



• PASTOR'S STUDY •

In 1999, my mother and father invited me to accompany them on a tour of Israel. One of the stops on the itinerary was the town of Bethlehem. Earlier generations, in their zeal to preserve the reputed sites of significant Biblical events, built cathedrals over those revered locations. In Bethlehem there is a massive building resting on the "supposed place" Mary gave birth and laid Jesus in a feeding trough. Our group was led through this elaborate building; we walked down to a small alcove where –I must confess—it took a lot of imagination to think this was Jesus' birthplace. (It looked nothing like the rustic setting must have been 2,000 years ago.)

As I have reflected upon my visit to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, I have concluded that my reaction was appropriate. It is mindboggling to think that the eternal Son of God took on human flesh and was born to poor parents in an obscure corner of the world. His first nursery was where animals were fed. As hard as it is to believe, it is true nonetheless. It is astonishing that Jesus would deign to enter my heart years ago and impart to me new life. The wonder and mystery of it all causes me to marvel yet once again as I approach a new Advent season. My prayer is that God would help all of us to ponder Jesus' incarnation with childlike wonder and amazement. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem is truly astonishingly wonderful.

Pastor Mark Musser.

Our mission is to glorify God by making disciples who treasure, live out and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit

Mrs. Musser's Musings on Christmas Traditions in the Parsonage

December 2013

Christmas is truly a "season of wonder" – but years ago as a young mother with three small children and a pastor-husband often called upon to work on holidays – my sense of wonder was sometimes best expressed by the questions: "I wonder how I will get everything purchased, wrapped, decorated, baked, mailed out, and prepared on time?" "I wonder how we will afford all this and if they already have or want this particular gift-item?" "I wonder if I will make it through the month of December?" I really wonder when we will get to slow down enough to enjoy it all?"

Some years we did better than others when it came to giving our children the opportunity to realize that Christmas was all about Jesus' coming to earth to be our Redeemer. Of course, there was the prominent Nativity Scene in our home in which the long-awaited baby Jesus was missing until Christmas morning. There was the blaring of "For Unto Us A Child is Born!" from Handel's Messiah coming from the CD player at a very un-godly, pre-dawn hour. There was the reading of Luke 2 on Christmas morning, generally after the opening of stockings followed by a quick breakfast, but before the gift-unwrapping began.

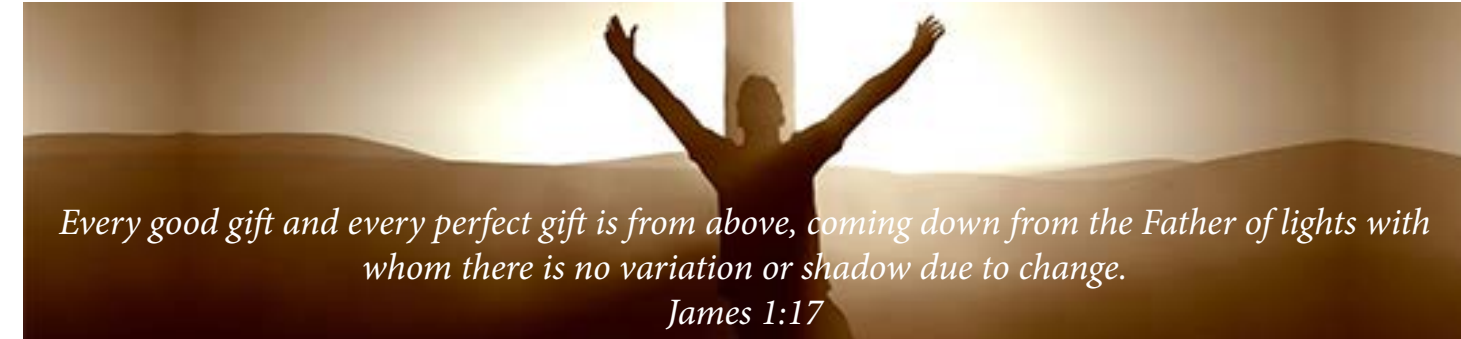
Along with these more 'religious' traditions, over the years we have grown to enjoy and anticipate a few other family traditions (besides cookie-baking and tasting)...

- A once-a-year made-from-scratch red velvet Birthday cake for Jesus complete with candle and singing Happy Birthday together.
- An annual ornament for each child that usually symbolized something significant which happened in their life that year (sports, a musical instrument, international trips, etc.) Recently these personal collections have been gifted to our newly-married sons to adorn their Christmas trees as they begin their own family traditions.
- Opening one gift each on Christmas Eve. Our plan was to spread out the enjoyment, so we often set aside a few gifts for after-Christmas snow days or long car trips to visit relatives.
- Watching "It's a Wonderful Life" together, crying at each appropriate scene, and reciting famous, now familiar lines by heart, reminding us of the importance of family and that "no man is truly poor who has friends."
- Mom's "Gifts of Good Will" – a more recent attempt of mine to help bring "peace on earth, GOOD WILL to men." This involved shopping at various thrift stores and getting second-hand, unique, often silly gifts which would show up in stockings or tucked in with another gift, mainly to bring a smile. When you stop and think of ALL we have, it makes sense to simplify the gift-giving, and it's amazing what you can find when you go bargain hunting!

May you and your families this year refuse the self-focused, over-the-top, materialistic emphasis of this world's holiday celebrating and bring back to your homes the simple, child-like wonder of God's extravagant, sacrificial gift of his Son this CHRISTmas.

By Joyce Musser

Come and prepare your hearts at A Night of Advent Celebration Saturday, Dec. 14th at 7.00 PM. Please bring 2 dozen of your favorite Christmas cookie! (Fellowship hall)



Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

James 1:17

What Kind of Sweet Little Christmas Picture Is This?



Have you ever noticed that when you look at a picture with you in it, you always check to see how you look first? Do thoughts like, *Is my nose really that big or is that just a bad angle?* or *Wow, I am actually pretty good looking*, run through your head? It doesn't matter if the picture was taken with the rest of your family standing in front of natural beauty as glorious as the Grand Canyon, the first thing you see is you.

I'm old enough to remember when Christmas cards actually had a picture of the manger, magi, shepherds, a star, and the Christ-child on them. What do our Christmas cards look like now? You guessed it: they are photographs of the family standing in front of the Grand Canyon (and yes, I actually sent out one of those) or with our favorite pet or in front of our new car or house. Like with everything else, we've made ourselves the center of the Christmas story, and we're using it to trumpet our own story . . . a story about our family and how wonderful we are . . . actually, the story I'm most interested in is the one mostly about how wonderful I am.

Then, for a brief moment, something else starts to take center stage, and the whole world begins talking and singing about Someone else . . . at least for a few

moments, because the Christmas story is the one story we can't find ourselves in. It is the one story strong enough to pull us out of our story and into it. And even though we keep trying to find ourselves there, I am pretty sure that none of us has any prenatal photos of angels trumpeting our birth to a group of shepherds in the Middle East. And although I am fairly certain that I was pretty much a perfect baby, I'm also certain that I was conceived in the normal way. No world ruler set out to kill me because he felt threatened by my birth, and although my grandma did bring my mom a handmade blanket, that is nothing compared to gold, frankincense, and myrrh offered by magi to foreshadow my destiny on a bloody cross.

The story of the Nativity, the story of the second person of the Trinity becoming an infant, wet with amniotic fluid, wrapped in coarse rags, seeking sustenance from his mother's trembling little body, is meant to shock us, to force us to look away from ourselves for just one moment, to him, to his birth. This birth is a glorious picture of scandalous humility and terrifying love beating in a little baby's heart. Who could imagine that his love would make him serve us like this? Why is the one whom the angels worshiped lying there in a cold stone feeding trough surrounded by smelly and warm cattle manure? What kind of sweet little Christmas picture is this? And where are we? Where is the portrayal of our family standing in front of the Grand Canyon looking all put together in our cool (or uncool) Christmas sweaters?

Even though this is what we say we believe, and our hearts say "yes" and "thank you, Lord" when we hear this story, we still want Christmas to be about us and our delicious cookies and our mad present buying skills. We keep inwardly yelling, *Look at me!* while there he lies, first in this manger, then in a cold stone tomb. And he says,

No, you look to me. I'm the only one who will bring you peace. I'm the only one strong enough to take center stage and hold it . . . and I love you even though you're always trying to take my place. I'm here to save you from your self-focus and all your sins and I will do it. You can believe because I've done this, I'm lying here like this. My name is Jesus, and I'm your Savior.



12 Prayers for Christmas

1. **LOVE** - Lord, help us follow the way of love - let the love of Christ compel us (1 Corinthians 14:1; 2 Corinthians 5:14).
2. **JOY** - Restore the joy of Your salvation to us; let us experience the joy of Your presence (Psalm 51:12; 16:11).
3. **PEACE** - Let Your peace rule and guard our hearts; give us more of You - You are our peace (Colossians 3:15; Philippians 4:7; Ephesians 2:14).
4. **HOPE** - Enlighten the eyes of our heart so that we may know the hope You called us to (Ephesians 1:18).
5. **FAVOR** - Let Your favor rest on us (Luke 2:52).
6. **LIFE** - Shine Your light of life on us; help us to walk in it (Job 33:30; Psalm 56:13).
7. **SALVATION** - Help us to fear You so we can unlock the treasure of Your salvation (Isaiah 33:6).
8. **SELFLESSNESS** - Keep us from self-seeking attitudes that reject truth (Romans 2:8).
9. **GENEROSITY** - Make us rich in ways that result in generosity on our part so You will be praised (2 Corinthians 9:11).
10. **RECEIVING** - Help us receive Your kingdom, Your Spirit, and Your grace (Daniel 7:18; John 20:22; Romans 5:17).
11. **SEEKING** - Encourage us to seek Your face with all our hearts (Deuteronomy 4:29; Psalm 27:8).
12. **PRAISE** - We ascribe glory to Your name, Lord; we come before You in worship for You are holy (1 Chronicles 16:28-29)

Elyse Fitzpatrick and her daughter, Jessica Thompson, co-authors of Give Them Grace, have teamed up again to write an advent devotional, Counting the Days, Lighting the Candles.

<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2013/11/22/what-kind-of-sweet-little-christmas-picture-is-this/>

Favorite Christmas traditions of some New Village Families

Every year we host Thanksgiving at our home. It is a day filled with good food, family and a time to reflect about all our many blessings. Then the next day is black friday... instead of going shopping, every year we stay in our pajamas and decorate for Christmas. We put up our Christmas tree and play Christmas music. Our boys love decorating the tree. It is always so nice to go over all the ornaments and remember why we got them. We make cookies and hot chocolate and soak in the warm feeling of the house being so cozy. At the end of the day we read to our boys the Jesus Storybook Bible and go over Jesus birth, the true meaning of Christmas. We have designated this day to our family, and this tradition, and we love and cherish every minute of it.

Mike and Gina Sterlacci

Several years ago (as one of their presents) I decided to give each of my six grandchildren a similar gift. The first year I bought them all flashlights. Everyone needs a flashlight, right. Well, they thought this was hilarious. Each year I think of something that will be appropriate for a boy as well as girls, with a thirteen year age span. Over the years some of the things I have given them has been beanie pillows, soft warm fuzzy blankets, socks, Dunkin Donuts gift cards, gloves, and through Samaritan's Purse, a card that stated money was sent in their name to help people in other parts of the world. One grandchild gave 5 baby chicks to a family, another fed a baby for a week, another provided warm blankets for a family, etc. This has become a favorite, "looking-forward-to" tradition. On Christmas day when we all gather around the tree, the first thing the grandchildren do is look for the six packages that are all wrapped the same, then they try to guess what the theme is for this year, then they all open them at the same time. This is a fun tradition, but it is not the most important part of our Christmas celebration. It is remembering that "Jesus is the Reason for the Season" (Isaiah 9:6 "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given"). The baby of Bethlehem became the living, risen Christ who has rescued us from our sin.

Ellie Pultz

Over the years, we have enjoyed some simple yet meaningful Christmas traditions. Each Advent season, we set up a nativity scene together as a family. While reading the Christmas story from scripture, the children take turns adding the figures to the scene as they are introduced in the reading. Another Biblically-based activity is using the "Adornment" Christmas tree decorations from Family Life. Each ornament depicts a scriptural name or description of Jesus, such as Emmanuel or the Lamb of God, and has the reference verse printed on it. Adding one ornament a day to the tree allows time to meditate on the concepts brought out in the accompanying devotional booklet, and to listen to the appropriate song on the accompanying CD. Also, the story book, What Nick and Holly Found in Grandpa's Attic, incorporates the names of Jesus used in the Adornments, and has become a favorite of ours. It is part of a collection of Christmas books that we bring out every year to help "keep Christ in Christmas" in direct yet uncomplicated ways.

Lynn and Nick Camillone

Living next door to the Moore's, we try to beat them in putting up our Christmas tree and outdoor lights. So far 20 - 1 Schwams :) On a more serious note we enjoy decorating our tree with the children even as they are getting older. Reflecting on Christ's birth.

Keith and Barbara Schwamb

Advent Beauty (1982)

Tilting on her yearly track
Advent beauty circles back,
Flying faster with the years,
Hardly giving time for tears
First to dry upon the cheek—
Has it been more than a week
Since we laid both young and old
In the ground now winter cold?
Has there really been a spring
When the birds began to sing?
Has there been both summer, fall
Since the Baby in the stall
Called us with a Christmas bell
to sing, O Come, Immanuel?
Tilting on her yearly track
Advent beauty circles back,
Flying faster with the years—
Ah, but overtaking fears.
Let the Lord of advent lift
Every care (an early gift!);
See the Savior and the Son
Shine in advent candle one.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/john-pipers-first-advent-poem>

**Christmas Eve Service
at 7:30PM. Bring your
family and friends as we
focus on the incarnation
of God in the flesh.
This is an intimate and
wonderful time in the
life of our church. All
are welcome.**

Coming Up in the New Year

- January 19th Sanctity of Life Sunday
- February 9-15th Prayer Emphasis Week
- March 30th 5th Sunday Fellowship

DECEMBER 2013

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Worship Service @ 11 A.M.	2 Missions Meeting	3 Fusion Youth Group	4 Mid-Week Bible Study and Prayer	5	6 Ignite Youth Group Candlelight Conference @ 6:30pm	7 Men In The Morning Christmas Tea @ 3:00pm
8 Worship Service @ 11 A.M.	9	10 Fusion Youth Group	11 Mid-Week Bible Study and Prayer	12 Women's Bible Study in Philippians	13 Ignite Youth Group	14 A Night of Advent Celebration
15 Worship Service @ 11 A.M.	16	17 Fusion Youth Group	18 Mid-Week Bible Study and Prayer	19 Women's Bible Study in Philippians	20 Ignite Youth Group	21 Men In The Morning
22 Worship Service @ 11 A.M.	23	24 Fusion Youth Group	25	26 Women's Bible Study in Philippians	27 Ignite Youth Group	28
29 Worship Service @ 11 A.M.	30	31 Fusion Youth Group				