

THE FIRST BAPTIST NEWS



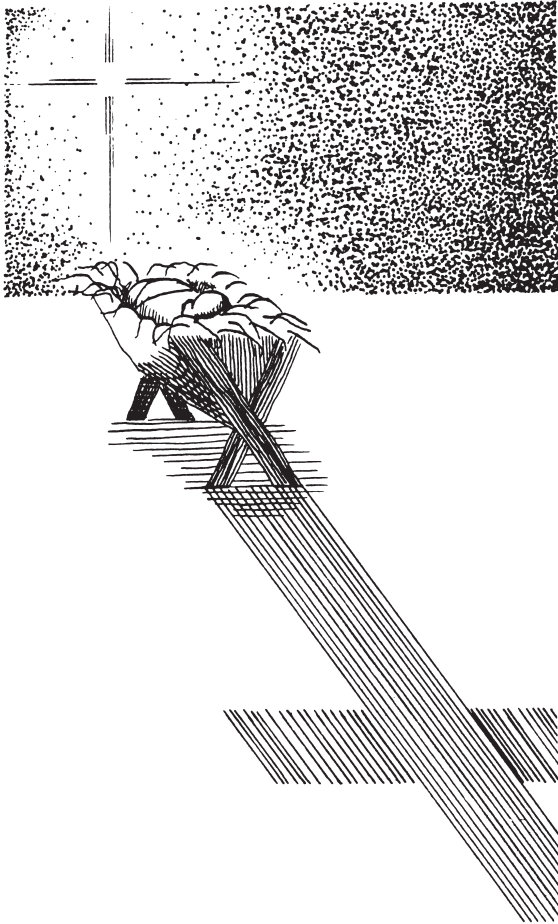
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Volume LXXXV

No. 26

DECEMBER 18, 2017

An American Baptist Congregation Making God's Love Known in Los Angeles Since 1874
International • Intercultural • Ecumenical



Where shepherds lately knelt and kept the
angels' word,
I come in half-belief, A pilgrim strangely stirred;
But there is room and welcome there for me.

In that unlikely place I find him as they said:
Sweet, newborn Babe, how frail, And in a
manger bed;
A still small Voice To cry one day for me.

How should I not have known Isaiah would be
there, His prophecies fulfilled?
With pounding heart, I stare:
A Child, a Song, the Prince of Peace for me.

Can I, will I forget how Love was born and
burned its way into my heart
Unasked, unforced, unearned,
To die, to live, And not alone for me?

– Jaroslav J. Vajda

FROM THE INTERIM PASTOR

As we have been reflecting on the songs of Advent over the past few Sundays, the song *Gloria*, as depicted in Luke 2:14 is another song that invites our attention. In many ways the word “glory” defines God. God’s glory met Moses at the burning bush when God called Moses to lead the Hebrew people out of slavery. God’s glory (*Shekinah*) was visible in the pillar of cloud and fire that protected the Hebrews from Egyptian pursuers and led them through the wilderness. God’s glory suffused the newly built temple in Jerusalem. Now God’s glory dwelled in an infant embarking on a perilous journey. Those who choose to embrace Christ encounter God’s essence and are changed.

It is because of God’s glory come to earth that the angels sang, “And on earth peace among those whom he favors.” Jesus’ birth was the birth of peace. Reconciliation between humanity and God, without the need of an intermediary, became possible. This is the simple yet profound chorus sung at Messiah’s birth. Two lines of theological truth summarize the hopes of all seeking God’s redemption, starting with Hannah and extending to the end of time.

As we further look at the song’s meaning, we can assume the shepherds didn’t pause for theological reflection after the angels stopped singing. To them, the song and accompanying announcement meant an important baby was born, and that the event was so significant that God spoke directly with them (Luke 2:15). But we have the benefit of history to more fully discern the meaning of this short song.

First, we can comprehend God’s link with humanity. Both benefit through Jesus’ birth. God receives glory. We receive peace and God’s favor. God might be in highest heaven as the song says, and we might be on a tiny blue marble somewhere in the vast Milky Way, but Jesus’ birth links heaven and earth.

Second, we know that true peace is found in Jesus. Biblical peace is what Hebrews call “*shalom*.” *Shalom* is not merely an internal contentment, but a tranquility that pervades relationships and finds expression in concern for the welfare of others and in care for creation. It is a peace that transcends personal security and includes a yearning for all to be right with the world. Those who truly encounter Jesus’ peace will want that peace to spread globally. True peace that changes the world originates with Jesus. Peace

(continued on Page 2)

CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS

It's not purchasing gifts,
 It's sharing your gifts;
 It's not wrapping presents,
 It's being present and wrapping your
 arms around the ones you love;
 It's not getting Christmas cards out on
 time,
 It's sending any card, anytime, at the
 right time;
 It's not having the biggest and best
 Christmas light display,
 It's displaying the Christ light that
 comes from your heart;
 It's not Santa coming down the
 chimney,
 It's Jesus coming down from heaven,
 and giving us the gift of eternal life.

– Anonymous



FROM THE INTERIM PASTOR (continued)

begins with repentance from sin and a restored relationship with God. Then it moves to a newly discovered ability to see others through the merciful eyes of God.

The song also changes hearts. The shepherds could not refrain from singing the song sung to them. As they left the stable, Luke tells us they glorified and praised God for all the things they heard and saw. When Paul met Christ on the Damascus road, he went from breathing murderous threats against Christians to teaching that Christ is the Son of God. Before Paul and Silas were arrested and sent to a Philippian prison, Lydia, a founder of the Philippian church, opened her heart to the gospel message. When the Philippian jailer witnessed the power of God after an earthquake opened the prison doors, but no one attempted escape, he immediately wanted to know how to be saved. The living reality of the song of the Christian faith changes lives.

Finally, this song changes values. People who embrace this song start looking at coworkers mercifully and seeking ways to love their enemies. They strive to further God's kingdom by sharing the gospel and by challenging oppression with compassion. It might best be described as a gracious lifestyle. God's abundant grace is irresistible and spills into others' lives, much like angels' melody.

*Glory to God in the highest
 heaven, and on earth peace
 among those whom he favors!*

Finally, in closing, I along with my wife, Maria and our three children, Nina, Nicholas and Nicole wish you a very Merry Christmas and a New Year that is favored by God.

Further, my wish for you is that you will feel God's presence in the candles, that softly spread their glow at Christmas and may you experience the wonder of His abiding love,

as He guides you, through each day of the coming year. May God's Blessings be with you and may the miracle of Christmas fill your hearts with joy and peace.

Faith makes all things possible,
 Hope makes all things work,
 Love makes all things beautiful,
 May you have all the three for this Christmas.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

With Hope,

Norman Bullock

Christmas Eve Worship

Please join us on Christmas Eve Sunday, December 24 as we celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ which will include a Festival of Carols and Lessons at 11:00 a.m. Please invite a friend.

Year End Contributions

All donations for the year 2017 must be received in the church office on or before 12 noon on Friday, December 29, 2017 or at the New Years' Eve Celebration on December 31. Contributions received after December 31 will be credited to your 2018 Contribution Statement. Contribution Statements for giving during 2017 will be available in late January. Please call the church office if you have any questions.

New Years' Eve Celebration

Although New Year's Eve is not recognized as a significant Christian date on many church calendars, it is still an important date in everyone's life. That is why we want to celebrate the old

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FROM THE INTERIM PASTOR (continued)

year and bring in the new year with food, fun and fellowship. There is not a better place to spend that time than with all the family and friends in church. Additionally, it's also an opportunity to invite friends and neighbors who are not part of the congregation to join with us.

Everyone is invited to the family gathering on December 31st. The event will begin at 6:30 p.m. and end at approximately 9:00 p.m. Even though we will end at 9:00 p.m., we will still countdown to the New Year!

End of Year CAR Donations

The end of the year is almost upon us and now is the perfect time to donate your unused car or truck to First Baptist Church. The proceeds will be used to enhance the ministries of First Baptist. Please visit the website below to make your car donation or for further information: First Baptist Church has partnered with CARS (Charitable Adult Rides & Services) to accept car donations as a way to support the ministries and programs of our church. We are grateful to the Trinh family for donating a car earlier this year.



Please consider donating that unused car to First Baptist. Your support helps us fulfill our mission. Your donation today will support our programs. Each dollar we receive from your donation enables us to further our cause. Please visit the website to make your car donation or for further information: <http://www.cardonatingiseasy.org/donate/?CharityID=3957>. You can also call 855-500-7433.

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RETIRED MINISTERS AND MISSIONARIES OFFERING (RMMO)

The roots of RMMO go back to the mid-1930s, when American Baptist congregations received a Communion Fellowship Offering on the first Sunday of each month to support retired ministers, missionaries, their widowed spouses and elderly clergy within their churches. In 1977, American Baptist Churches USA launched the Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering (RMMO) to continue this appreciation of God's service. The offering supports those who have dedicated their lives to God's service by providing emergency assistance in times of need and a thank you check at the end of each year.

Each year in January, we collect the RMMO offering. The theme of this year's offering is *Generous Congregations*. The verse is taken from Isaiah 32:8, "But generous people plan to do what is generous, and they stand firm in their generosity." Generosity is central to our faith. As Christians, we are called to serve and care for others, and RMMO aligns with the collective spirit of love that inspires us all to honor the devotion of ministers and their families for their service to the church.

Please join us in honoring God's committed servants by donating to RMMO during the month of January. Thank you for your support.



NEWS SCHEDULE

The next issue of *The First Baptist NEWS* will be dated **JANUARY 1, 2018.**

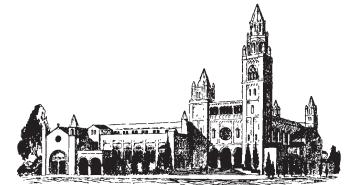
IN APPRECIATION

Dear First Baptist Friends:

My sincere appreciation to so many who helped with the memorial service for my son, Robert, on December 3:

- To the Diaconate and Maxine, Shirley, Ann and Lisa, for providing the sandwiches and reception;
- To Richard Rogers, Norman Bullock and Kyle Irwin, for their participation and efforts in planning the service.
- And most of all, to all of you who came to the service and showed love to me and my son.

Thank you, with love,
– Vance Smith



2017-2018 CHURCH OFFICERS

Moderator – Ann Brodie

Vice-Moderator – David McFadden

Church Clerk – Amy Shellmire

Treasurer - Shirley Parsley

Church Council Members-at-Large:

Zuleima Argumedo

Gerald Gubatan

Ben Marte

Nalis Mercier

Marta Torres

Pastoral Search Committee:

Gerald Gubatan, chair

Zuleima Argumedo

Daniel Choi

Davi McFadden

Shirley Parsley

Alma Pineda

Richard Rogers

Marta Torres



FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT, DECEMBER 24, 2017

9:30 a.m.

Church School Class for All Ages

11:00 a.m.

Worship in the Sanctuary

A SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS

– Lighting the Advent Candle of Love –



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2017

9:30 a.m.

Church School Class for All Ages

11:00 a.m.

Worship in the Sanctuary

“LETTING IT GO (FORGIVENESS)”

(Please read Matthew 5:7; 18:21-35 in preparation)

DR. NORMAN BULLOCK, Preaching