

FIRST words

TO REACH PEOPLE FOR JESUS CHRIST & TOGETHER BECOME MORE LIKE HIM



The lighting of the church was a wonderful experience and now we have the outside of the church all ready for Christmas. This Sunday, December 2, we will celebrate with one of the favorite annual traditions where our children and adults sing "Carry the Light" and we witness the parade of flags, which reminds us of the Kingdom of God made up of all nations. That evening, we will have a family Chrismon making event in the dining room starting at 5 p.m. This has also become a tradition for many of our families as they gather and make special Chrismons—Christ Ornaments which they can put on their Christmas trees at home.

The following Sunday, December 9, during the morning service our sanctuary choir, youth choir, and Celebration Orchestra will present "The King is Here: A Christmas Worship Musical." This musical focuses on the

Christmas story and reminds us all of the King of Kings.

December 16 will be our annual Blessings of Christmas where we have an opportunity to go and visit with those in our church who are not able to get out as in prior years. Then that evening, the children's choirs will present their Christmas concert at 6 p.m.

On Wednesday, December 19 our preschool choir will present their Christmas program in the chapel. This is one of the best concerts of the season as the 2, 3, & 4 year old children sing with such joy and expression.

Of course the highlight of the season are the Christmas Eve services on December 24. The family service starts at 6 p.m. which is designed to be a bit more kid friendly and Becky Tucker loves having all the children present for the children's sermon. Then at 11 p.m. we will have the 50th Annual Candlelight Christmas Eve Service. This service is broadcast live on KRBC and is preceded by a special 30 minute program featuring music from our choir and produced in-house by our communications team.

Christmas is coming! Are you ready?



words

FOR THE JOURNEY

Over the next four Sundays, we will take the spiritual journey called Advent. The season of Advent comes from the Latin word which means “a coming.” The Church sets aside the four Sundays before Christmas as a time of preparation for the coming of Christ. Yet, we face a problem over these weeks. Culture rushes us to Christmas without this time of preparing. We schedule Christmas on the calendar while for the prophets and people, it is only a hope and promise. We forget the people of Israel had lived over four hundred years waiting and waiting for a word from God. Advent becomes a time of waiting and longing for God to show up. Before we can sing “Joy to the World,” we need to sing “O Come O Come Emmanuel...to set your people free.”

Let me tell you a story or journey of waiting and trusting what God will do. When our family lived in Louisville, we spent a memorable Christmas Day in our minivan traveling to Lubbock. A trip of 1,109 miles. The Magi might have traveled only 800 miles to Bethlehem, but they did ride camels with no Interstates. Long before videos or computer games, we had two children who became easily bored and frequently fought. You decide who had the easier time.

We left on Christmas day in a gentle snow. The snow became a blizzard around Paducah, Kentucky. I questioned my decision of taking a shortcut as the ruts in the road began to disappear. We headed back to the Interstate. We made it through Tennessee. In Arkansas we drove into heavy fog on “this happy morning.” When we passed through Abilene, just a place on the map, our carburetor started to freeze up – or something like that – I’m no mechanic. I wish I would have known you back in then, we could have spent Christmas together. We drove, or chugged, the rest of the way to Lubbock at 40 MPH. When we arrived in Lubbock, Christmas Day was over – I think – if it ever seemed like Christmas.

Let us be thankful for the gift of gratitude and perspective. That adventure turned out to be one of the best, or our most memorable Christmas. Yes the children argued,

but we did sing some Christmas carols. We got on each other’s nerves. Our so called Christmas dinner ended up being at a truck stop. Yet, life is filled with challenges and isn’t perfect. Christmas Day might not have worked out as we had planned, however on that trip we were together as a family. We had some hilarious moments, which I will not reveal. We hung in there with each other. We remember it now with great joy and laughter. And something else, we had the miracle of Christmas Day and almost missed it – “God with us in every mess.” The first Christmas wasn’t perfect either – the holy couple far from home – no room for them in the inn – bone weary and tired – some shady shepherds showing up – no “Silent Night.” Just the sounds and smells of a barn. Merry Christmas.

“Perhaps
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and when
Christmas
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– when life
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or we don’t
expect it.”

Perhaps that is where and when Christmas shows up – when life isn’t perfect or we don’t expect it. The miracle comes not when the tree is decorated, we sit by a fire, or our plans pan out, it comes as a surprising gift of grace.

I have come to realize the Christmas miracle of that journey years ago. Here comes the miracle of Advent, a

time of waiting and longing for what God will do. I did not know as we passed through Abilene late on Christmas night, that several years later I would worship with you in our sanctuary on Christmas Eve in 1995 as Pastor.

I stand amazed at what our Great God had planned for my life on that Christmas Day when it didn’t seem like Christmas. I was just passing through Abilene with a

Continued from page 2.

mechanical mess and a stop at a truck stop in Tye. Yet, God had something extraordinary in mind. Wherever you are this Christmas, keep trusting even in the dark, do not fear a deep longing for more, and keep waiting for what God will do. Don't miss the blessing of Advent. This Advent, instead of knowing Christmas is on the calendar with all of your plans or expectations, wait...long...that God has more than you can imagine. Perhaps Tye and Bethlehem have a lot in common.

From a truck stop in Tye, or even Bethlehem,

Phil



1st Annual Lighting of the Church



FACES OF BELOVED COMMUNITY PRESENTATION AT FIRST BAPTIST ABILENE

A portable photography exhibit highlighting the people and places of CBF Global Missions will be on display in the welcome center beginning December 2. The nationally touring exhibit, titled "Faces of Beloved Community," has been curated on behalf of the CBF Missions Council drawing upon the best of thousands of photographs taken around the world. This powerful exhibit shows the beauty, richness, and diversity of CBF's work and the people around the world who we are blessed to walk alongside," said Martha Perusek, director of development for CBF. "A picture says a thousand words, and I know our congregations will be moved and inspired by the exhibit, knowing they play an important role in sharing the Gospel, touching lives, and creating this beloved community." Make sure you stop by the welcome center to see how your gifts to our FBC Budget and Unified Missions Offering are making a difference.



MUSICAL INSIGHT

by Todd Wilson

It all began on December 24, 1818 at St. Nicholas Church in the village of Oberndorf, Austria. The music planned for the midnight service was to be accompanied by organist Franz Gruber, when the frightening discovery was made that the organ would not function. It was then Father Joseph Mohr, assistant priest, decided to write a new song text, asking Gruber to compose a simple, yet fitting melody. This new Christmas carol, written for two voices with guitar accompaniment, was sung in the Christmas Eve service.

Later, the Strasser Family of Zillerthal began singing this song at fairs and festivals to attract people to their booth where they sold fine chamois-skin gloves. The children, much like the Von Trapp children, became popular folk singers and spread the song throughout Austria. This charming little song even came to the attention of the king and queen and the Strasser Family was asked to give a royal performance, securing the popularity of Mohr and Gruber's composition.

The song was first sung in America by German speaking congregations, but was translated into English and appeared in a book of Sunday school songs in 1863.

This Christmas Eve marks the 200th anniversary of this song which has been sung around the world and throughout the ages. Its words speak of the quiet stillness into which the WORD became flesh, describing the worship of shepherds and angels, and how the Son of God is "loves pure light." This Christmas Eve, we will join our voices and sing together this beloved carol, Silent Night.



CHRISTMAS MUSIC OPTIONS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

As a church, we feel God has blessed us with a wonderful space to worship as well as host our local school programs. This year, we just might set a record for the number of groups utilizing the sanctuary for their Christmas programs. Here is a list of those groups:

December 9-7:30 p.m.

December 10-7:00 p.m.

December 11-7:00 p.m.

December 13-7:00 p.m.

December 18-9:30 a.m.

December 18-Noon

December 18-7:00 p.m.

December 20-6:30 p.m.

ACU Vespers

Abilene High School Choir Concert

Abilene Christian High School Choir Concert

Craig Middle School Choir Concert

First Friends Preschool Christmas Program

Christmas Carols with the Organ

Madison Middle School Choir Concert

Clack Middle School Orchestra Concert

All of these programs and concerts are open to the public and so you really have no excuse for not getting into the Christmas spirit with all of the musical options available to you.

TO APOLOGIZE OR NOT....

by Mike Greenfield

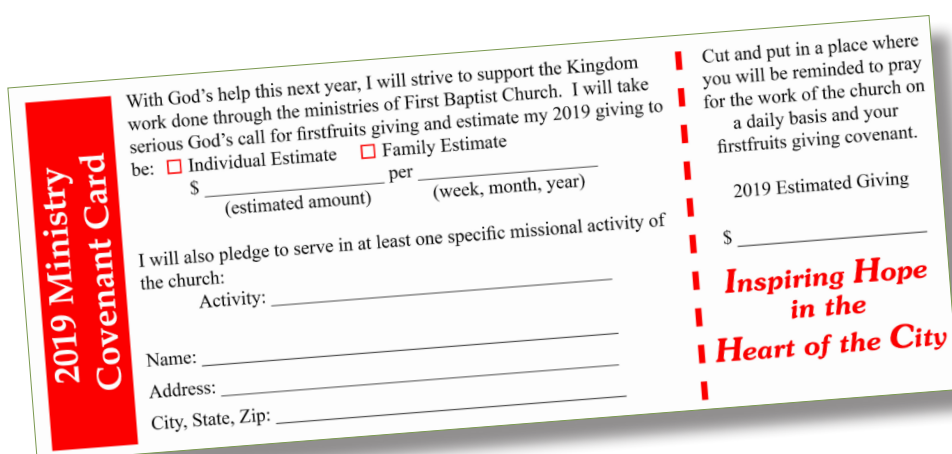
Not long after we sent out the 3rd quarter giving statements, I received a phone call from the sister of someone who comes to our church. Let me state very clearly, I do not know who this person is, nor who her sister is, only that her sister had received the giving statement and the letter I wrote to go with it. At this point, I believe some background information is needed to make sure the story is told and understood in its entirety.

Long before I came on staff here at First Baptist, the church sent out quarterly giving statements. I assume the idea is to keep everyone informed about their giving. The church was and continues to offer Estimated Giving Cards as a way for folks to think through what they are going to do in the next year in relation to their giving to the work of the church. Neither of those are seen as invoices, bills, collection notices, or demands, but simply a way to keep our giving back to God in front of each of us. Now, for the record, I do not know what is on any of those cards or statements. Nor does Dr. Christopher or the rest of the staff with exception of the finance office who must process the information and keep accurate accounting for tax and legal purposes, all of which is audited on an annual basis and the audit presented to the finance committee (which occurred last month at their regular monthly meeting). I, along with the finance committee, look at numbers, but not the names associated with those numbers. You see, I know how much money is given on a weekly basis, but I do not know from whom it comes.

Back to my story, the phone call started out with a high level of anger present and most of it directed at me personally because I wrote the letter sent with the statement. During the 45 minute conversation, I tried to listen to the “what” as much as the “why” of the conversation. Basically, she felt that the church was looking down on her sister and judging her by how little she gave and that ALL we were concerned with was money. I attempted to apologize at several junctures in the conversation and repeatedly tried to let her know that my intent with the letter was to say thank you for all the gifts the church receives, but remind all of us that the year was not over. I also told her four or five times that I had no idea what was on the statement of any person in the church except for my own. The conversation ended on a more congenial tone and I told her that I would look into how we communicate with people about their giving.

So, now I am going to do two things. First, I want to apologize to any of you who might have taken my previous letters in a negative way. I can assure you I have only wanted the best for each of you and for the church. The second thing I want to say is that I will not apologize for my understanding of what God teaches us about giving. I believe the tithe, 10%, is a Biblical concept which is just as valid today as it was when it was written in the Bible. Just as the Blessed Life book has reminded us, I reminded the caller and I will remind us all, giving is a matter of the heart and if your heart is in a right relationship with God, then your giving will be as well.

So when January rolls around, you will receive a year-end giving statement (required by law) from the church showing your 2018 actual giving. With that statement (which I do not know any of the information) I will write a letter thanking you for your gift, whether one dollar or thousands, and remind us all that together we were able to accomplish Kingdom work. So, let's finish strong as we close out 2018 and get ready to see what God has in store for us in 2019.



2019 Ministry Covenant Card

With God's help this next year, I will strive to support the Kingdom work done through the ministries of First Baptist Church. I will take serious God's call for firstfruits giving and estimate my 2019 giving to be: ☐ Individual Estimate ☐ Family Estimate

\$ _____ per _____ (estimated amount) (week, month, year)

I will also pledge to serve in at least one specific missional activity of the church:
Activity: _____

Name: _____
Address: _____
City, State, Zip: _____

Cut and put in a place where you will be reminded to pray for the work of the church on a daily basis and your firstfruits giving covenant.

2019 Estimated Giving
\$ _____

**Inspiring Hope
in the
Heart of the City**

If you have not had an opportunity to return your 2019 Ministry Covenant Card, you may do so anytime during the month of December by placing it in the offering plate, bringing it by the church, or mailing to the church. Your faithful support enables the church to continue to do great ministry for the Kingdom of God.

CHRISTMAS EVE GOOD CHEER OFFERING

The Good Cheer Fund of First Baptist Church, Abilene is used by City Light Community Ministries and our pastoral staff to meet special needs (often in crisis situations) of our church and community. Lights stay on in homes, water is not cut off, heat stays on, and senior adults will be able to make that important doctor's appointment because of the gas voucher they received through this Good Cheer ministry of FBC. In addition, rent assistance, utility bill assistance, bus passes, identification cards, birth certificates, and a night or two in a motel on a very cold night and you can see this is a very important ministry. All this is made possible through the generosity of our church members who contribute to the Good Cheer Fund on a regular basis, but especially during the Christmas Eve services. Abilene is a better place to live because of this offering and how FBC Abilene uses these funds. Please pray about how you can give to this important offering at our Christmas Eve Services. Thank you for being a church who loves our city and is willing to help people, even if they never join our church.

CITY SIDEWALKS * HOT CHOCOLATE BOOTH

This past Tuesday night, we had a great time serving 125 gallons of hot chocolate at the annual Abilene City Sidewalks. We want to thank all those who came out and helped us serve. A huge thank you to Paige, Kathryn, & Jerry Clark; Hannah, Sarah, Timothy, & Jecilly Varghese; Chance, Candy, & Eddie Rains; David Hall, D'Anna Smith, Debby Brown, Jack Stafford, Pat & Billy Bob Neff, Becky Tucker, Mike Greenfield, C.V. Blake, Todd Wilson, Matthew Broyles, Phil Christopher, and the FBC custodial staff. What a wonderful way to kick-off this special season of celebrating our Savior's birth.



BLESSINGS OF CHRISTMAS

On Sunday afternoon, December 16, we pray you will be participating in our annual Blessings of Christmas visits to persons in our church who are unable to be out and about as much as others. We will have gift bags and cards ready right after worship that morning.

Here is the plan. Come to the welcome center following the morning worship service. Select one or more cards and bags. Take them to the address listed on the card. Leave the gift from the church and enjoy a brief visit with one of our special fellow members. Following your visit, return to your homes knowing you have been a vital part in our church's Christmas outreach.

How about making it a family Christmas event? Bring the entire family and help us deliver approximately 75 gifts. What a wonderful way to invest a portion of your time this Christmas season!

We Need You!

Our Preschool department is literally bursting at the seams and this is a GREAT problem to have! We have many new young families and so many babies who have already been born or are on the way. All of our classes are growing in size from infants to Pre-K and we are very thankful for this blessing.

With that said, we have 2 needs in Preschool:

1. We need at least 8-10 more volunteers for Extended Session. There is NO preparation on your part...you just show up and love on these sweet kids.
2. We need a Sunday school teacher for our 2-year-old class to replace Brennan Favor. She did such a wonderful job and loved these kids!

"Room 5 (2year olds) is one of the most fun places to be on Sunday mornings. The excitement and energy these 2 year olds bring to Sunday School is contagious. Seeing them learn the stories of the Bible is so rewarding and fun."

-Brennan Favor

"It's a joy to pay forward for the wonderful people that were in the nursery when our grown daughter was in there. I love the hugs, smiles, and the giggles! Keeps me young!"

-Louise Gray

"Working in the nursery gives me the opportunity to meet our young families that I wouldn't get to know otherwise."

-Laurie Irby

"As a mom of three older kids, I still find it rewarding and necessary to serve in the church nursery. I believe in the saying that the doors of the church begin in the nursery. As parents, we first rust nursery workers with the safety and nurturing of our children. What's greater than rocking a baby or seeing young children worship the Lord? In my adult life as I have grown in my walk with Christ, I have learned that a growing Christian is a serving Christian. Jesus teaches us to live a life of joy...putting others first. Serving in extended session is a great way to serve younger parents so that they too can grow spiritually!"

-Marci Cole



EVENT CALENDAR:

DECEMBER

- 2-16 CBF Art Show
- 2 Carry the Light Service
Personnel Committee
Family Chrismon Making
- 3-6 Pictorial Directory Pictures
- 5-7 CLCM Christmas Store
- 6 Healing Hearts Meeting
- 7 Parent's Night Out
- 9 The King is Here-Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra
ACU Vespers Concert
- 10 AHS Choir Christmas Concert
- 11 Rockin' Moms
ACHS Choir Concert
- 12-14 CLCM Christmas Store
- 12 Buildings & Grounds Committee
Grant-in-Aid Ministry Team
- 13 Craig Choir Christmas Concert
- 16 Blessings of Christmas
Missions Committee
Children's Choirs Christmas Program
- 18 First Friends Christmas Program
Noon Carols with the Organ
Finance Committee
Deacons' Meeting/Christmas Party
Madison M. S. Choir Program
- 19 Preschool Choir Open House
K-5th Choirs Caroling
- 20 Healing Hearts Meeting
Clack M. S. Orchestra Concert
- 24 Church Offices Closed
Family Christmas Eve Service
Annual Christmas Eve Candlelight Service
- 25 Church Offices Closed
- 26 Church Offices Closed
No Wednesday Activities

STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

December 10, 4 years
Masonya White
Wednesday Night Cook

December 12, 2 years
Sly Butgereit
Custodian

December 16, 16 years
Todd Wilson
Pastor for Worship & Music

December 21, 26 years
Tony Martinez
Custodian

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

November 2018

Budget	November	Year-to-Date
Required	\$270,990	\$2,881,803
Given	\$228,060	\$3,085,116

God continues to bless our faithfulness through the tithes and offerings given to His Kingdom work.



FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH • ABILENE

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