

FIRST *words*

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

ADVENT COVID-19 STYLE

As with most everything this year, we have adapted from what we normally have done to what we can do because of the pandemic. Advent is not different. This year, Advent will begin on November 29 and as in years past, the sanctuary will be decorated for the Christmas Season. However, because of our desire to be a good neighbor and support the plea from the head of Hendrick Medical Center, we will not have in-person worship that morning, so the Chrismons will already be on the tree and not a part of the children's sermon.

That evening, we are still planning on having the Drive-thru Hamburger Dinner and Lighting of the Church, except we will not be setting up tables and would ask everyone to remain in their vehicles for the event. We believe we can do this safely by not having anyone get out of their cars.

The Ingathering Team will be meeting the first week of December to help us think through how we do church for the remainder of the year, so we are not exactly sure how the other Sundays of Advent and Christmas Eve Services will look. Our desire is to carry on as many traditions as we possibly can, all the while doing so with safety in mind. The Parade of Flags is one such tradition which will have to be done differently this year. So, on December 6, the second Sunday of Advent, the flags will be a part of the service, just not sure how right now.

One tradition, which will be able to continue without hardly any changes, is our daily Advent devotions. Each morning beginning November 29 and going up to Christmas Day, a new devotion will be posted on our Facebook and Instagram pages as well as sent by email. This year, we pray these devotions will be an encouragement to you during this difficult time.



words

FOR THE JOURNEY

Dr. Phil Christopher
Senior Pastor

I love the reruns of M*A*S*H. In a holiday episode, Colonel Potter lamented, “I’ve spent 18 Thanksgivings away from Mildred. It took 15 of them to realize I was making myself miserable wishing I was some place I wasn’t.” He went on to say, “If you aren’t where you are...you’re no place.” Wherever you were on Thanksgiving, this very moment or whatever the circumstances, we have a choice - we can be resentful, or grateful to be where we are and who we are....

I have worked at trying to discover what COVID-19 can teach us. How we go about our lives affects others. Pastor Brian McLaren said: “In these challenging times, we are discovering a wisdom that we have needed all along. We are not separate. An invisible virus in a remote part of the world in an open food market can spread from one body to another body to around the world in days, weeks, and months.” We are a community connected to each other from the global to local.

We were not sure if we would venture off to Victoria for Thanksgiving. Last Friday, Mary decided to cook the turkey. It had been in the fridge for a while and it might be only the two of us. Nothing worse than a “foul bird.” Well, come on complainers..., there are so many things worse. Countless people are living and dying through these tough times. Some spent Thanksgiving alone at an empty table.

When I walked into the house last Friday and smelled the turkey cooking, I was overwhelmed by memories of past Thanksgivings. Smell is the most evocative of the five senses in triggering our memories. I remembered the early morning family runs with matching shirts in the

Turkey Trot. The sounds of the family in the kitchen. The fantastic Thanksgiving we all spent in Nashville, where Caroline made special family t-shirts. The Thanksgiving in Victoria where Natalie had 80 people for lunch - Andrew has a big family. I could go on with this journey down the backroads of my mind.

Perhaps Thanksgiving was different for you. If this Thanksgiving didn’t turn out as you planned, take a journey down the backroads of your mind. The gift of memory can be such a source of gratitude. Take a moment to remember those Thanksgivings of the past. Sure they weren’t perfect - families are families - conflict happens. Yet, remember those blessed times which no virus can ever take away.

As we approach Advent, a story caught my attention. A reporter in an interview with Dr. Fauci, made a comment: “Christmas is probably not going to be possible....” Pious evangelicals dogged piled on the reporter for his suggestion. The

context was that Christmas might not happen because of limited family gatherings. Leadership is even evaluating how we will safely offer our two Christmas Eve services.

We understand Christmas is more than just getting the family together. Don’t we? His birth divided history into “before” and “after.” Every historical event and ruler who has ever ruled is dated by His birth. All of us might discover this year, Christmas is more than cozy family gatherings, but the birth of “Emmanuel - God with us” who is with us in our pain.

Our theme for the four Sundays of Advent will be “Nothing Can Stop Christmas.” Jesus was born in the worst of times - taxing season, division, Roman rule, poverty, and



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the oppression of a ruthless dictator named Herod. Trust, God always shows up in the “worst of times.”

The spirit of Advent is a deep longing for God to come and set us free. We have been longing for a vaccine for COVID-19, and it looks like help is on the way – there is light at the end of the tunnel. During this Advent Season, we could use our longing for a vaccine – for help – for a cure to become a longing for God to reconcile this broken world. Jesus didn't just come to vaccinate us from a virus, but to heal our wounds and save us.

Christmas might be different this year, but the miracle will come. The question is: “Will we be different?” Will we be prepared? I pray this Christmas we will worship and prepare our lives like never before. Could COVID-19 bring a revival in our longing for a cure which becomes a longing for God to heal and set us free?

God is coming and nothing can stop Him,

Phil



BREAD OF LIFE

“In Northern Africa, bread is a way of life. Not that long ago, women would prepare their loaves of dough at home and then send them to the community oven, where the bakers would cook the loaves and then return the fresh bread to each home. This still happens in small, rural communities, but in the big cities you can pick up fresh loaves in almost every tiny convenience store. Bakers make their morning deliveries on scooters which are outfitted with gigantic baskets behind the seat. Bread is so critical to the Northern African diet that it's eaten for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks (diabetes is a regional health challenge).

When a family prepares more bread than they need, the leftovers are never wasted. It's considered shameful to throw bread away, so families will take their remaining bread and put the loaves outside somewhere safe, so that any hungry passerby can eat. These loaves are never put in the dirt or on an unclean surface, so you might be surprised to see random loaves of bread stacked on wall ledges, park benches, or even tucked into tree trunks. Stray animals, people living in poverty, and farmers who can't afford to feed their flocks are all welcome to it.

Every time I see bread stashed in random places outside, I'm reminded of how important it is for communities to be involved in caring for their neighbors in ways which bring dignity. The local church here is passionate about this work, serving our most vulnerable migrant and refugee neighbors with compassion and care. It's an honor to partner together as we serve the One who called himself the Bread of Life.”

- Karen, *field personnel serving in Northern Africa*



COLLEGE FALL RETREAT

Our college students went on our annual Fall Retreat to Butman Methodist Camp November 13-15. While there, we studied what scripture says about money, focusing on many parables of Jesus and His teaching about money in the Sermon on the Mount. We discussed the inability to serve two masters, where our treasure is our hearts will be, and why Jesus says it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get to heaven. A couple of different activities were done to help us think through and understand how much really is enough. And finally, we discussed the importance of giving and how generosity demonstrates the greatest understanding of God's grace given to us.

Sunday morning, one of our students led us in singing, and we shared communion together to remember the depth of Jesus' love and in whom our relationships should be unified. We also had a lot of fun playing games, hiking, making s'mores, and singing around the campfire.

Press on,

Matthew Broyles

Here are a few links to some resources we used if you are interested in exploring more of what we discussed:

[How Much Money Is 'Enough'? This Simple Thought Experiment Gives You an Exact Number to Aim For](#)

[How Much Money Is Enough? - Millennial Money](#)

[20 Bible Verses on the Significance of Tithing - Pushpay Blog](#)





OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

In spite of COVID-19, Operation Christmas Child had a great year! As a collection center, we were able to collect 6,826 shoeboxes, is down from last year, but we wondered how much the virus would affect us. We still were able to load 453 cartons into the two semi-trailers and they are now on their way to Dallas to the processing center. All of this was made possible because of the generous giving of each person who filled a box, manned the collection center, and by the men who helped load the trailer on Monday. Those include: John Weeks, Kelly Utley, Sandy Utley, Alan Wartes, Steve Clemmer, C.V. Blake, and Matthew Broyles. However, the whole process would not have worked without the excellent and hard work done by Debra Clemmer, who as always kept everything running smoothly and accurately. A special thank you goes to Eric Couvion, who did many behind the scene tasks which made everything else work. We are still considering taking a group to the Dallas processing center to work an afternoon shift on December 4 if COVID-19 does not make that impossible. If you would be interested in helping with the next phase of the operation, let Debra know (675-8116). So, thanks again for making Christmas a joyful experience for 6,826 children around the world.

YOUTH CAMP REMINDER

We hope you are enjoying the holiday season!

Last year, we did not get to participate in either of our Youth Camps because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though our future is still unclear, we hope we will be able to attend Youth Camp in 2021 and are making plans accordingly (while taking precautions).

Here are some dates for you to put on your calendar:

Horizon Middle School Camp
(Brownwood, TX)
June 16-20, 2021

High School Camp
(YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, CO)
June 27-July 2, 2021

We have reservations already in place. Still, we will need to have an idea of how many students plan on going. Let Austen know if your student plans on joining us for camp!

Let us continue to pray for our community and our world during this time.

-Austen Winfrey

2021

june

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	01	02	03	04	05	06
07	08	09	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

july

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
			01	02	03	04
05	06	07	08	09	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

ACTING IN love

Last month, because of your faithful giving to the budget, First Baptist Missions Committee was able to help the following programs and ministries be able to continue to meet the needs of many during this holiday season.

City Light Christmas Store: A store of toys to help Martinez, City Light, and GLO families be able to purchase toys at a much lower rate for Christmas. This is held at our City Light building and is a great blessing to many!

Head Start Program: There is an abundance of children needing assistance this year and this money helped Head Start cover the gap of other programs for Christmas and supply clothing to those children.

Nazareth Evangelical College: FBC has previously supported this ministry and were able to again during this season where their normal sources of support were weakened. Here is just one highlight: because of the necessity of teaching by Zoom, the enrollment at the college has tripled to over 90 students, since anyone with an Internet connection can enroll. For the first time, they have enrolled Arab-Christian students in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran. It's amazing the reach they are having. The economic challenge is that the remote students are not able to pay anything, and most of the normally enrolled Arab-Israeli students around Nazareth are unable to pay the normal tuition because of lost jobs due to the virus. Baptist churches in Israel are, like those in many places, struggling to keep up economically, so their support is limited, and tourism has evaporated completely right now.

Abilene Downtown Christmas Sponsor: We are a part of the downtown activities during the Christmas Season like City Sidewalks, Christmas Tree Lighting and many other activities which help us form a bond with our neighbors downtown.

Lesley-Ann Hix Tommey with CBF and Rauschenbusch Metro Ministries in New York City, NY: In November, we were able to send money which will help purchase snack packs and toiletries this ministry supplies to those in need in the Hell's Kitchen community, along with other needs.

If you have any questions or would like more information on any of these ministries, please contact the Missions' Office at 325-675-8112.

THERE IS STILL TIME TO BE A PART OF THE CITY LIGHT CHRISTMAS STORE 2020

Once again, our church has the opportunity to provide Christmas assistance to families who would prefer to provide for themselves at Christmas rather than receive presents from a stranger or stand in the line for a giveaway, but they are unable to do so.

We want to encourage families at Martinez Elementary, GLO Daycare, and City Light this holiday season with our City Light Christmas Store!

The store will be open by appointment only on December 1, 2, and 3 and then again December 8, 9, and 10. Donated toys will be priced at 10 to 15 percent of the retail price. It is a great joy to be able to help these families!

HERE'S HOW YOU CAN HELP:

1. Purchase a toy or toys and drop them off at the church office by Monday, December 8 or donate money and we will be happy to purchase tax free the toy on your behalf. If you donate money, please mark your donation as "Christmas Store."
2. Volunteer your time. We will need a few volunteers to help set up toys and help each day while the families shop. If you would like to help, contact Melinda in the Missions' Office at 325-675-8112 or melinda.norris@fbcabilene.org.



HELP IS NEEDED TO STAY WARM!

CITY LIGHT is needing help with some new or gently used jackets, hats, and gloves to help our neighbors; especially in the cold weather. If you can help, please drop them off at City Light during building hours MWF 9 a.m.- noon or 1:30-3:00 p.m.

STAY *connected*



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ABILENE, TX**

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We can change the world,
one community at a time!

**As of today, we have met \$18,755
of our 2020 goal of \$80,000.**

Seven Mission Offerings Combined Into One:

CBF

BGCT World Hunger

Community Transformation

Baptist World Aid

Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions

BGCT Disaster Relief

Lawrence Trott Offering for Associational Missions

*Please contact the Missions' Office
(325-675-8112) if you need more information
or have questions.*

STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

December 16, 18 years

Todd Wilson

Pastor for Music & Worship

December 21, 28 years

Tony Martinez

Custodian

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

November 2020

Budget	November	Year-to-Date
Required	\$ 256,000	\$ 2,974,407
Given	\$ 187,716	\$ 2,675,458

(Does not include the last Sunday of November)

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



FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH • ABILENE

1333 North 3rd, Abilene, TX 79601
fbc@fbcabilene.org | www.fbcabilene.org
325-673-5031