

Christmas Blessings



CALVARY COURIER
DECEMBER 2010

Letter from the Pastor

By the time that you get to read this, there will be less than 13 shopping days until December 25 which is most likely not when Jesus was born. Our family Thanksgiving plans had to account for "black Friday" shopping, seeing that Joshua and Liz are in retail. We feasted on Wednesday, the 24th, according to the plan. My father-in-law and I endured yet another Detroit Lions loss while nibbling on the previous day's leftovers. Other than the Lion's game, this will be yet another exciting season holiday season and perhaps Josh and Jeanna will have their "new" home completely livable by Christmas.

To be totally honest (as if it is possible to be "partly" honest), I am not sure that I enjoy the holidays all that much, other than the nap during the Lions game. This will sound quite unpastoral of me, but, I think that it would be a great idea to take a year off from "the holidays" entirely. Our culture has attached so much baggage to the days, mostly through capitalistic opportunism, that we totally miss the point of them.

Lincoln, in a time of terrible bloodshed and maiming, set aside an annual day to give thanks to God in spite of the struggle, for his many blessings to our nation. In this, the President also called upon Americans to care for the "widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife." (He actually said to commend them into God's tender care, but I think that he was talking about a lot more than just praying.) The feasting part of this day of "Thanksgiving and Praise" is probably incorporated from the Hebrew concept of celebrating God's blessing by enjoying his blessings in the form of food. During these feasts, the aliens, the widows and orphans as well as the Levites were to be provided for, that they too might enjoy the feast and celebrate (Deut 14:28,29). As a society now, we give thanks without an antecedent of said thanking. The praising God idea seems to be out altogether, as I never hear it mentioned outside of Church. Maybe we should each read what Lincoln actually wrote about a "secular state" pausing to thank God for a whole day. Hardly seems constitutional these days . . .

The history of Christmas is a fascinating study (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas>) with the conclusion that little about the date or celebration has much of anything to do with Jesus' birth, Magi deleted nativity scenes excepted. I think that it is fine that we read or reinterpret a lot of the contemporary symbolism to refer to the incarnation, but we should probably not be too upset if others avoid these linkages. In reality, the Christmas holiday is a mixture of a lot of customs, with some being Christian. Seeing that we have no idea as to what date Jesus was born, December 25 is a fine day to celebrate that most important birth humanity's history. It is a fine thing as well to give gifts as a form of enjoying the material blessings of God.

I wonder though, if it might be a good idea to give gifts a little bit later in the month so we can focus on the incarnation; New Year's, for example. I am not proposing anything radical here other than that we make sure to focus on the wonder of the manger rather than the marvel of the mall. Our family's tradition has been to read the Luke narrative and to give thanks before ribbons are touched as a means of prioritizing relative significance. I think, however, that the manger is forgotten without care as brightly colored paper receives its foreordained shredding. To focus on our lost estate apart from Bethlehem and the mercy and grace initiated there should be our aim as we commemorate the Gift.

I do not plan to change any customs that our family has this year, or the next, but I do want us to keep the stated intent as the actual intent. We must give thanks and praise to God intentionally, and we must remember the extreme grace and mercy offered to us in the person and work of Christ, the Messiah, the Son of David, born of Mary. We must not forget.

--Pastor Steve



All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Matthew 1:22-23 NIV

CALVARY MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH

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The *MISSION NEWS*

o Susan has been digging in clay, planting veggies, and learning about weeds and bugs. Also "practicing driving the motorbike." They have many obstacles to deal with on their roads! "Prayer for good travels, good health, and good attitudes. Please pray for receptivity on the part of local church leaders..."

o From Brian: "The Lord gave Roger the two months he asked for and eight more... Pray for the Lord to comfort him while he lives and to use him... Pray for me... (Brian will be visiting Roger and family more often), and pray for the family." Most of them do not know the Lord.

o Dan and Nancy "have no shortage of blessings for 2010! (grace, friends, each other, new home, continuing ministry)" Their Thanksgiving letter is on the Missions Board. They also "wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy 2011."

o Craig outlines "some of the ways that LRI has seen God's great faithfulness" in his Thanksgiving letter. He also mentions: "Several staff have lived with many short paychecks this year." Please pray for special gifts this month to make up these shortfalls.

o Tom and Nancy "thank you for your prayers!!" They will be traveling to Michigan for Christmas. Nancy is doing well with the current chemo treatment. Tom's second knee replacement surgery is to be January 10. Pray for this surgery to go as well as the first. "Thanks."

o In Action Newsletter, Thomas Smoak writes about the first-ever Global Children's Ministry Conference in Beirut, Lebanon. "There was a clear sense that we were part of something much larger than any of us." Also news briefs from Malawi, Zambia, Philippines, Colombia, and Ecuador.

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I HATE TO ASK YOU NICE FOLKS TO MOVE,
BUT THE INN'S MARKETING DEPARTMENT
FIGURES THAT IT WILL ONLY BE A MATTER OF
TIME BEFORE THIS TREE GETS BETTER
RECOGNITION THAN YOUR SON

Why do we celebrate
Jesus' birth at Christmas,
though we don't know when He was born?
It was necessary and inevitable
that we select a date
to celebrate an eternal miracle--
the coming to earth
of God in human form...Jesus,
Who changed the entire world
with His message of love,
forgiveness, humility, and peace.

Christmas is an obligatory
and indispensable holiday
marking the transformation
from guiltless selfishness
to striving to follow His example
of service to God and our fellow man.
That is worth celebrating.

By Joanna Luchs