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HOPE & HARMONY

Official Newsletter of Mary Elizabeth Baptist Church

Welcome!

Okay, I have a confession to make. I started listening to Christmas music in October. Yes, I'm one of those people. Finally, the Christmas season is in full swing, and Advent is upon us! In this issue, we have included one devotional for each week of Advent, and the scripture will match that week's sermon. We hope that the devotionals and articles add a feeling of hope, peace, joy, and love to your Christmas. It is such a special time for us as Christians, and from the bottom of my heart I wish each of you a very Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year.



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Week 1 - Gift of Hope

LIZ EDWARDS

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

ISAIAH 9:6

The theme of the first week of Advent is “Hope.” I feel hope as I read Isaiah 9:6. It describes the birth of our Messiah that is sent to redeem us; the ultimate source of hope. The birth of Jesus is a mighty display of God’s love for each of us, and that love gives hope. I didn’t have a full understanding of the depth of love God showed for us by sending His only son to dwell on Earth and ultimately die for our sins until I became a mother. If he has given us Jesus, we can just imagine what more he wants to give us when we ask and seek his will.

Finally, this verse states “the government will rest on his shoulders.” In a world of strife and corruption, we are given the hope of a Savior that will bring peace and stability. Jesus will be king of everything. I had a professor in college who used a picture of Atlas from Greek mythology holding the Earth on his back during a lecture; Atlas is in a lunge position with the world on his back as he appears to be weighed down by his load. In contrast, Isaiah 9:6 depicts Jesus as sufficient to bear the load with it simply resting on his shoulders. While it is a profound responsibility and a burden to be shouldered, Jesus does it with grace. What a wonderful thing in which to hope.

Week 2 - Name, Please

KEVIN CARTER

The story is told of when I was born my father rushed into his parents’ house on his way back to the hospital. He hurriedly dropped by to check on my other two brothers staying with Grandpa and Grandma Carter, as he was running back out the door Grandma asked, “What did you name him?” Shouting back over his shoulder as he ran out the door, Dad said “Kevin Dwayne!” Grandma looked at Grandpa and said, “What did he say?” Grandpa shrugged his shoulders and said, “Sounded like Cabinet Drain.”

I have taken a lot of ribbing over the years for having the name Cabinet Drain for a couple of days. Now when asked for my full name I don’t use this lighthearted misinterpretation, but my legal name that is on my birth certificate. My name is Who I am. Good or bad we are known by our name.

Blinded Jewish scholars think that Christians have misinterpreted the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6 and err when they teach that it refers to Jesus of Nazareth as it’s fulfillment. They argue that the prophecy was of Hezekiah and the names were of Jehovah (the Father) and not the son. They refer to verb tenses, Hebrew sentence structure and a host of other less than convincing objections. But Hezekiah is a poor example of a great light in darkness; yoke breaker; gladness bringer and a never-ending ruler ushering in great peace as found in Isaiah’s prophecy. There must be a better bearer of Isaiah’s wonderful messianic names!

I found out who by my own discovery and quite unwittingly when:

- My burden of sin and guilt troubled my dark heart, and I cried out to God for peace, Jesus said “put your trust in me for I am the Prince of Peace”. I experienced peace that is indescribable.
- When at the end of my wits I pray for direction because the stakes are so great, Jesus says “trust and obey for I am the Wonderful Counselor”. Then I walk in faith and my steps are sure and my companion is the Lord.
- Standing at the graveside of my loved ones and realizing my own mortality I cower in fear, Jesus says “Do not be afraid I Am the eternal God, and I have adopted you and all who trust in me. You will be with me eternally, victorious in heaven.

There is a name above all others and his name is Jesus! He has proven Himself to fulfill all the prophetic names “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God and Everlasting father” and especially in this Christmas season, “The Prince of Peace”.



Week 3 - Shout it from the Rooftops

NATALIE ROGERS

The Christmas story hits me differently now that I am a mother. My heart aches for Mary. Imagine being a young, unmarried woman and being told you were pregnant with the Messiah! Being pregnant out of wedlock is scary enough, especially in the time she lived. But, to know that you were giving birth to and charged with the responsibility of raising Jesus Christ! Talk about pressure!! But then, the more I think about it, the more I realize that the children God blessed me with aren't really mine. They belong to Him. He was good enough to give them to me for a short time. In the time I have them, I plan to pour love and light into them, show them how to be the hands and feet of Jesus in this sometimes ugly world, teach them how to rely on God - even when it seems he isn't listening. Motherhood has taught me that Jesus is my only hope! He has a plan that he hasn't let me in on. He knows how my life and the lives of my children will play out. I have to trust that he has good things in store and the hard things are meant for a greater purpose.

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

ISAIAH 7:14

Motherhood has also made me realize how much He truly loves us. He loves each of us, no matter how far we may have strayed, more than we love our own children. Hard to fathom, isn't it? But, that's the good news!!!! It's true!! We should be shouting it from the rooftops! God kept his word, he brought his sinless son into this world through a virgin. He lived a blameless, yet persecuted life for me and for you and for every single person on this planet. Then he died a horrible death to pay for all of mine and your sins. Through his death he wiped our slates clean. He paid the price. You're never too far from God. Just like our earthly parents, that love endures! He's waiting, longing for a relationship, even if you've messed up. Just call on the holy name of Jesus and he will come running with open arms. What an amazing blessing to be loved like that!

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

ISAIAH 53:5-6

Week 4 - Jesus Freely Gives

KARLA MCHWORTER

As Christians, when we read the first part of these verses, we are able to imagine what it might have been like when our precious Jesus showed us ultimate mercy and grace. He was pierced, crushed, and scourged to spare us our rightfully deserving punishment.

We can also very much identify with the poor little sheep who wanders off from his Good Shepherd's protection going his own way. God in His perfect goodness knows what is good and perfect for His image-bearing creation. We tend to take our eyes off Him and disobey thinking we know better than God or not looking to Him in the first place to see His will for us.

Jesus has so freely given to us the gift of forgiveness and healing. In order for us to receive that gift, we must see our own inner ugliness and repent, turning away from our own desires and truly to God's good desire for us. God promises to see and hear us when we pray to Him with sincere hearts. God changes us!

The world has changed a lot since that day Mary and Joseph welcomed Baby Jesus in awe. The world has changed a lot since the day our precious Lord agonized and died on that cross, then resurrected, defeating death! Human sin has made the world a hard place. Although the world has changed, God does not change. God is faithful! His promises remain available to our sincere hearts.



A Gift Passed Down

WITH CONNIE COPE

A big part of the Christmas season for the children and members of our church is the Christmas play. Connie Carter is the writer and director of this play; she has served in this role for 6 years now. Years of COVID and different circumstances have put her creative strengths to the test and we have enjoyed the results including a live nativity with real animals under the stars! As a writer and director, Connie sees the play, not only as a creative outlet, but as a unique ministry to the children and people involved and the audience.



The process begins in the same way with dedicated prayer and Bible study, and even though the story of Christ's birth is the same, the message God places on her heart is a little different each year. "I spend a lot of time in prayer," says Connie. While some of the ideas are inspired by things online, she doesn't feel that simply purchasing a premade play would be the best thing for our church. Connie believes that "knowing the kids who come... their capabilities, how they're creative... & allowing them to use their talents" helps to create a play that utilizes the gifts God has given each child for his Glory. "And then a lot of prayer... because if God will just give me an idea to go with, then it seems like everything else he just gives me to go with it."

While creating and directing the play has plenty of responsibilities, Connie loves taking the time to discuss with each child the role they are playing and what it means to the story they are telling. She feels the children are able to learn about the Bible in this way. She enjoys seeing the littlest ones praising God all the way to the youth ages sharing the message of Christ through drama and song. Music has always been a big piece of the Christmas plays.

One of Connie's biggest influences for Christmas plays is her mother. She feels that her mother has left a legacy of creativity in the face of adversity and a strong reliance on God in prayer. Connie remembers helping her mother with Christmas plays at the age of 16, and she has even pulled some of her mother's own tips and tricks into plays at MEBC. "She's definitely influenced a lot of what I'm doing. I would love to pass that on to my kids. Like this year Weston sat with me and helped me come up with ideas and write parts of the play."

This year's Christmas play focuses on gifts from God, and we are blessed to have so many members, like Connie and the children of MEBC, who act on their gifts to further the kingdom of God. (A special shout-out to the adults who use their gifts to help wrangle children during practices and to parents who get them there!) "If one person comes to belief in Jesus, or if one person's heart is blessed, I feel like it's all worth it. So, that's what I pray all the time," says Connie. We hope you can join us on December 15th for this year's play at 6:00 pm at MEBC Sanctuary with soup supper to follow in the fellowship hall.



Season's Waitings

The season of Christmas has always been a favorite of mine. I love the traditions, the music, the decorations, and believe it or not the waiting. It's almost as if everything that I associate with Christmas time is curated to bring an almost electric charge to the anticipation of Christmas Day. I can recall with heaping nostalgia the mounting excitement that came once the decorations were up and continued to increase with each Christmas carol and each card in our little church mailbox. The Christmas play really ignited the excitement that was almost set to volcanic levels once school let out. Then it was finally Christmas Eve. A feeling of excitement courses through me even now as I reminisce about the ride home in the dark after our family celebration knowing the next morning was Christmas.

I relish this waiting, but I do not generally like to wait. You'll not find me grinning ear to ear in search of the longest check-out line at the grocery store. I don't go to the DMV just to enter the queue. A stubborn loading screen on the computer does not send me into carols of joy. So why do I feel ecstatic about a season that is built around a month of waiting? I know what I'm waiting for is wonderful. As a kid it was the excitement of gifts and Christmas celebrations, as an adult it is the celebration of advent. I wait expectantly.

The coming of the Messiah was prophesied since man's original sin when God said "He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Throughout the Old Testament the coming of the Son of God is foretold, and, boy, what a wonderful gift to wait for. Imagine being among the first to witness the arrival of Emmanuel. The excitement that fuels advent is an excitement about God's promises that were fulfilled by the coming of the Son of God, and the excitement of the promises that came with the Son of God. When we stop and contemplate the gift of God's only Son and his sacrifice for our sin, we truly experience the joy of the season and it is boundless.

As Christians we are now awaiting Christ's second coming, and we are to wait expectantly as Jesus describes with the parable of the servants awaiting their master in Luke 12:35-40. We have two examples of this in the story of the birth of Jesus, Simeon and Anna. These devout people did not simply look forward to the coming of the Messiah; they were devoted to serving God and listening to the Spirit. Simeon was "guided by the Spirit" (Luke 2:27), and Anna "did not leave the temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayers." (Luke 2:37).

Just as we decorate our homes, wrap gifts, and write Christmas cards in preparation for Christmas, we are to prepare our hearts for the second coming of Christ. We are to be actively seeking his Kingdom. Keeping a close guard on our minds and hearts knowing our Master is returning. Doing good works, producing fruit, and sharing His Gospel with anticipation and excitement of the perfect and complete wonder that is coming.

"The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come."

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER



DECEMBER

UPCOMING*

- ADVENT BEGINS
DEC 1
- CHRISTMAS PLAY
DEC 15, 6 PM
- CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE
DEC 24, 6:30 PM
- BROTHERHOOD BREAKFAST
DEC 29, 8 AM



*CLICK THE EVENT FOR MORE INFO & SHARABLE FLYER

MEBC HIGHLIGHTS

CHRISTMAS PLAY

THIS YEAR'S CHRISTMAS PLAY WILL OCCUR ON DEC 15TH AT 6 PM. IMMEDIATELY AFTER, THERE WILL BE A SOUP SUPPER IN THE FELLOWSHIP HALL. CROCKPOT OF SOUP AND CRACKERS OR BREAD OPTION. WE ASK ALL MEMBER FAMILIES TO BRING A CROCKPOT OF SOUP AND CRACKERS OR BREAD OPTION.

OPERATION CAROLINA CHRISTMAS

RATHER THAN SHOEBOXES, BAGS WERE USED IN ORDER TO FIT THE ITEMS FOR THE CHILDREN OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA. OUR CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES COLLECTED ENOUGH DONATIONS TO PACK **50** BAGS! BAGS WILL BE PACKED ON THE 6TH AND SENT OUT SHORTLY AFTER.

WISDOM CORNER

"AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US, AND WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY, GLORY AS OF THE ONLY SON FROM THE FATHER, FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH."

JOHN 1:14

GOOD FOR THE SOUL



Sketch by Josh Edwards

Original by Dave Coverly



THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT AND INTEREST WITHIN OUR CHURCH & COMMUNITY. PLEASE FORWARD OUR NEWSLETTER TO A FRIEND! IF YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR OUR NEWSLETTER OR HAVE CONTENT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE FEATURED PLEASE CONTACT US AT: MEBC3703@GMAIL.COM