

# THE FIRST BAPTIST NEWS



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

## FROM THE INTERIM PASTOR

Christmas is almost here. Can you believe it? It seems like only yesterday, we were ringing in the “new” year. At this time every year, we’re exhorted by pastors, books, TV holiday specials, and our consciences to “remember the true meaning of Christmas.” But amidst the hectic pace of holiday preparations, that’s much more easily said than done. Advent is a time of joy, new beginnings, and most all, expectations.

During Advent, we will also intentionally explore Stewardship by meditating on the biblical songs of Advent as we discern our giving for 2018. Our theme during this season is “Blessed Be the Lord God” which is based on Luke 1:68. This theme invites us to explore giving as we explore the many Advent songs that are often overlooked. This also theme focuses us on restoring our response to the great gift of Jesus Christ.

We are sentimental about Christmas music. The mall echoes with it shortly after Halloween. Public television features orchestras and chorales perform great Christmas hits. We reminisce about bundling up for late night Christmas caroling. Families play holiday music at the first snow. Yet, I wonder if our familiarity with the melodies hinders our understanding of the message. “Silent Night” is reduced to a lullaby rather than a song of reverent worship for the king of the universe. “We Three Kings” becomes a ballad instead of a song of intense religious pilgrimage. “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” reminds us of toothless six-year-olds singing at their kindergarten Christmas program, rather than moving us with its stirring proclamation of Christ’s incarnation and global peace.

As we begin the season of Advent in preparation for the coming of Christ, we are also using this time to prepare our hearts and minds through the work of stewardship. Stewardship is about everything we do once we say yes to God. In these weeks during Advent, we will also journey into stewardship. The sermon for the first Sunday in Advent (December 3) dealt with the song of Hannah who made herself available by saying yes to God. Hannah’s song to God celebrates a yearning fulfilled and provides a foundation of giving upon which Mary, the mother of Jesus, sang her song centuries later.



The story recorded in I Samuel, chapters 1 and 2, is the story of Hannah, Peninah, and Samuel. Bible scholars translate their names from the Hebrew as “Grace,” “A Reddish Pearl,” and “God Hears.” It is a profound story, poignantly showing us how deeply Hannah longed to become a mother and find her place in the Jehovah worshiping community of her day. In addition, it shows us what she and ultimately others believed about the God who remembered her, particularly in the song that Scripture has preserved.

*My heart exults in the Lord;  
my strength is exalted in my God.  
My mouth derides my enemies,  
because I rejoice in my victory.*

Hannah believed in the Lord as her deliverer.

*Talk no more so very proudly,  
let not arrogance come from your mouth;  
for the Lord is a God of knowledge,  
and by him actions are weighed.  
The bows of the mighty are broken,  
but the feeble gird on strength.  
Those who were full have hired themselves out for  
bread,  
but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.  
The barren has borne seven,  
but she who has many children is forlorn.*

Hannah believed the Lord is unique in his holiness and strength. He answered humble prayers.

*The Lord kills and brings to life;  
He brings down to Sheol and raises up.*

Hannah believed the Lord has dominion over life and death. She believed the Lord has power over wealth. She also believed that the Lord has power over all authorities and empathy for the truly destitute. Finally, Hannah believed that the Lord orders creation for the protection of his people.

The significance of Hannah’s song cannot be overestimated. It endured eleven centuries and touched the life of a young Jewish handmaiden who was also a “songwriter.” Like Hannah’s song, the Magnificat begins with the hope of a miracle.

*(continued on Page 2)*

## FROM THE INTERIM PASTOR (*continued*)

That young woman, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was in a situation quite different from Hannah's. Hannah was scandalous because she was infertile and emotive. Mary was preposterous because she was pregnant and described her child's origins irrationally. Differences aside, both women were acutely aware of how their God worked to change the course of history through the lives of the infants they carried.

When compared lyrically with Hannah's song, Mary's song is strikingly similar, expressing a common belief about God's intentions that remained steadfast throughout the history of God's people. Mary also believed God cared about the humble, and she rested in God's holiness and justice. She too sang of a God above earthly authority, who controls affluence and guides Israel's destiny.

Hannah's song and her beliefs about God extend to Mary and on to

us today. The birth of Hannah's son clearly foreshadows the Messiah's birth. In Hannah's story and in her song, we learn that the Lord is watchful and involved in human history. The life of her son, Samuel, becomes a story of anointing and undoing kings at God's direction. Christ's life, caught up in the strains of the same song, is a story of salvation for humanity.

In Hannah's story and in her song, we learn that God's people exhibit humility of character and circumstance. Hannah's song expressed the heartfelt hopes of God's people for more than a millennium. Her song summarizes the theology that our modern society today, especially in the light of divisive-ness, greed, dishonesty, racism and bigotry has ignored. Her theology speaks of a God who feeds the hungry, gives children to the childless, restores the dead, eradicates poverty, and raises the poor out of the dust. The destitute are well acquainted with the humility that drove Hannah to her knees before the God of the universe with her deepest longing.

At the birth of Christ, the song of Mary echoes this theme. Jesus fulfilled Hannah's song. In him, the destitute find hope and redemption. In him, the sick find healing and the oppressed recover liberty. God's people then embrace humility both in character and lifestyle, and participate in God's incredible work.

In Hannah's story and in her song, there is the sense that the birth of a child, especially a child born to kingdom-building parents, has cosmic significance. Hannah's desire for motherhood was not a selfish quest for personal significance lived vicariously through her son. Rather, she believed her son's life would influence her people, and it was imperative for her to give this

young son back to God instead of raising him herself.

Hannah's song leads us to God. Her story radiates conviction, individually and corporately. Her song foreshadows our Messiah's coming. Contemplating it leads me to renew my covenant with God. What about you?

This story reestablishes a connection with the intended meaning of Advent by considering a song of Advent. Hannah's prelude to the Magnificat teaches us what God's people believed about God's purposes for the world. Mary's Magnificat echoes Hannah and reveals Mary as an exemplary servant of God. As we continue throughout Advent, we will continue to explore the songs of Advent, such as Zechariah's Benedictus and Simeon's *Nunc Dimittus*. These are songs about the fulfillment of hope. The angels of Bethlehem, the choir of heaven's throne room, sing "Gloria" to celebrate Christ incarnate. Studying these original songs of Scripture lays a foundation for expressing true devotion to God when we sing the hymns and carols of our faith—regardless of the season.

How will you celebrate Advent this year? God has given us the perfect gift through Jesus. How will you return a gift to God in act of stewardship?

With Hope,



Norman Bullock



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**STAFF:** Norman Bullock, *Interim Pastor*; Esther Sanchez, *Administration and Building Coordinator*. James Johnson, Josue Guevara, *Custodians*. Kyle Irwin, *Organist/Choirmaster*. Sandra Rogers, *Communications Coordinator*. Lisa Thomas, *Interim Building Manager*. Cynthia Felton, *Interim Worship Arts Director*. Woun Kim, *Interim Youth/CE Minister*.

**CHURCH PHONE: (213) 384-2151**

**OFFICE HOURS:**

Monday-Friday 9:00 am-4:30 pm

[www.FBCofLA.org](http://www.FBCofLA.org)

**email addresses:**

General: [FBCLA@FBCofLA.org](mailto:FBCLA@FBCofLA.org)

Norman Bullock: [NBullock@FBCofLA.org](mailto:NBullock@FBCofLA.org)

Cynthia Felton: [CFelton@FBCofLA.org](mailto:CFelton@FBCofLA.org)

James Johnson: [JJohnson@FBCofLA.org](mailto:JJohnson@FBCofLA.org)

Woun Kim: [WKim@FBCofLA.org](mailto:WKim@FBCofLA.org)

Sandra Rogers: [SandraBR@FBCofLA.org](mailto:SandraBR@FBCofLA.org)

Esther Sanchez: [ESanchez@FBCofLA.org](mailto:ESanchez@FBCofLA.org)

Lisa Thomas: [LThomas@FBCofLA.org](mailto:LThomas@FBCofLA.org)

### NEWS DEADLINE

The next issue of *The First Baptist NEWS* will be dated on **December 18, 2017.**

**SOME CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS  
December 17 and 24**

Please make plans now to join us on these Christmas Sundays as we celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. Why not invite a friend to join us!

**Sunday School Christmas Pageant,  
Sunday, December 17 at 9:30 a.m.**

Our Christian Education ministry through the Sunday School will present its Annual Christmas Program in Robbins Dining Hall at 9:30 a.m. Please come and support our children and youth of the church.

**Christmas Sunday Worship, December 17**

Please join us for Worship at 11:00 a.m. for our Christmas Worship Extravaganza. Christmas Sunday will be centered upon the gracious gifts of God. In turn, we shall have occasion to present our own gifts in the special Christmas offering to be received during worship on that day. Measure your gift by others you give at Christmas time. This offering deserves to be as large as the gift presented any other friend or loved one – for it is a gift to Christ, our Lord.

**Some Gifts to Give**

*Some gifts you can give this Christmas are beyond monetary value: Mend a quarrel, dismiss suspicion, tell someone, "I love you." Give something away--anonymously. Forgive someone who has treated you wrong. Turn away wrath with a soft answer. Visit someone in a nursing home. Apologize if you were wrong. Be especially kind to someone with whom you work. Give as God gave to you in Christ, without obligation, or announcement, or reservation, or hypocrisy.*

*– Charles Swindoll,  
Growing Strong, pp. 400-1*

Please use the **attached envelope** and **bring it on December 17** or mail it to the church. Thank you for generously sharing!

**Christmas Eve Sunday Worship,  
December 24, 11:00 a.m.**

Please join us for a **Service of Lessons and Carols** at 11:00 a.m. and invite a friend to join you.



**IN MEMORIAM**

The Church Family extends its deepest Christian Sympathy to the family of  
**ROBERT E. SMITH**  
*Deceased October 2017*  
Church Member 1977-2017

**DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES**

Congratulations to those celebrating birthdays and anniversaries in December including:

- Linda Pineda (7th)
- Mercy Leiva (16th)
- Joy Cho (21st)
- Ben & Cora Marte anniversary (27th)



**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

*Deep peace of the running wave to you,  
Deep peace of the flowing air to you,  
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you,  
Deep peace of the shining stars to you,  
Deep peace of the watching shepherds  
to you,  
Deep peace of Christ, the Light of the  
World, to you.*

*- a Gaelic Blessing*

**Christmas blessings  
and peace  
this season.**





**SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT, DECEMBER 10, 2017**

**9:30 a.m.**

Church School Class for All Ages

**11:00 a.m.**

Worship in the Sanctuary

**“RELEASING MARY’S SONG INTO YOUR LIFE”**

(Please read Luke 1:49 in preparation)

**DR. NORMAN BULLOCK**, Preaching

– *Lighting the Advent Candle of Joy* –



**THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT & CHRISTMAS SUNDAY,  
DECEMBER 17, 2017**

**9:30 a.m.**

Church School Christmas Pageant  
in the Robbins Dining Hall

**11:00 a.m.**

Worship in the Sanctuary

**“Finding Peace When Your Song Has Been Rejected”**

(Please read Luke 2:14 in preparation)

**DR. NORMAN BULLOCK**, Preaching

– *Lighting the Advent Candle of Peace* –

– *Christmas Offering* –