jesus' birth was happening to prepare for his coming--everything. God has made another promise. Everything that has been happening for the past 2000 years, has been happening to prepare for Jesus' return—every single thing.

Let us rejoice this week that we have a God who is faithful to his word and a reigning savior who rules over his creation even right now. "Joy to the World the Lord has come, let earth receive her King." FBC, Fairdale, let's welcome and receive our King Jesus again this Christmas Season!

“Joy to the World!”

Joy to the World! The Lord is come; let earth receive her king;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heav'n and nature sing, and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns; let men their songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love, and wonders of his love
And wonders, wonders of his love.

PROMISES KEPT

December 18, 2011

Revelation 5

Michele Fowler

*Worthy are you to take the scroll and open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.*

—Revelation 5:9-10

I have always been an avid reader. Escaping into the made-up world of a good novel is one of my favorite things to do. Sometimes I become so involved in the story that I almost feel like I know the characters and that I am trying to work through their struggle right along with them. I get upset when I invest a lot of time in a novel, only to find that it does not have some degree of a happy ending. Praise God that His book has the happiest of all endings.

The beginning of Chapter 5 of Revelation echoes the despair that begins in Genesis with the fall of Adam. God gives Adam and Eve one simple law; they cannot follow that law perfectly. God gives the Israelites the Ten Commandments; they cannot follow that law perfectly. How can man ever be righteous in God's eyes? How can sin and death be conquered and salvation gained?

John sees the scroll and understands that there is no one worthy to open it in heaven or on earth. He weeps with despair at this hopeless situation. This scroll, which represents the outworking of human history and God's judgment on humanity, could not be opened by just anyone. It had to be one who could keep God's law perfectly, who could bear God's wrath for sin despite being blameless. The coming of this One had been promised for centuries, all through Scripture. In the midst of his despair, John sees Jesus, the Lamb standing as if slain, come and take the scroll. Only Jesus could gain righteousness for man, conquer sin, conquer death, and gain salvation for people from every tribe, language, and nation. This is why one of the elders could say to John, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." Jesus puts an end to John's weeping.

And so, in Revelation, the final installment of God's book, John provides a beautiful picture of how the promise of redemption has come to pass—the happiest of endings. In response, all of heaven breaks into a song of praise. "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

December 19, 2011

Matthew 1:18-25

Andrew Berry

Promises are easy to make and often easier to break, but generally hard to keep. For this reason the most important part of a promise is whether or not it's fulfilled. If a person makes a promise but does not follow through with his agreement, essentially his promise is void, meaningless, and easily forgotten. In Matthew 1:18-25 we see the beginning fulfillment of all of God's former promises in the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ.

As we have highlighted in past weeks, God's promises to His people guide the story of the entire Bible. From the Garden of Eden to Abraham to Moses to David to the prophets, we see a continuous story that points to one person: the Messiah. With the birth of Jesus, we have our promised Messiah, the One who ushers in and mediates God's new covenant.

As God's fulfillment of His promises, Jesus saves us from our sins and provides substance to all of the types in the Old Testament (kings, prophets, priests). Whereas it's "impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins," with Christ's sinless life and perfect death we have an all-sufficient sacrifice that atones for our sins once and for all (Heb 10:4). By being born of a virgin and living a perfect, sinless life, he provides for us a righteousness that is not our own. By later dying on the cross, bearing God's wrath, and then rising again, He paid the price for sin, making us acceptable before God.

Because God keeps His word, we have salvation, as well as a new and better covenant. Unlike the prophets of old, Christ serves as a better prophet, a prophet who communicates God's Word directly. Unlike the priests of old, we have a high priest who gains for us direct access to the Father. And, unlike former kings, we have a king who holds his position permanently and rules perfectly.

This holiday season rejoice in the fulfillment of God's promises. All of God's former promises find their fulfillment in Christ's life and work. While this is definitely an exciting time for all of us, treasure Him more than anything else this Christmas.

PROMISES KEPT

December 20, 2011

Matthew 2:1-12

Terry Stivers

We look at Matthew 2:1-12 where we see the wise men searching for the baby Jesus—longing to find this child which is the Savior, this one that was promised to each of us, this one all of our sins were laid upon. Oh how they anticipated his arrival just like we do today. We wait on Him to come back and all the sin, tears and heartaches will be swept away.

This reminds me of a song my kids like to sing. “Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King.” It also reminds us of “no more crying or dying there.” Oh how we long for the promise and the anticipation of this savior!

Then, after searching, the wise men finally arrive. Can you see them walking up in amazement to baby Jesus, the Savior, and falling down worshipping Him—just as we will do when He returns to claim His people? All the longing and anticipation for His promised return will be fulfilled. Our risen Savior who was beaten and hung on a cross, dead and buried, has risen from the grave! Joy to the world for our Savior has come!

So in this season of Christ’s birth, let’s fall on our knees and worship our King. The one the scriptures promised us. Let us not wait for His return to worship Him, but now in this season. Give Him all the glory and honor He deserves. He is worthy of all glory, honor and praise.

Amen!

December 21, 2011

Philippians 2:5-11

Nate Martin

What an amazing act of grace that Jesus Christ would leave the throne of heaven and humble himself by putting on human flesh. Had God so chosen He could have let us remain in sin, but God promised a savior. Sin is a very serious thing. Therefore, it requires a very serious answer. Not just any old way could pay for the wickedness of sin committed against a holy God. It took God and God alone to pay for sin—the sinless God man that is, Jesus Christ.

Jesus the sovereign king of the universe made himself nothing taking the form of a servant. What an interesting truth to think about that Jesus Christ became flesh! For this we must be thankful! For it is the only way our sin can be paid for. Jesus humbled himself so much in fact that he died on a cross. The cross was one of the most humiliating ways to die, but Jesus took it so that we may be forgiven of sin. Now he is the name above all names and worthy to be praised!

Verse five says that we have the mind of Christ. May the truth of Christ's humility in coming to earth to save a sinful people by dying on the cross lead us to joyful obedience this holiday season. Jesus left heaven that he might serve people in His life and His death.

As Christians we are to be followers of Jesus. How can we be more like Christ in humility and service? Who may we serve that no one else seems to notice? How can we humble ourselves by giving our time to do work that no one else wants to do? May the truth of Jesus' life and death motivate us this season, and may we anticipate that time when He will come again. A day that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord.

PROMISES KEPT

December 22, 2011

Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:14-18

Dalton Stivers

We, being made of flesh and blood, were not like God and never could be. Therefore, if God was going to save us from death, He had to become like us to do it. He had to destroy death by defeating it. When Jesus, being both fully God and fully man, rose from the dead, He showed that God could defeat death and save a man from the clutches of death.

In order for this to happen, Jesus had to be fully man. In other words, He had to be like all of us in the senses that He had to be born of a woman, sleep, eat, and do all the things humans do, except sin. We are born sinners because of that well-known story we all heard as little kids about Adam and Eve in the garden. How was Jesus born without sin? It is because he was fully God as well.

Not only did Jesus have to be fully man and fully God; He also had to live the PERFECT life. I'm not talking about perfect as in the life everyone dreams about. I'm talking perfect as in without flaw—no sin. He was to be our spotless lamb. He was tempted like every man has been, is, or ever will be and didn't waver.

He had to go through what we go through in order to be like us. According to verse 17, He had to be like us in every way so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of people. He had to be like us so He could take on our sin and die like we die. Once He died, He had to conquer death. The only way to do this is to rise from the dead, and guess what, He did!

Isn't that amazing? God made himself like us to save us. His son bore our punishment so we didn't have to. What an amazing God our God is!

December 23, 2011

1 John 1:1-4

Peter A. Witkowski

“I believe in UPS,” chirped my toddler brother as he took off to answer the doorbell. He had heard my father playfully talk about Santa Clause. He had even seen a few packages addressed from jolly Santa put under our large Christmas tree that was adorned with host of ornaments, red bows and candy canes. But as little brother opened the front door, he was once again greeted with the appearance of a brown clad UPS man, holding cardboard boxes with large black letters. Although the recently arrived packages- as the ones before- would be hurried away to my parent’s upstairs bedroom and be transformed into glorious presents attired with ribbons that felt like soft lace and pretty bows that radiated light across the room, my little brother was still aware of their source. He happily put his trust in the plain but very real UPS deliveryman.

We too must be careful not to become distracted from the reality this Christmas season. Though Christmas stories are very delightful, we must not let the holiday become defined by the stories of red nosed reindeer, or of a green Grinch with a heart two sizes too small, or even of a miser who gives Bob Cratchit that much deserved pay raise. We must remember that the true Christmas story is about Jesus.

Baby Jesus was real just like you and me. He felt the cool damp air of the stable as it flowed across his body. He could smell the freshly laid hay in his musty wooden manger. He heard the sweaty, mud splattered animals around him neighing. He was struck by the appearance of the first visitors, the shepherds, who were clad in dirty tunics that reeked from days of working under a hot sun. When Jesus was circumcised at the temple, he let out a blood-curdling scream! And, he smiled and clapped, when he saw the presents that wise men carried. Jesus was really human. The testimony of the shepherds, Simeon, Anna, the Magi and his earthly parents accurately reported the arrival of our savior. But what we know about Jesus does not end with his birth.

The apostle John noted this glorious truth in I John 1. He wrote that he and others had, “heard....seen with our eyes... [and] touched with our hands,” the grown Jesus (I John1:1). They heard him lovingly converse with the rich young ruler in their guttural Hebrew dialect. They had seen Christ give life to Jairus’ sick daughter. They let large moist tears drip down their faces as Jesus died on the cross. But oh did they rejoice when they touched the purple stained bruises of the risen Jesus. They knew that Christ had come to save them! “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21)”. The first witnesses told others about Jesus’ life, hoping that all might find forgiveness and eternal life in the savior who began his life that Christmas morning long, long ago.

As we prepare to open gifts, let us not forget the reality of Jesus’ birth. Just as my brother recognized that many Christmas packages come from UPS, let us recognize that the true joy of Christmas is found in Jesus Christ our Savior. “Joy to the World the Lord has Come! Let earth receive her King!”

PROMISES KEPT

December 24, 2011

Luke 2:1-7

Annette Darnell

I would venture to say that most every adult in the western world has heard the Christmas story found in Luke 2. The story of Mary and Joseph with their newborn baby “wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger” has been told in countless ways and countless times, in movies, books and children’s Christmas pageants. At first glance this passage appears to be a sweet and simple story, but the magnitude of its effect on humanity cannot be fully understood by the human mind.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary telling her of the miraculous conception of her child that was to come. This child would be a son named Jesus and “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 32,33) Mary knew that she had been chosen to give birth to the Messiah but she would never know that He would be the way to God for all of humanity. She would never understand the fullness of what that meant.

From the time of Creation, God knew the only salvation for sinful man would be by faith through grace. In Genesis 1:26 He reveals to us our first inkling of His plan for Christ to be the way to that salvation. From that moment on, history was propelled toward its fulfillment. Documented writings from 1450 BC through 430 BC predict this special baby’s birth. Micah tells us that from Bethlehem will come “one who will be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old from ancient days...and he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord.” Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6,7; Isaiah 53 and innumerable other prophesies of the Messiah are found in Daniel, Zechariah, Psalms and other Old Testament books.

The innkeeper in our story knew that a baby was to be born that night surrounded by livestock, eating from the manger in which the infant would lay. What he did not know was that it was God who had come to lie in the dirty straw of that humble birthplace. When the time came for Mary to give birth, the time had also come for God to give birth to His plan. (Matthew 5:17) Christ was Mary’s firstborn son and, likewise, Christ is the firstborn of all creation. (Colossians 1:15) Christ was born in Bethlehem, away from His home, just as we are so far away from our home. (Hebrews 11:13-16; 1 Peter 1:1) Christ came as a little child, so we must come to Him in the same way. (Matthew 18:3)

We know that Christmas is the time we celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ but here on earth we will never be able to know the fullness of what that means. What we do know is that we are celebrating much more than a birthday. We are celebrating God’s plan of salvation, even though we will never fully understand it. We are celebrating the love God has for us, the depth of which we will never understand. And we are celebrating the fact that even though we don’t understand, God always has and always will.

Merry Christmas!

December 25, 2011 (AM)

Luke 2:19

Josh Wamble

How often do we really treasure the words of God that we read in the bible? How often, instead, do we pass over them quickly and get on with the rest of our day? On this day of all days, we do well to take a moment and follow Mary's example of treasuring and pondering all these things.

When the shepherds visited Mary, they told her all that the angels had shown them. **The good news that they brought was of great joy (v. 10).** What greater joy could we imagine than that the God of creation has made a way to be with his creatures? No longer do we have to approach God through priests and blood of bulls and goats. No longer do we have to travel to the location of the temple to worship. No longer do we need any mediator to go between us and God. We now have a mediator who is God! We are finally able to worship wherever Jesus is found! We can forevermore approach God boldly not wondering and fearing whether or not our sacrifice will be accepted but knowing that the sacrifice that cleanses us is perfect and complete!

They told her that **the news was for all the people (v. 10).** Before we were cut off from the promises of God. We were not part of the covenant people, not Hebrew from birth and, therefore, without hope and without access to God. Now, we have been brought near to God through the blood of Christ! We have access to the Father because we have been united to the Son. We are as acceptable as he is! We are as welcome as he is! We, even we, are as loved as he is!

They told her that **a savior is born who is Christ the Lord (v. 11).** Our hope this Christmas morning is not in a political savior or a financial savior. We do not hope in the strength of men. Our savior, the savior that we hope in, is Christ the Lord. The one true and living God is my savior—your savior! I have confidence and hope that I can be saved because of who my savior is. It is true that I have a great need. I need to be reborn. I need to be transformed. I need to be completely changed. I do have a great need, but I rejoice with Mary and the angels because I have a great savior who can meet and exceed my needs—a savior who is himself the God of creation!

Perhaps the angels saved the most amazing of their messages for when they sang in unison that **on earth now there is peace between God and men (v. 14)!** Wow! Where there once was strife, hostility, war, there now is peace. It is possible for men to have peace with God! How unbelievable that is! This is the meaning of the gospel. If you love the Son, God is pleased with you, and there is peace.

Today of all days, as we celebrate and rejoice that the Son has come into the world, ask yourself this question: do you have the Son? Do you have peace, or are you still at war?

PROMISES KEPT

December 25, 2011 (PM)

John 1:1-18

Josh Greene

Someone once said that ‘a picture is worth a thousand words.’ This old and familiar phrase means that a complex idea can be conveyed with just a single still image. In many ways, I learned this on my first trip to New York City. I had often heard that New York City was so big, so fast-paced, and so diverse. But, I wasn't able to fully grasp it because I had never been to see it. Well, once I finally went I understood. That city is incredible. It really is so big, so fast-paced, and so diverse. One might say you just have to be there to know what it's truly like. In many ways, God is like this. God is the most interesting and familiar subject in the world. All people everywhere *think* about God. They have thoughts on God, beliefs about God, opinions about God and so on. But all the different thoughts and opinions vary about God quite a bit.

One of the reasons why God is so misunderstood is because “*no one has ever seen God* (John 1:18a).” **Therefore, as sinners, humans don't understand God properly.** This is what leads to many people saying things like ‘if god was real he could just come prove himself to everyone.’ Many people say they would believe in God if they ever saw him. Well, they wouldn't, but that is for another time and discussion.

This thought is what makes Christmas and Christianity so unique and valuable. It is unlike any other religion. It's truly different. **It is not people trying to figure out God. It is God showing and explaining Himself to people.** God came to us.

In John 1:1-18, John says that God became a human and that human is Jesus. Jesus is God and man. Jesus is the answer to all the world's questions, confusions, and misunderstandings about God. Jesus Christ, the God-man, is the picture that is worth more than a thousand words. But He is even more than a picture. He is real life. He is a person. He is just like us. And, He is God, so he is just like God. In fact, Hebrews 1 says Jesus is “*the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.*”

John concludes this prologue (verses 1-18) by saying at the end of verse 18 that “*he (Jesus) has made him (God) known.*” The New American Standard version says it like this “*he (Jesus) has explained him (God).*” Jesus has made God known to the world. If you want to know what God is like, look to Jesus or look at Jesus. Jesus is the explanation of God. He is God in the flesh. He is God in a picture. As John MacArthur says, “All that Jesus says and does interprets and explains who God is and what he does.”

Christmas is the culmination and fulfillment of this beautiful truth. The birth of Christ is the very moment that God became man. Galatians 4:4 says, “*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His son, born of a woman.*” And as Christ lived and taught our understanding of God was becoming more clear. Jesus explained Him. God in Jesus makes sense. He is no longer confusing.

This Christmas take heart that all of God and his promises have been fulfilled... in Jesus. **Christmas is about God clarifying God.** When the virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus the world received the greatest gift ever. God was blessing the world. God was explaining Himself to us. God was clearing up any confusion about what He is like. No other religion has anything like this. No other god is like our God, the true God. He makes sense to us now. He is great and He has people everywhere. If you this Christmas believe that Jesus is God coming to save us, then you are God's child. If you will believe this, then you can be God's child. As 1:12 says, “*to all who did receive Him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*”

