



The Arkansas State Capitol in Little Rock is decorated for the holiday season. A privately funded life-size Nativity was set up Dec. 10 on the south end of the Capitol grounds, near 7th Street, to celebrate Christmas. Photo by Caleb Yarbrough

Ark. Baptists celebrate Christmas through outreach, special events

ACROSS ARKANSAS many Southern Baptist churches take part in special traditions during the Christmas season. Whether it's through unique services, community outreach or raising money for international missions, each church celebrates the birth of our Savior in its own special way.

Christmas for caring

First Baptist Church, Alma, will mark its 27th Christmas Is for Caring community event Saturday, Dec. 17. Multiple churches, businesses and individuals come together annually to make the event possible, where families hear the gospel and receive food and toys. Hundreds of toys will be given

away, along with tons of food for area families. The event has grown into one of the largest Christmas benevolent programs, which is made possible by many corporate sponsors, according to organizers.

Advent wreath

This year's Christmas theme for Freeman Heights Baptist Church is Come and Worship. The church began its observance of the Christmas season Nov. 27 by hanging and lighting an Advent wreath. To raise awareness for its Lottie Moon Christmas Offering goal of \$3,000, the church also put up a Lottie Moon Offering Christmas tree. On Dec. 18 the church will present a

Christmas musical titled Hope Has Hands. On Christmas Eve the church will hold a candlelight service at 6 p.m.; and on Christmas Day, a service at 10:45 a.m.

"We hope to focus on the real reason for the season," said Freeman Heights pastor Alan Brown. "It is Jesus and nothing else. Come and worship!"

Care for widows

For about a decade, Bill and Amy Roussel and Bob and Karen Davis of First Baptist Church, Searcy, have cared for the widows and widowers of their congregation by hosting

See **CHRISTMAS** page 8

Nativity ban results in flood of displays

BAXTER COUNTY - Last November when a federal judge ruled that a Nativity scene could not be displayed on the lawn of the Baxter County Courthouse, it didn't take long for 81-year-old Sue Chrisco, a member of Sage Baptist Church in nearby Izard County, to take a stand and call on all churches to display Nativity scenes on their lawns.

In the Arkansas Baptist News (ABN) Podcast 56, host Bill Bumpas talks with Chrisco and S.D. Hacker, director of missions, Rocky Bayou Baptist Association, about the initiative to encourage churches to display Nativity scenes. Rocky Bayou association, where Sage Baptist Church is located, is adjacent to Baxter County.

Prior to the judge's ruling, a Nativity scene had been set up annually on the lawn of the Baxter County Courthouse for more than 40 years.

Seeing the Nativity scene prominently displayed was a "wonderful experience," said Hacker, who served White River Baptist Association, which covers Baxter and Marion counties, from 1964 until 1970. He added there had never been any controversy surrounding the annual tradition until a lawsuit was brought in 2014 by the American Human-

ist Association along with a Baxter County resident.

The lawsuit stated that the county should not allow a Nativity scene at the courthouse every December while denying requests for other displays on the property.

A federal judge subsequently ruled in 2015 that Baxter County violated the U.S. Constitution by displaying a Nativity scene while not allowing other displays, such as a "Happy Winter Solstice" banner and a menorah, outside the courthouse. The ruling made national headlines.

When Chrisco heard the ruling, she said she was "very perturbed like everyone else."

Soon, she read an article in a local newspaper urging churches to set up Nativity scenes on their property where they wouldn't be forced to take them down.

The idea "hit me like a ton of bricks," she said. "I thought, 'Why haven't we been doing this all along?' There's a lot of churches that do this, but there's more that don't."

"So I took it upon myself ... and started calling all churches in Izard County," encouraging them to set up Nativity scenes.

"I've done my level best to find all the churches out there

See **NATIVITY** page 7



POSTAGE INFORMATION



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ABN Digest

Stories of interest
to Arkansas Baptists

Trump picks Baptist to lead EPA department

WASHINGTON - President-elect Donald Trump has selected Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt - a climate-change skeptic and Southern Baptist layman who sits on the board of trustees at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary - to run the Environmental Protection Agency, according to media reports. On Dec. 8, Trump's transition team confirmed the selection of Pruitt, a member and deacon at First Baptist Church in Broken Arrow, Okla., elected to the Southern Baptist Convention seminary's trustee board in 2012.

Charitable donations up overall in 2015

WINCHESTER, Va. (BP) - Charitable donations to a diversity of Christian organizations including churches, schools and advocacy groups increased in 2015 over the previous year, according to the latest statistics released by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA).

The 12.5 billion given in 2015 was 2.2 percent greater than 2014's giving of \$12.2 billion, ECFA said, based on official audits and other financial statements of 1,816 of the more than 2,100 non-profit members accredited by the ECFA, including many Southern Baptists.

"Both new and long-standing donors are continuing to give faithfully to support the important work of our member organizations," ECFA president and CEO Dan Busby said. "It is encouraging to see generosity in action."

The study is based on financial data only from groups accredited by the Winchester, Va., based organization, but supported by other organizations.

For more ABN Digest, go to arkansasbaptist.org/abn-digest

One door closes; another opens

Church plant gifted with new facility

Margaret Colson
Arkansas Baptist News

SPRINGDALE - If you could receive one Christmas gift this year that would transform your life, what would it be?

For Generations Church in Springdale, Christmas came early this year. This past October, Generations Church, a young congregation begun just two years ago, became a member of Washington Madison Baptist Association. On the same day the young congregation was voted into the association, it received its life-changing gift - the gift of a church building and property.

"This gift is ... an incredible manifestation of God's provision," said Generations pastor Chris Taylor.

The story of how Generations Church came to receive a church building and property to call its own began generations ago when Silent Grove Baptist Church was established and ministered in the then-rural community dotted with pastureland. As the community became more suburban through the years, Silent Grove church membership dwindled - down to only about eight members.

Silent Grove's bi-vocational pastor, Steve Johnson, contacted Ron Lomax, director of Washington Madison Baptist Association, seeking guidance about a year ago. Lomax told him that reaching the community for Christ might mean "a new church in their facility and possibly a new pastor with that church."

Not ready to make that decision, Silent Grove maintained its presence in the community - continuing to hold its worship services at 11 a.m. on Sunday mornings for eight to 10 people, then allowing a Marshallese church of about 30 people to use its building on Sunday afternoons and, finally, several months ago, allowing Generations Church, with about 40 people, to meet in its building on Sunday

mornings at 9:30 a.m.

Three congregations in one building worked for a while until pastor Johnson called Lomax, saying they "just couldn't do it anymore," according to the associational director. But Silent Grove Baptist Church didn't want to go quietly.

"Silent Grove Baptist wanted a new generation of people to take over the work started years before, and the new church that came in to do this was actually called the Generations Church," said Lomax.

"This older generation (at Silent Grove) saw the need for a newer generation reaching the newer generation who lived around their church and voted to give their property in order for ministry to continue," he said.

Generations Church, which has seen 17 people make professions of faith in Christ in the past 23 months, "is committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ, who grow in maturity and are equipped to make more disciples," said pastor Taylor.

Still, lacking a permanent facility was a challenge for the young congregation. Before meeting in the Silent Grove facility, Generations Church had met in a community clubhouse, an American Legion hall and in the building of another congregation that was leasing its property.

"Finding a facility in which to corporately worship Christ ... is one of the greatest challenges to planting a church," explained Taylor, because of the space/amenities needed and resources required.

"These difficulties were addressed and provision granted by God through the gracious people at Silent Grove Baptist," he said.

Even with a place to call home, Generations Church aims to "focus less on 'come and see' ministry within the walls of our meeting place and more on 'go and tell' outreach

See **FACILITY** page 3



Abigail Taylor (above), the most recent person to make a profession of faith at Generations Church, Springdale, is baptized by her father, Chris Taylor, Generations pastor. Below, Bree Mattingly reads the Bible at the church.



ABN to resume Jan. 12; ABSC closed Dec. 23-Jan. 2

LITTLE ROCK - This is the last edition of the *Arkansas Baptist News* (ABN) for 2016.

The ABN will resume print publication on Jan. 12, but will distribute its regular edition of the ABN *Link* electronic newsletter

Dec. 23. To subscribe visit arkansasbaptist.org/link-subscribe.

The Arkansas Baptist State Convention building will be closed in observance of the Christmas and New Year holiday from Dec. 23 through Jan. 2.

Ark. 4th in rate of divorce nationwide

AS THE RATE of divorce in 2015 reached its lowest point in 40 years in the U.S., Arkansas saw an increase – resulting in the state ranking fourth overall in the rate of divorce.

Prior to 2015 Arkansas had the seventh-highest divorce rate, according to survey data.

A reason for the high number of divorces in the Natural State may be that people marry younger in Arkansas than in other states, family law attorneys told the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* in a recent article. Additionally, the attorneys say married couples in Arkansas often have clashing expectations in marriage.

But the rise is not only in younger couples, as attorneys are seeing a higher number of divorces among couples who have been married 30 years or longer, the newspaper reported.

Larry Page, executive director of the Arkansas Faith and Ethics Council, said the increased incident of divorce

isn't surprising, considering the culture Americans live in today.

Page said many Christians can't "identify with precision the exact causes for the phenomenon" of divorce.

"For one thing, the institution of marriage – particularly as God designed between one man and one woman, for life and with fidelity – has been under assault for some time," said Page.

"Our culture has embraced so many counterfeit relationships, such as premarital sex, promiscuity, homosexual and bisexual relations, and adultery to name a few. In the politically correct and theologically incorrect values about relationships society has endorsed, should we be surprised at the fragility of many marriages today?"

Page added, "We badly need a reset on marriage. That will only be accomplished if believers model what real, lasting and meaningful relationships

– especially ones as fundamental and essential as biblical marriage – look like. May we find ourselves made of the stuff to make that happen."

Attorneys admit that the impact of divorce stretches well beyond couples and that dissolution of marriages harms the psyches of involved children, especially if the youth are thrust in the middle of long-running disputes, the *Democrat-Gazette* reported.

"What you'll find if you look at the studies is that children can handle their parents getting divorced, OK, but what screws kids up is parents who constantly are acrimonious toward each other and fight and fight and fight," Jack Wagoner III, an attorney who has handled divorce cases for more than 20 years, told the newspaper. "That's been shown to have a terrible impact on kids."

The rate of divorce in Arkansas moved upward from 22.3 divorces per 1,000 mar-

ried women in 2014 to 25.3 in 2015, according to Bowling Green State University's National Center for Family and Marriage Research data. Nationally, the rate dropped from 17.6 to 16.9, the lowest rate in at least 40 years.

Data is based on the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

Nationally, there has been a decline in divorce among younger people and an increase in divorce among older people, the *Democrat-Gazette* reported.

Pulaski County, the state's largest county, has granted 1,540 divorce decrees in 2016 compared to 1,785 in 2015, Douglas DalPorto, supervisor of court records for Pulaski County, reported the *Democrat-Gazette*.

Additionally, the number of marriages declined in Pulaski County by 4 percent to 3,592 from 2014 to 2015, according to county data reported by the newspaper.

Former ABSC staffer Bob Holley dies at 83

ARKADELPHIA – Robert Earl Holley, 83, of Arkadelphia, formerly of Little Rock, died on Nov. 30.

Holley joined the Arkansas Baptist State Convention staff in 1968, where he served for 29 years, including 24 years as director of discipleship training. In this role, Holley worked with Arkansas Baptist churches to develop discipleship training programs, including senior adult ministries, deacon training, children's Bible

drills, youth speakers' tournaments and other initiatives to enhance church outreach and membership development.

He was born to James Luther and Cleo Myra Holley in Montgomery, Ala., on May 31, 1933, and lived most of his childhood in Birmingham, Ala.

Holley entered the ministry after graduating from Howard College (now Sam-

ford University) in 1952, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1954.

Holley was a member of First Baptist Church, Arkadelphia, and a resident of The Plaza Assisted Living Facility.

In addition to his parents, Holley was predeceased by his brothers, James L. Holley, Jr. and Grogan Holley.

Holley is survived by his wife of

62 years, Lucile Foster Holley; two daughters and sons-in-law, Anita and Norm Pumphrey of Ruston, La., and Deborah and Jeff Root of Arkadelphia. He is survived by three grandchildren, Clint Pumphrey and his wife, Darcy of Logan, Utah; Scott Pumphrey of Logan, Utah, and Abby Root of Arkadelphia.

A service celebrating Holley's life was held Dec. 2 in the chapel of Immanuel Baptist Church, Little Rock.



Holley

FACILITY

continued from page 2

to the world around us," said Taylor.

One of the primary ways Generations Church gets "the gospel outside the four walls" of its facility is through a club that meets weekly for an hour at a local school, bringing together as many as 60 elementary school age children to hear the gospel message.

For associational director Lomax, Silent Grove closing its doors while Generations Church opens its doors is a

dynamic example of Southern Baptist cooperation at its best.

"The cooperative effort of Southern Baptist churches is quite clear in this situation," he said.

"In this case, Silent Grove Baptist Church became a legacy church when it handed over its building and property to be used by another group of people who will continue to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, carrying on the ministry that was begun so many years before in that location ... and reaching a new generation for the Lord."

Contact Margaret Colson at margaret@arkansasbaptist.org.



The gift of a church facility from Silent Grove Baptist Church to Generations Church, Springdale, is "an incredible manifestation of God's provision," says Generations pastor Chris Taylor.

ABN Digest

Stories of interest
to Arkansas Baptists

Convicted chaplain now faces civil charges

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Former Southern Baptist chaplain Kenneth Dewitt is the subject of a civil lawsuit filed by a former inmate at McPherson correctional facility in Newport, according to the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.

Dewitt was convicted of third-degree sexual assault and sentenced to 10 years in prison in August for assaulting multiple women while serving as a chaplain at the McPherson correctional facility.

Springfield, Mo., attorney Joseph LaCome filed a lawsuit on behalf of Leticia Villarreal, a former inmate who was deported to Mexico following her release from prison, and "has talked with several more women who were inmates at the McPherson Unit," the *Democrat-Gazette* reported. Villarreal is one of three women Dewitt admitted assaulting while working at McPherson.

In the lawsuit, Villarreal claims Dewitt assaulted her 72 times over the span of 18 months and that she "fell into a deep depression because of the sexual assaults, and frequently considered suicide," the newspaper reported.

Grammy nomination goes to worship leader

JONESBORO – Zach Williams, artist in residence at Central Baptist Church, Jonesboro's Refuge campus, has been nominated for a Grammy Award.

Williams was nominated for a Grammy for Best Contemporary Christian Music Performance/Song for "Chain Breaker," according to grammy.com. Williams co-wrote the song with Mia Fieldes and Craighead County-native Jonathan Smith.

The 59th Annual Grammy Awards are set for Feb. 12.

For more ABN Digest, go to arkansasbaptist.org/abn-digest

Editorial & Opinion

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have..."

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

How a funeral helps us consider life

Recently, I attended the funeral of my former editor and boss, William "Bill" Newsom, in Russellville.

"Mr. Newsom" as I called him – a wiry fellow who sported a flat top for as long as I knew him – died at age 81 after a 45-year career as a newspaperman.



Pressing On

Tim Yarbrough
Phil. 3:14

He was a fixture of the Russellville community, having served 37 years with the local newspaper, *The Courier*.

Newsom was instrumental in me returning to Arkansas after my family moved to Missouri in the early 1970s. I was 24 at the time and working

at the *Press Merit* in Malden, Mo., when I answered an ad for a position at what was then called the Russellville *Courier-Democrat*.

Newsom hired me; I moved to Russellville and really fell in love with the area and its people. It was a time in my life when I owned the only boat I have ever owned – resulting in my frequenting Lake Dardanelle every chance I got when not working at the newspaper (which wasn't that often).

I learned a lot from Newsom, mostly about accuracy and brevity in writing. He encouraged reporters to elimi-

nate as many words as possible to make more room in the newspaper for more stories. While not always successful, I have attempted to follow his advice over the years.

During visitation prior to the funeral, I bumped into Stephen Davis, retired pastor of First Baptist Church, Russellville, who knew Newsom well and was a personal friend of his. In fact, Davis said that he had worked out with Newsom a little more than a month ago, so his sudden passing was evidently a surprise to many who knew him. It is good to know that Newsom was a Christian and has reached his heavenly home!

After attending the funeral I have caught myself glancing

a bit more frequently at the obituaries in the daily newspaper. I have noted – with a bit of alarm – the number

of folks listed who are either my age or younger. I recall

See **FUNERAL** page 7

Cartoon by Gary Thomas



State legislative session to convene Jan. 9

Legislators will gather in Little Rock on the second Monday of January to begin the 91st regular session of the Arkansas General Assembly. If past sessions are any indication, more than 2,000 bills will be introduced, debated, considered and voted on. In that mix will be proposals covering a whole host of issues – from state budget, finance, taxation and appropriation measures to



Faith & Ethics

Larry Page

those dealing with substantive matters involving the state's criminal code, health and welfare concerns, business regulations, standards for the governance of municipalities and counties, issues regarding the production and marketing of alcoholic beverages, medical marijuana and many other

particulars.

The Arkansas Faith and Ethics Council (AFEC) will be on top of the legislative session, lobbying for those measures that comport most closely to Judeo-Christian values and working against those running counter to those biblical principles. The

AFEC will monitor and scrutinize all the goings-on at the capitol and apprise those who receive our legislative alerts. Many of this publication's readers are on our email list; however, for those who aren't and would like to receive our alerts at no cost, just email me at llp@ArFaith.org and request the service.

There are some measures the legislators will deliberate

on that we can anticipate, and there are others that will come as total surprises. As for those matters we fully expect to see, chief among them will be the enabling legislation that must be passed to administer the unfortunate – but unavoidable – new business of so-called "medical marijuana" that has been created in our state. The constitutional amendment approved by the state's voters in last month's general election approves the growing, marketing and smoking and ingesting of marijuana, but much of the "nuts-and-bolts" specifics must be established by the legislature.

The AFEC, along with other individuals and faith-based groups, will work diligently (and hopefully effectively) to restrict and tighten up as much as constitutionally possible the particulars about

this new trade in marijuana to limit the abuses, dangers and harms that we know will accompany this misguided attempt to bring compassionate health care to Arkansans. While the whole effort to legalize marijuana was couched in terms of medical marijuana, the real intent by those supporting and pushing it was recreational marijuana and, in time, that is what this bogus new law will devolve into.

In addition to paying attention to how the marijuana laws play out, we will be working to prevent advances of the SO/GI (sexual orientation/gender identity) agendas. We expect attempts to amend the state's civil rights law to elevate members of those groups to special preference and privileges to which they aren't entitled, such as the "rights"

to let males use bathrooms, showers and locker rooms reserved for females based on their self-professed beliefs that they are female and not male.

Among other matters expected are those restricting attempts to increase abortion on demand at any gestational age, preventing the expansion of lottery and casino gambling, opposing bogus hate crimes, limiting the availability of hardcore pornography, promoting the welfare of children at risk, improving race relations and the well-being of communities, and preserving local control by which individual counties and communities can determine whether the sale of alcoholic beverages should be permitted where they live.

Larry Page is executive director of the Arkansas Faith and Ethics Council.



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Talking with Hugo



Family Matters

Ben Phillips

The aroma of meat being smoked made my mouth water as we arrived at MeShack's BBQ Shack. My father-in-law wanted to treat us over Thanksgiving to some top-rate Texas BBQ. We arrived 35 minutes before they opened to secure the first spot for carry-out only BBQ. The brisket, ribs, sausage and pulled pork were worth the wait.

However, BBQ was not the only special thing about that trip. The conversation we had in line with a stranger, Hugo, was the real blessing. Hugo grew up in Puerto Rico and immigrated to the U.S. where he went to school and became an engineer. He did not grow up having a grandfather or a father in his life. His mother worked two jobs to help him get through school.

Hugo initiated a conversation and affirmed us for a wise decision to eat at MeShack's. He then spent much time imparting truth and wisdom to Christian, my 16-year-old. His tone was gracious, encouraging and challenging like a wise sage. He encouraged Christian to work hard and to be good at his work. He challenged him to honor God and do things for Him more than for himself or for others. He urged him to stay away from drugs and alcohol. He noticed Christian's basketball shirt and motivated him to work hard at basketball and get a scholarship to help pay for college. There was a story that went along with each of his admonitions.

Can you imagine if the older generation in the church intentionally passed along wisdom to the younger generation in the church just like Hugo? What words of wisdom and stories would you share? Purposefully speak some wisdom into the next generation you encounter over your Christmas holidays.

I left MeShack's savoring the smell and flavor of some delicious BBQ, but I will savor the words of Hugo, a stranger, who inspired my son by sharing personal stories and wisdom. His words will long outlive the taste of the BBQ. May your words of wisdom and stories to the next generation be savored beyond the holiday season long after the food has been consumed.

Ben Phillips serves on the ABSC evangelism and church health team.

Christmas: The best time for evangelism

Christmas is upon us again. This is my favorite time of year for lots of reasons. Family time is precious, and the joy that just happens throughout the month makes it a wonderful time. As a Christian, it is also one of the best times of the year. The message of the gospel is clear through the message of Jesus coming to fulfill God's promise to send a Redeemer. The music is great; kids' musicals are exciting, and the worship spirit is unique.

Because it is such a great time in the church, that makes it the ideal time to invite someone to attend church. In fact, many folks are even looking for special music and Christmas Eve events. Pastors should seize this month as the best time for evangelism. Be intentional to challenge and equip your congregation to invite someone to church during the month.

Here are some ideas:

- Make Sunday school/small group parties an intentional time to invite friends, folks who have fallen out of

attendance, spouses who do not attend, etc.

- Pick a particular Sunday for a friend emphasis. Plan music and something creative as part of an evangelistic message for that Sunday. Ask the church to pray for specific people to invite that Sunday, and pray as a church toward that day.

- Challenge the church to invite people for your church's Christmas Eve service.

- Preach a message to challenge and teach your people how to invite neighbors to their homes for Christmas desserts and to share their salvation testimonies.

The opportunities to share Jesus are limited only by our imaginations. The ground is more

fertile than any other time of the year. If Jesus is the "reason for the season," then there should be no reason to let your church miss this chance to show people that God so loved the world He sent His only Son.

J.D. "Sonny" Tucker is executive director of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention (ABSC).



Executive Directions

Sonny Tucker

Don't miss Christmas!

The TV drama series "West Wing" ran for seven years and depicted life in the White House. The show centered on fictional U.S. President Jed Bartlett and his top staff members. One of my favorite episodes was set on Dec. 23. Personal and political crises had embroiled the members of the president's staff. Chief of staff Leo McGary was attempting to resolve a crisis in the Middle East where Israelis had occupied the Church of the Nativity and wouldn't let anybody enter. Press secretary Toby Ziegler had returned to his office to find his estranged father waiting for him. They had not spoken in years; now dad wanted to talk. Across the street, a snooping reporter filed a story that could topple President Bartlett and his entire administration.

While crisis upon crisis was happening within the White House, another crisis was brewing outside. A snowstorm had closed the airport just as everybody was planning on getting out of the nation's capital for the holidays. A choral group from Yale University was in the White House that day to perform a Christmas concert. Because the students were unable to leave, the concert continued throughout the day. With the choir in the background the episode unfolded. We know the choir was there, but the dialogue of the characters prevents us from hearing the words they sang. Then, as day gave way to evening, we hear what they were singing.

"Oh, holy night, the stars are brightly shining. It is the night of the dear Savior's birth."

Leo was on the phone with Jerusalem. Would he be able to resolve the crisis peacefully? "A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices ..."

Toby and his father were standing side by side, listening to the choir, "... for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn."

President Bartlett was alone in the Oval Office, staring out the window as the snow fell, wondering if his presiden-

cy would survive the scandal that would soon be headline news. "Fall on your knees, oh hear the angels' voices. Oh night divine, oh night, when Christ was born."

For just a moment everyone was aware that something bigger than a political crisis or international incident or family problem was happening. Christmas was coming to the White House, and nothing could stop it! For those final few moments of the episode, it was indeed a holy night.

Christmas is coming, and many in our communities will miss it. How many people in our neighborhood will put on a Christmas CD but not hear the words of joy and hope? How

many homes will display a manger scene in their living rooms but never welcome Christ's presence? How many people will give and receive gifts but never receive the gift God offers them of abundant and eternal life through Jesus Christ?

Christmas is coming, and if we are not careful, we can miss it, too! We can become so wrapped up in the activities filling our church calendars that we can miss the meaning of Christmas. We can become so preoccupied with all the preparations that we miss the wonder and the joy of Christmas. If Christmas comes and goes without making any real and lasting difference in our lives, if we fail to praise God and spread the good news of the gospel to all people, then we've missed the message of Christmas.

Stop for a moment and listen. Perhaps over the noise of the season we can hear the angel say: "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ... Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased" (Luke 2:10, 14, NIV).

Merry Christmas!

Sam Roberts is senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Stuttgart and president of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention.



President's Perspective

Sam Roberts



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Our mission: To make an eternal, global impact

The mother of a child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) called to tell me that when her camper arrived home all he could talk about was the drama. She explained that her son had ADHD and couldn't concentrate through a 30-minute sermon, but the characters in the story captured his attention. The spiritual truths drawn out of the play spoke to her son.

We are people who connect with stories because our God is the Author of great stories. Joshua 2:10 speaks to the importance of story.

When the spies of Israel went into Jericho, Rahab told them, "We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed" (NIV). Rahab said that the people's hearts melted and there remained no courage in them because of these stories. Story captures our imaginations, and it moves our spirit. It is



Camp Siloam

Jason Wilkie

a powerful tool for helping people understand the character of God. One of the most compelling stories in Scripture is Esther. It is a story filled with all the elements of a great story: suspense, conflict, an evil villain and innocent hero, twists of fate and reversal of fortune. That is why for summer 2017 we have written a fun, wacky drama called "Cave Match" that parallels the story of Esther. Our drama draws campers in with a light-

hearted theme for our camp pastors to bring heavy truths of Scripture that we feel are important for young people to understand.

It is our hope that, in the character of Esther, campers will see a person who is like many of them. Esther was a young person who came from a broken family and was placed into a difficult situation. We hope campers see a woman who remained strong and courageous when her faith was tested and in a moment was used by God to save her people.

Esther's story teaches that God has given each of our lives purpose, that He has gifted us to serve His kingdom and that there will be points in our lives when we need to stand, be strong and courageous.

Our mission is that campers understand their identity in Jesus Christ, their purpose in God's kingdom and God's mission for the world. If campers understand these things, then they can make an eternal, global impact.

Jason Wilkie is executive director of Camp Siloam. For more information about Camp Siloam visit campsiloam.com.

ABCHomes: Christmas gifts

Arkansas Baptists provide many wonderful gifts for our children at Christmas. There will be new bikes, cameras, games, clothes, toys and other special gifts. As great as those gifts are, my thoughts turn to other gifts children receive throughout the year because of your support.

The gift of comfort. I remember two brothers who arrived at one of our emergency shelters. Their clothes were soiled, and their feet were black with grime. We provided them with clothes, and we filled their bathroom caddy with soap, toothbrush, tooth-

paste, shampoo and a comb. They asked, "Is all this stuff mine?" The younger brother said, "Look, we have our own bed." These are such simple things to us - but things that meant a new beginning for these boys.

The gift of order. I remember sitting with a dear friend as she said, "The children's home gave me the gift of order." My friend came into care after her mother had left the family. She skipped school to take care of her



ABCHomes

David Perry

youngest siblings. Her daddy often sat in the corner with a bottle. In the night, there were strange and horrible sounds. Her little brother would hide under the bed. At the children's home she found order: bookshelves with books in them, daily chores

that everybody participated in, and regular school attendance.

The gift of safety. Stormi's daddy drove a truck and didn't put much thought

into the care of the family. Stormi's home was not a safe one. She wrote, "My first Christmas in your care I received a pillow from a church group that made sure all the kids got a new pillow. I still have that pillow."

At the children's home on the night the children open their Christmas gifts, it is a tradition for all the children and staff to gather for the reading of the Christmas story. I'll never forget that night years ago when Royce Aston, former children's home director, read the Christmas story from the

book of Luke. As he finished reading the story, a tiny boy with a loud voice yelled, "That's an awesome story!"

There is one gift you help us share with our children that is above all gifts. You help us present God's greatest gift - not just at Christmas, but throughout the year. This gift doesn't sit under a Christmas tree but is a gift that was given upon Calvary's tree. Indeed, "That's an awesome story!"

David Perry is executive director of ABCHomes. For more information on ABCHomes visit abchomes.org.

Williams Baptist: A special appointment

This past summer, Williams Baptist College provided a bus in support of an Arkansas Baptist State Convention-sponsored mission trip to Indonesia. I was assigned to drive two different groups of Arkansas Baptists from Little Rock to their departure flight from the airport in Dallas.

After dropping off the first group of missionaries, I hit the road back home to Arkansas; within a few hours a blow-out caused me to pull over. Fortunately, I was only a few yards from a trucking service,

and a young man walked over to me and asked if he could help. After looking at the damage, he said he thought he could have me back on the road in a few minutes.

After the tires were fixed and I was getting ready to leave, I thanked the young man for helping me so quickly. Having noticed the Williams Baptist College signage on the bus, he asked, "Are you a preacher?" I said "No, but I am a bus



Williams Baptist

Jimmy Ward

driver who loves the Lord!" He then asked, "Will you pray for me?"

We held arms and I started praying right where we were standing. I had no idea what to pray for, but as I prayed, I asked God to give me the words needed to encourage this young

man. When I stopped praying, we both had tears in our eyes, and he gave me a big hug. The people driving down the highway who saw us

crying and praying probably thought that there must have been a really bad accident! It was no accident, just a special appointment planned by God.

The next day I was up early with this divine encounter still on my mind. After boarding the next group of missionaries, we started to make our way out of the Little Rock traffic. I had to tell someone what had happened the day before, so I told the guys in the seat behind me. If you try and hold these kinds of blessing in, you will explode!

I am thankful for the opportunity to serve Williams Baptist College, Arkansas Baptists and those whom God puts in my path. That experience taught me the importance of my daily quiet time in helping me to be ready to serve. If we are willing, He will use us!

Jimmy Ward is retired from both the United States Air Force and public school service as a teacher/coach. He is one member of a team of faithful men who provide transportation services to the students at Williams Baptist College.

Find your next pastor or staff member through an Arkansas Baptist News classified ad!

You can now submit a classified ad via the ABN website at arkansasbaptist.org/classified-ads

Classifieds

PASTOR - We are seeking a pastor for a church in the Little Rock area. The pastor will be responsible for the spiritual care of the congregation and will also be involved in the church's outreach programs. If you are interested, please contact the church office at (501) 763-1234.

OTHER STAFF POSITIONS - We are seeking several staff members for our church. Positions include: church secretary, children's ministry leader, and youth pastor. If you are interested, please contact the church office at (501) 763-1234.

CHURCH OFFICERS - We are seeking church officers for our church. Positions include: church treasurer, church member care coordinator, and church member care counselor. If you are interested, please contact the church office at (501) 763-1234.

Groundbreaking for ABC Homes NWA facility Dec. 19

SPRINGDALE - Arkansas Baptist Children's Homes and Family Ministries (ABC Homes) is expanding to meet the needs of single mothers and their children in the Springdale area.

A groundbreaking ceremony will be held at 11 a.m., Dec. 19, for the Northwest Arkansas Family Care Home on the grounds of Cross Church of Springdale, 1709 Johnson Road. The Family Care Home will assist single-parent mothers and their children through residential care, mentoring, financial planning, teaching, counseling and referral to valuable community resources.

An anonymous family in Northwest Arkansas donated funding for the construction of the home. Cross Church

donated the land to ABC Homes for the ministry to single mothers.

The 7,000-square-foot facility will house up to seven moth-

homemaking, spiritual growth and relationship building.

"The new home will be a place of refuge and hope for mothers and their children.

The mothers and children will find refuge in the caring staff and community volunteers who will mentor them as they work toward goals," said James Hawkins, Fayetteville area director.

"They will have hope as they begin to achieve their goals and realize this opportunity could change the trajectory of

their family for generations to come."

The groundbreaking ceremony will include comments from Springdale Mayor Doug Sprouse and Arkansas Rep. Robin Lundstrum, in addition

to ABC Homes leadership and friends.

In addition to the future Springdale home, the ABC Homes operates two family care homes in Little Rock and Jonesboro; two long-term residential care homes for

children; three emergency receiving homes; and foster care training and placement. Counseling services are provided in seven locations around the state.

For more information visit abchomes.org.



NATIVITY

continued from page one

and call them," said the octogenarian.

To help Chrisco in her campaign, Hacker has offered to provide the names and phone numbers of all churches in Rocky Bayou Association, which includes Izard, Sharp and Fulton counties. He believes that because the idea is coming from a layperson, it will have a "stronger impact" than if it were coming from a minister, who is often expected to "take a stand" on religious matters.

"But if she (Chrisco) took a stand, it would have an impact, and sure enough, it has. She has had a great impact not only within our association

but also with many other denominations in our area," he said.

So far, 61 churches have committed to set up Nativity scenes on their lawns.

"It's wonderful to have a relationship with other churches of different denominations," she said. "We are all Christians, and I love the relationship we can have with others in this endeavor to remember the birth of our Savior.

"I would like to challenge the other 74 counties in Arkansas to join us in this endeavor to put a Nativity scene in the church yard of all churches across Arkansas. Maybe someday it will catch on in other states as well," she said.

To listen to the podcast visit arkansasbaptist.org/abn-podcast or subscribe via iTunes.

FUNERAL

continued from page 4

scoffing at some of my elderly family members when I was younger for immediately turning to the obits when they opened a newspaper. No more!

Around the time of Newsom's funeral, I read a verse from James 4 during my devotion time, which was a good reminder and helped me to put things in perspective:

"You don't even know what tomorrow will bring - what your life will be! For you are like smoke that appears for a little while, then vanishes" (James 4:14, HCSB).

Amid the celebration of

Christ's birth, Christmastime offers believers tremendous opportunities to be a significant witness for Jesus Christ.

My prayer is that during the hustle and bustle of the season that we'll all pause - perhaps recalling the last funeral we attended - and apply the reality of the brevity of our lives to telling someone about Jesus.

In spite of what we think is a culture overwhelmed with opportunities to know Christ, it may be our personal witness to someone we know that makes the difference in them making a decision to follow and surrender their life to Christ.

Tim Yarbrough is editor/executive director of the Arkansas Baptist News.

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CHRISTMAS

continued from page one

a Christmas dinner at Whistle Stop Barbecue restaurant without any contributions from the church.

Each year around 30 people attend the dinner. Evening festivities also include door prizes. One year the two couples used the church van to take attendees on a tour of local Christmas lights. This year's dinner was held Dec. 13.

"Our ladies and gentlemen really look forward to this event each year. Whistle Stop's nostalgic décor adds to the conversation," said Linda Stake, pastor's ministry assistant at First Baptist.

Christmas Child

Beverly Starr, a member of First Baptist Church, Nashville, is the church and area coordinator for Operation Christmas Child, a ministry of Samaritan's Purse.

This year First Baptist set a goal to send 9,000 shoebox gift boxes to children across the world through the organization. In the area that Starr coordinates, 16,000 boxes are expected to be packed and sent.

Starr and her team pack as many as 400 shoeboxes a week, said Ruth Ann Sherraden Jacobs, a member of First Baptist. "She (Starr) is very dedicated."

Living Christmas tree

First Baptist Church, Little Rock, is using a living Christmas tree production to raise money for missions.

One hundred percent of proceeds from ticket sales for the production titled The Tree goes toward the church's missions budget. The church expects \$40,000 to be raised dur-

ing the The Tree's run.

"These funds are used for Lottie Moon, Dixie Jackson, Annie Armstrong, Pulaski Baptist Association and a host of church planting endeavors in our city and around the world," said Jonathan Curtis, lead pastor at First Baptist.

"Our prayer for this production is that people would come in loving Christmas but leave loving Christ. We use this program to share the gospel twice - once while they are here for the program and then again through the funding of our mission budget," he said.

Christmas giving

First Baptist Church, Rison, hosted Barbara and David Vick, former International Mission Board missionaries to Argentina, Dec. 4, during a fellowship dinner.

Church members researched missionaries and people groups and then prepared and served foods from each of the countries during the dinner.

"The focus of the evening was to learn more about what God is doing throughout the world, as well as to encourage support of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions," said Barbara Vick, circulation coordinator at the *Arkansas Baptist News* (ABN).

"Thank you, Vicks, for your 29 years of mission service in Argentina and for sharing some of the great God stories with us," said Paige Morrison, a First Baptist member who attended the event.

According to Morrison, the church raised \$1,350 for missions as a result of the dinner. Danny Allen, pastor at First Baptist Church, said 70 church members were on hand. Allen is a member of the ABN board of directors.



First Baptist Church, Little Rock, expects to raise \$40,000 through its living Christmas tree production. "These funds are used for Lottie Moon, Dixie Jackson, Annie Armstrong, Pulaski Baptist Association and a host of church planting endeavors in our city and around the world," said Jonathan Curtis, lead pastor at First Baptist, in written comments.

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Members of the Immanuel Baptist Church, Little Rock, building committee and others celebrate noteburning Dec. 4.

Immanuel celebrates \$40 million debt payoff

LITTLE ROCK - Through faithful, generous and sacrificial giving of its members, Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock celebrated the payoff of more than \$40 million loan debt during services Dec. 4.

Payment of the loan took about 13 years, according to Sharon Hallmark, a staff member at Immanuel Baptist.

"This (payment) included initial pledges of \$15 million, the sale of the former property and a significant loan from Simmons Bank," she said.

The final installment on the loan was made in October

2016, she said.

"Immanuel is very grateful to the Lord and the generosity of His people to have met this obligation in such a short time frame," Hallmark said, adding, "Immanuel is also very grateful for the leadership of Dr. Rex M. Horne, Jr. to boldly follow God's direction in spite of the fact that many consultants said it could not be done."

"Most importantly, we give the Lord the glory for his faithfulness to and through this congregation."

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Go to myfaithbaptist.org to register online.

First Baptist Piggott builds to reach community

Caleb Yarbrough
Arkansas Baptist News

PIGGOTT - With a church facility that worked well in the 1960s but isn't quite helping First Baptist Church, Piggott, reach its community today, it was time for a decision.

Like many Arkansas Baptist churches, the facility of First Baptist Church, Piggott, was built in the 1960s and had long lacked functional space. Recently the church made a decision that it hopes will serve it well into the future.

In July 2016, First Baptist, Piggott, closing in on its 60th anniversary, broke ground on a new family life center so that it can better minister to the community and - God-willing - grow the congregation.

Rondal Richardson, pastor of First Baptist, came to the church about two years ago. Upon arrival, Richardson found out that the church had designated money for a new facility but had never begun construction.

"This facility was built in 1962, and they had just put it

off and put it off in regards to building something like a family life center," said Richardson. "We decided as a church to go ahead and do it."

One major consideration that led to First Baptist's decision to construct a new facility was the necessity of reaching younger people, said Richardson.

"We are just trying to look at the future. We have to get young people and young couples in this church in order to survive," said Richardson. "This (the new facility) is a tool. We can use it to reach children and youth, and hopefully we will be able to use

it for every kind of event we can imagine - vacation Bible school or anything that we can do to be involved in the community."

While First Baptist currently only holds a traditional service, the church is considering starting a contemporary service that would meet in the new facility, he said.

"I really like multi-generational-type congregations," said Richardson. "That may be something we can look at in



First Baptist Church, Piggott's new family life center is currently under construction. Photo by Tim Yarbrough



Richardson

the future. ... We have a lot of young couples who go to other churches, but we have a lot of young couples out here who go nowhere. So we have got to work on that."

"We are pretty well paying for it as we go so that it is not a debt for us," said Richardson, who said he is thankful for the fact that First Baptist chose to build the new facility without taking out large loans.

Former church members,

See PIGGOTT page 11

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Student Pastors' Lunch & Workshop
Jeff Aarssen, New Apostles, Pastor, Corner Church - Jacksonville

Preschool and Children's Ministers' Lunch & Workshop
Bill Frazier, Corner Church - Jacksonville

Ministers' Wives Lunch & Workshop from 11:00am-1:00pm
Diana Ake, Corner Church - Jacksonville



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'Pray!' theme of 2017 SBC meeting in Phoenix

PHOENIX (BP) - "Pray! For such a time as this" is the theme for the 2017 Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Annual Meeting June 13-14 in Phoenix, anchored by Esther 4:14 and Luke 11:1, SBC President Steve Gaines has announced.

Prayer should be the top priority of every Christian, Gaines said.

"The Southern Baptist Convention needs to be a people of prayer," Gaines said. "Only then will God send the power we need to fulfill the Great Commission."

Local television personality and Arkansas Baptist dies

LITTLE ROCK - Beth Ward Haynie, local TV personality and member of Immanuel Baptist Church, Little Rock, died Dec. 8, following complications from heart surgery.

Haynie, better known by viewers as simply, Beth Ward, was in the Arkansas broadcast business for 37 years before retiring in 2006. She joined KARK in 1968 after moving to Arkansas from her native Virginia and remained with the station until 1986.

Best known as the co-host of the long-running noontime program "Dialing for Dollars," Haynie also did the weather forecast, previously called "Arkan-

sas Today," at the THV11 in Little Rock.

Haynie authored her own obituary prior to her death. It reads in part:

"At this time I want to thank God for the many years He gave me living in the beautiful world He created, for wonderful parents who gently but steadfastly instilled the character and moral molding of my life for which I'm grateful. Charlie Haynie, my husband for forty-three years, gave me many years of happiness, love, protection and wisdom. From my marriage to Charlie, we had two children I deeply treasure, Bracy

Haynie (Lauran) of Nashville, TN and Sarah Haynie Clark (Andy) of Novato, CA. To my two oldest children, Sherri Lindsey (Kenny) of Van Buren, AR and Andy Ward (Lori) of Ripon, CA, I can only say you are so precious and dear to me.



Haynie

"Having had four children, I was also blessed with many grandchildren. Jenna Nissen (Chris), Abby Lindsey, Olivia Lindsey, all terrific children of my daughter Sherri and husband Kenny Lindsey, two wonderful grandsons, AJ Ward and Tyler Ward, children of Andy and Lori Ward, and Evangeline and Andrew Clark, children of Sarah and Andy Clark.

"My life was full of blessings

too numerous to mention. But I must mention one ... my career in television. It was so enjoyable. Meeting so many wonderful people, being around my friends, gaining knowledge daily and watching that ever changing weather forecast ... it was a terrific thirty-seven years.

"As my life on earth ends and yours continues, I pray you have, or will have today a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, my Lord, the only person who can truly give you life unending, comfort, peace, love and pull you through the difficult times plus send blessings to make you smile all year long. Trust me, you can trust Him to be in control of your life. Jesus Christ is King."

A memorial service was held Dec. 10 at Immanuel Baptist Church.

arkansasbaptist.org

PIGGOTT

continued from page 10

even those who now live in other states, have heard about the building project and are contributing to it, he said.

While construction, which began in July of this year, has been a slow process, Richard-

son said the building's basic structure has been completed, and the bathrooms, heater and air conditioning will soon be installed. Completion is slated for June/July 2017.

Already, however, First Baptist is using the space for ministry, such as using it to work on two floats for an upcoming Christmas parade.

"I look at everything God

gives us as a tool. ... With the current building we have here, we are limited," said Richardson.

"I think it's getting harder and harder to reach these younger kids. But I think a building is a tool that God puts in your hand, so use it," he said.

Contact Caleb Yarbrough at caleb@arkansasbaptist.org.

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BAPTISTS

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Church life

Central Baptist Church, Pine Bluff, choir will present a Christmas musical at 6 p.m., Dec. 18.

Watson Chapel Baptist Church, Pine Bluff, adult choir will present its Christmas program Dec. 18.

Park Hill Baptist Church, North Little Rock, retired nearly \$3 million of a debt Nov. 27 that was taken out in August of 2012. "What a great way to end 2016 and what a great expression of how faithful and generous the members of Park Hill Baptist Church have been throughout the years as they continue to give to and serve God in the North Little Rock area of Central Arkansas," said Ken Shaddox, Park Hill senior pastor.

Baptist life

Seven students with ties to Arkansas graduated Dec. 2 from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) in Louisville, Ky., where 180 master and doctoral degrees were conferred.

Students receiving doctoral degrees from the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Ministry include Daniel Hinton, Little Rock, doctor of philosophy; Toby Havens, Sherwood, doctor of ministry; Anthony Langley, Lepanto, doctor of ministry; and Stuart Allen Bell, Centerton, doctor of ministry.

Those receiving master of divinity degrees from the

School of Theology include Tyler Clark, Fort Smith; Daniel Rakes, Fayetteville; and Taryn Elizabeth Blocker, Hot Springs.

On the move

Bill Emmerling is serving as pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Blytheville.

Kirk Martin is serving as pastor of Barton Chapel Baptist Church in Tyrone.

Guadalajara, Mexico.

Cody Lain is serving as pastor of West Side Baptist Church in El Dorado.

Aaron Lindsey is serving as pastor of First Baptist Church in Flippin.

Julio Arriola is leaving Cross Church in northwest Arkansas after serving as global worship pastor for more than five years to plant a church. with his wife, Carla, in

Guadalajara, Mexico.

Gaines to speak at prayer conference

LITTLE ROCK - Steve Gaines, senior pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Cordova, Tenn., and president of the Southern Baptist Convention, will speak at the annual prayer leaders' workshop being held from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m., Mon-

day, Jan. 30, preceding the state conference on evangelism and church health.

This year's workshop will be held at Geyer Springs First Baptist Church, Little Rock.

Gaines has a Ph.D. in preaching from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, and is married to author and speaker Donna Gaines.

Steve Gaines is the author of numerous books, including "Share Jesus Like It Matters."

STEWARDSHIP TIP

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life insurance and paid leave. Contact: Bill Vondermehden at 870.741.5784 or bvondermehden@abchomes.org.

Baptist Home, Monticello

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■ Houseparents:

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Emergency Home, Judsonia

■ Relief houseparent:

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Remember that all charitable contributions must be received or postmarked by Dec. 31, 2016 for them to be tax deductible on your 2016 tax return. Donate online at abchomes.org



Classifieds

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Runyan First Baptist Church, Sherwood, AR, is seeking a **bi-vocational pastor**. Send resume to 10611 Jacksonville-Cato Road, Sherwood, AR 72120 or email byebot@gmail.com or call 501-831-5125. Attention Bob Tobey, pastor search committee.

FBC Clarendon, AR, is seeking a **full-time pastor**. Send resumes to FBC Search Committee, PO Box 324, Clarendon, AR 72029, or email resumes to jrbreynolds@gmail.com.

Smithville Baptist Church seeking either **bi-vocational or full-time pastor**. Please send resume to P.O. Box 37, Smithville, AR 72466.

First Baptist Church, Gillham, is seeking a **full-time pastor**. Please send resumes to Pastor Search Committee, c/o

Vona McKinley, 332 Pendergrass Road, Horatio, AR 71842.

OTHER STAFF POSITIONS

First Baptist, Mansfield, MO, is seeking **bi-vocational youth pastor** for growing youth group. Contact us at firstbaptist618@centurytel.net or 417-924-3306.

East End Baptist Church is seeking a **bi-vocational worship leader**. Responsibilities will include Sunday morning and evening services and leading the choir. Contact the church at 4701 East End Road, Hensley, AR 72065 or by emailing pastor@eebcar.com.

FBC Pea Ridge seeking **full-time youth pastor**. Responsible for planning, implementing, promoting and overseeing all ministries related to 6th - 12th grade students. Also, pro-

vides support to discipleship ministries for all age groups in coordination with the Sr. Pastor. Contact: al@prfbc.org.

Small church in southeast Arkansas is seeking a **music leader** for Sunday morning worship. Contact Larry Toller, pastor, at 870-413-1938.

Full-time positions available, Louisiana Baptist Children's Home, Monroe, LA. Salary, housing, life/medical insurance, annuity, paid vacation, and training. • Husband/wife teams needed as **campus foster parents**. Contact Susan Nolan at 318.343.2244 or snolan@lbch.org. • Ladies needed as **cottage managers** serving homeless children and mothers. Contact Susan Clark at 318.343.2244 or sclark@lbch.org.

First Baptist Church in Nevada, MO is in search of a **full-time worship pastor**. We

are seeking a great worshiper of our Lord Jesus Christ who has the skill set to invite others into that journey. Please send resume to worship.pastor@fbcnevada.org.

Sheridan First Baptist Church is seeking a **part-time interim worship/choir leader** (Sunday morning service & Wednesday pm practice). Please send resume: 1201 South Rock Street, Sheridan, AR 72150 or email fbc-sheridan@windstream.net.

Union Baptist Church, El Dorado, is prayerfully seeking a **bi-vocational music minister**. Please send resume and DVD/link to Jonathan Morris, 144 Crain City Rd, El Dorado, AR 71730, or email jmorris.ubc@gmail.com.

Beebe First Baptist Church is accepting resumes for a **full-time minister of music and education**. Please send re-

sume to PO Box 67, Beebe, AR 72012 or email bhall@fbcbeebe.com.

Small church needs **music director**. Sundays only. Contact sulliglenda@yahoo.com if interested.

Bear Creek Springs Baptist Church is seeking a **full-time student pastor**. Those interested should send a resume to Bear Creek Springs Baptist Church, Attn: Senior Pastor, 179 Devito Loop, Harrison, AR 72601.

MISCELLANEOUS

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Immanuel Baptist, LR, hosts 650 at annual football banquet

LITTLE ROCK – Immanuel Baptist Church, Little Rock, hosted the 23rd annual Champions Award Football Banquet Dec. 5 honoring high school coaches and players from high schools in Pulaski County.

A steak dinner was served to 650 coaches and players representing 15 of the 17 high schools in the county.

Keith Jackson, former NFL player and Little Rock native, was the keynote speaker who shared an inspirational message, challenging the players to make the best of opportuni-

ties they are given and to think before acting in order to minimize the number of mistakes they will make in life.

Jackson encouraged players to use their God-given talents to the best of their ability.

Others included on the program were Richard Smith, banquet chairman; Matt Hubbard, associate pastor for student ministries at Immanuel Baptist; Chuck Beale, Central Arkansas Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) director, and Terry Carter, interim pastor of Immanuel Baptist.

Jackson played football at

Parkview High School in Little Rock and at the University of Oklahoma. He was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 2001. The 2016 football season was Jackson's last as the color commentator on radio broadcasts for the University of Arkansas Razorbacks, which he had done for 16 years.

After playing football Jackson returned to Little Rock and started PARK, (Positive Atmosphere Reaches Kids), a non-profit organization in its 23rd year as an outreach program for inner-city youth.



Student athletes and coaches gather for the 23rd annual Champions Award Football Banquet Dec. 5 at Immanuel Baptist Church, Little Rock. Photo by Jeanie Weber

ABN to host SBC media specialists

LITTLE ROCK – The Arkansas Baptist News (ABN) is set to host the Southern Baptist media specialist meeting Jan.

25-27 at the Arkansas Baptist State Convention building in Little Rock.

The media specialist meeting is an annual event, traditionally held in January, that brings together Southern Baptist communications professionals who work in audio and video production, social media, photography, Web design and other creative positions across the country.

Full-time creative professionals involved in Southern Baptist communications may be eligible to participate. For more information email Caleb Yarbrough at caleb@arkansasbaptist.org.

Sam Moore Evangelistic Ministries



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- 800-838-2272, ext. 5103
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DECEMBER 25, 2016

The Christmas story is so incredibly familiar. We read it every year. Many of us are like Linus, able to quote a composite version of the story pulled from Matthew and Luke. Even those of us who cannot recall it word for word are familiar enough with the story to tell it well in our own words. Yet, even this well-known story holds nuggets that jump out and grab us. Verses and phrases we brush over in one reading seem to jump off the page in another.

Consider the treasure of Mary's words in Luke 1:38 (NASB): "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word."

An angel had just appeared to this young woman. She was going about normal life, anticipating the normal progression of life from a daughter dwelling under her father's protection to a wife entering her new husband's home. In a brief moment, the angel interrupted all of that, turning her life upside down. Despite the thrill, practical thoughts were already running through her mind. Just

slip back to Luke 1:34 for proof of that. That practical side had to know that this was going to drastically change her normal little world.

Yet, she immediately and fully surrendered to the announcement of the angel and the will of the Lord.

Countless followers of Christ have since echoed her words. Numerous epistles begin with the author identifying himself as a bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Generations of believers have submitted to the will and word of the Lord, despite all disruption to their tidy way of life.

But it all starts here with a powerful statement of surrender from a simple young woman.

As we read and reread the incredibly familiar story of Jesus' birth, does the announcement of the Savior stir anything in us? Are we driven to follow Mary's example and surrender ourselves as bondslaves to the Lord, willing to do His will? May it be so, because I cannot imagine a better way to celebrate!

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Savior announced

LUKE 1:26-38 (NASB)

Ann Hibbard
East EndBIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE
God's living Word saves

PSALM 119:41; LUKE 1:30-35

Doug Hibbard
East End

The psalmist continued his praise of the Word of God in the "vav" section, which runs from Psalm 119:41 to 48. This section sees the variety of Hebrew words for the aspects of God's Word. These come into English as: word, statute, ordinance, promise, precept, testimony and commandments in the New American Standard version of the Bible. The picture the psalmist painted is one of the robust Word of God affecting all aspects of life and worthy of all praise.

And yet we can see that the psalmist spoke better than he knew. Looking back through the New Covenant, we know that the Word of God is another title for Jesus, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). This takes us to the other passage for today as we celebrate, not only the written Word of God, but also the incarnate Word of God, Jesus our Savior.

In Jesus, we see how the loving-kindness of God comes to us, as the psalmist spoke of in Psalm 119:41. We

see that salvation comes from God to mankind, as God promised. And this promise goes all the way back to Genesis 3:15, where God promised that the seed of the woman would destroy the serpent! In Jesus, we see the One who always speaks the truth and fulfills God's ordinances (Gen. 5:43).

And what should be our response? The psalmist again provides our answer.

First, we should walk in liberty (Ps. 119:45). Liberty from what? Liberty from sin by the blood of Christ! Liberty from the fear of death through the resurrection of Jesus! Then, let us take that liberty and, as the psalmist said, speak the testimony of what God has done before kings. Let us not be ashamed to proclaim

Jesus to the world around us.

As we celebrate Christmas this year, let the words of the psalmist remind us what we celebrate – not just a baby Jesus, but Jesus who has come as the fulfillment of all of God's Words. And let us lift up our hands and lives in worship.

JANUARY 1, 2016

Happy New Year! The greeting rings all around us as we end an extended stretch of holiday thrill, reminding us that it is time to get back to normal. As the Christmas decorations come down and the excitement dies down, normalcy feels like a welcomed treasure. But that does not mean it is automatically an easy transition. After any stretch of excitement and challenge, normalcy quickly begins to look a little bland. Being diligent in the restored normalcy takes intentionality and determined choice.

This is where the Reubenites, the Gadites and half of the tribe of Manasseh found themselves. Before being allowed to settle in their new homes, they had to cross the Jordan and fight with the rest of Israel. They had to push through in obedience, fight off the enemy, and help their brothers gain victory. Once it was all over, a brand new normal awaited them in their brand new home. As excited as they must have been to get settled, it would not be easy

to transition from constant motion and challenge to settled normalcy.

Normalcy is where a new temptation arises – a temptation to become settled and lazy, forgetting all that we have fought through. It is a place where we can forget the ground we fought so hard to gain and neglect the continued growth that must follow.

Joshua saw this possibility, especially for tribes that would be separated from their brothers and the tabernacle of God by a river. So, he challenged his fellow Israelites to be very careful. They'd been faithful. They'd been obedient. Now, they were ready to be settled. But, that would not stop the need to continue in obedience, no matter how different that obedience looked.

It is a new year for us. We have a new chance to settle after the victories of 2016. As we do so, may we never forget that our reward for last year's faithfulness is the freedom to continue to be obedient in the new year.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Settled

JOSHUA 22:1-8 (NASB)

Ann Hibbard
East EndBIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE
God's Word is always relevant

PSALM 119:89-96

Doug Hibbard
East End

It's the beginning of a year. Never let that stand in the way, though, of a Sunday school lesson series. That's not meant nearly as sarcastically as it sounds. It's actually an illustration of the opening verse of the "Lamedh" section of Psalm 119.

Psalm 119:81 reminds us that the Word of God is settled in heaven forever. His Word has no need of getting back on track for a new year. The Word of God neither wrapped up yesterday like your "read-through-the-Bible" plan did, nor does it restart today. Instead, the Word of God is the most stable thing that you know of.

The Word of God is more stable than the turning of a calendar page. After all, Jan. 1 is the date the calendar changes, but it does not reflect anything else. There are no astronomical moments for this date. None of the world's religions tie anything to this date, with the possible exception of college football and bowl games. The Jewish new year occurs at another point on

our calendar, as does the Chinese new year. At times, a new lunar month will start this day, but often it will not.

So, we should begin our new year continuing what we have done in the past. We should start by celebrating the faithfulness of God (Ps. 119:90), rather than worrying over resolutions past. Let us remember that even the earth we stand on was established by God, and through Him all things are held together (John 1:3). This is better, by far, than serving the calendar that wipes out both the good and the bad, and forces us to a clean slate every year.

Instead, we have the privilege of beginning every year with 365, and this year 366, more days of knowing that God rules over all things. We know that He is still in the business of saving even sinners like me (Ps. 119:94) and will continue to do so, for His commands are without limits. Let this year, then, build on His faithfulness as we go into all the world and share the love and truth of Jesus.

JANUARY 8, 2016

As I sit down to write this afternoon, my son is singing loudly, making up new words to familiar tunes as he plays a game with his older sister. I couldn't help but laugh as he closed out one verse with, "...because I like to make noise!" Because of my son's love for noise-making and for recreating familiar songs, I'm constantly reminded of his pleasant singing voice, his energy and his quick-thinking creativity.

If I'm honest, though, as much as I love being reminded of just how creative and energetic my sweet boy is and as much as I love to hear him sing, there are days when I wish his reminders were not quite so loud!

Reminders are a prominent feature of Scripture. They might not be as loud as the songs of a 10-year-old boy, but they are still powerful and ever-present. Even the most cursory reading of the Bible places those reminders front and center, and each one boldly declares the importance of walking before God in obedience.

Reminders are intended to induce

action. Joshua's final address to the Israelites in Joshua 24 is a perfect example. In addition to speaking to the people, he set up a large stone by the tabernacle and added the words of the people's commitment to the book of

God's law. With each action, he called the people to obedience, setting up tangible aids to remind them of the need for intentional and active obedience throughout the years to come.

Sadly, the Israelites ignored the challenging reminders, and we all too often follow their example. Knowing that the reminders will require action, we prefer to shelve God's Word, keeping the reminders quiet and calm.

Fortunately, just like I cannot ignore my son's precious singing, so God does not allow us to ignore His reminders. He keeps them before us one way or the other, challenging us toward obedience and continual renewal. May we be faithful to reflect continually on those reminders!

action. Joshua's final address to the Israelites in Joshua 24 is a perfect example. In addition to speaking to the people, he set up a large stone by the tabernacle and added the words of the people's commitment to the book of

EXPLORE THE BIBLE Challenged

JOSHUA 24:14-28 (NASB)



Ann Hibbard
East End

Many people approach the Word of God today with suspicious minds. That is an unfortunate reality in our world where anything that didn't happen yesterday is treated as if it were born 10,000 years ago and so isn't worth bothering with. The psalmist corrected that error.

While this lesson does not deal with the final strophe of Psalm 119, it is our last look at it for now. Let us work our way from Psalm 119:160 back to the top. Psalm 119:160 reminds us that the Word of God is not almost always true, but instead it is constant. As we see in Isaiah 40:8, the Word of the Lord endures while grasses and flowers fade and wither.

What brought the psalmist to this conclusion? As we read the rest of this section, we see that his life had taken a turn for the worse. Then, as now, many times it seemed that only the strong survive, even there in the Promised Land. He cried

out for God, exclaiming that he had been steadfast, loyal, true to the ways of God. He was persecuted, having to walk that lonesome road through adversaries who did not know God's ways (Ps. 119:157-158). He pointed out that he and the wicked have taken separate ways, and so he called upon God to revive and strengthen him.

As with the psalmist, for each of you, the One who can hear the sound of your cry and actually rescue you is the same King of the entire world as always. He is Jesus, our Savior, who has given us His Word, which is always reliable.

It is no secret, as the psalmist said, what the Lord can do. If the Lord can raise the dead, He can provide us with an accurate, reliable Word. Let us love the Word and learn it. The more it is always on our mind, the more we will see the wonder of Jesus in every page.

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE God's Word is Truth

PSALM 119:153-160



Doug Hibbard
East End

JANUARY 15, 2016

Many years ago, I knew a girl I'll call Mary. Actually, I did not really know her. We never had a conversation, and I never learned anything about her beyond her name. But, to this day I can picture her face clearly.

Mary was absolutely beautiful. She was tall and held herself perfectly erect. She had a flawless face and gorgeous, long, straight blond hair. The only thing she lacked was a smile.

Every time I saw Mary, she sat stone-faced, silent and alone. She did not interact with anyone, and no one interacted with her. Brokenhearted for her, I tried to talk to her and offer friendship, but Mary never budged. She never responded and hardly even blinked.

I don't know Mary's story. All I know is that somehow, somewhere along the way, her life was devalued. So, she shut down, closing herself off from both those who devalued her and those who would have offered her love. To this day, I ache over her pain. Over the years, I

have often prayed for her, asking the God Who created her to also rescue her from whatever held her captive.

There are people like Mary are all around us. They are souls "being taken away to death," as Proverbs 24:11 describes. We see them as aborted babies, unwanted foster children, neglected adults, abused souls of all ages. They are those who society deems a burden simply because they cannot see or hear or walk or carry on life as we think they should. Yet, every single one is beautifully valuable.

I think God has allowed me to remember Mary so I will continue to have open eyes to those all around me. Jesus does not physically walk the earth, healing with His touch as He healed blind Bartimaeus. But, He does touch others through us, breathing life and love into a world full of men, women and children He values and calls us to value, because we stand as the tangible manifestation of His love.

What Mary can we value today?

What is real joy? Is it the joy of winning a football game or winning an argument? The way we behave in churches and Baptist conventions sometimes leads me to think it's the latter. True joy must be winning an argument, except there is no verse here that suggests that.

Instead, we see Paul express his gratitude for the Philippians, his longing for their presence, and his hope for their future. This is where true joy comes from, so let us consider these things for a few moments.

First, Paul was grateful for the Philippians. His gratitude was aimed in the right direction, as he thanked God for them constantly. Our first step in understanding joy is to remember that God brought the people around us into our lives. Some of them are, like the Philippians, our encouragers and partners in the gospel. Others are there to help us grow in prayer and patience. But finding gratitude that God has brought people into our lives

is the first step toward joy. After all, God loved the world, which is full of people, by sending His Son for people. If He puts people in your life, that's a great gift.

Second, Paul longed for the Philippians. He longed for true fellowship with his fellow believers. We should find joy as we gather with the people of God. Too often, we see fellowship as a burden. Now, a word to the Baptists: there is more to fellowship than food - but food is a good help for fellowship if it doesn't make us dread gathering! True joy grows as we see our fellow Christians develop in their walk with Christ.

Third, Paul had a hope for the future of the Philippians. Do we have hope for the future of the people around us? Not a hope for material wealth or political success, but for their growth in Christ? True joy comes into maturity as we pin it on the faithfulness of our great God instead of on earthly matters.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE Value all

PROV. 24:11-12; MARK 10:46-49 (NASB)



Ann Hibbard
East End

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE Praying with joy

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11



Doug Hibbard
East End

Reformers' disagreement on Christmas yields lessons

NASHVILLE (BP) – When it came to celebrating Christmas, leaders of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation were divided on whether followers of Jesus should say “bah humbug” or “joy to the world.”

While Martin Luther loved to celebrate Christmas with feasting and special church services, the so-called Reformed wing of the Reformation, led by Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin, raised objections to such festivities, arguing believers should worship God only in ways explicitly commanded by Scripture and that a festival in December commemorating Christ's birth was not commanded.

The Reformed wing's Puritan heirs in England and New England were adamant in their rejection of Christmas celebrations. English Puritan William Prynne (1600-1669) argued, for example, that “all pious Christians” should “eternally abominate” Christmas festivities, said Michael Haykin, professor of church history and biblical spirituality at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In New England, celebrating Christmas could result in a fine.

Though few modern Christians share such sentiments against Christmas, a North Carolina pastor who holds a Ph.D. in church history said, believers can draw insights from both sides in the debate.

Andy Davis, pastor of First Baptist Church in Durham, N.C., advocates a “mediating position,” in which believers acknowledge the food and fun of Christmas as good gifts from the Lord but also recog-

nize that secular Christmas festivities can stray far afield from celebrating the incarnation.

“Take the Christmas blessings, and look upward to the giver,” Davis said. “The happiness that we feel when we look at the lights and we enjoy the holiday – all of it comes from God. And ultimately God has so much more to give you than just that. He has His own Son, and the center of everything is the giving of Christ.”

Reformers differ

Among the Reformers, differing views of Christmas stemmed largely from differing views of worship, said Haykin.

Luther held the “normative principle” – the belief Christians may worship God in any way not forbidden by Scripture – while Zwingli and Calvin held the “regulative principle” – the belief Christians may only worship God in ways commanded by Scripture.

Thus, Luther retained the Roman Catholic traditions of Advent and Christmas and may have been among the first people to decorate a Christmas tree with candles, said Haykin. “It was a festival he delighted to celebrate.”

The first seven sermons in “The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther” edited by John Nicholas Lenker are all designated for the Christmas season.

For Zwingli and Calvin, in contrast, “there are questions raised about” Christmas, Haykin said. He noted all Reformers praised God for the incarnation but differed over the appropriateness of an official festival on Dec. 25.



Leaders of the protestant referomation – Martin Luther (left) and John Calvin.

Preaching on Christmas Day 1551, a Tuesday, Calvin noted, “I see here today more people than I am accustomed to having at the sermon,” according to Calvin's “Sermons on the Book of Micah” translated by Benjamin Wirt Farley.

Then Calvin warned, “When you elevate one day alone for the purpose of worshipping God, you have just turned it into an idol. True, you insist that you have done so for the honor of God, but it is more for the honor of the devil.”

Still, Calvin's admonition seemed to be a caution rather than a prohibition of Christmas.

In a 1551 letter quoted by Presbyterian pastor Phil Larson, Calvin said he “pursued the moderate course in keeping Christ's birthday.” Similarly, in a 1555 letter he noted, “A church is not to be despised or condemned because it observes more festival days than the others.”

Nearly a century later, the Puritans, who drew theological inspiration from Calvin

among other sources, took his view a step further, formally outlawing Christmas in England in 1647, said Haykin.

In America, the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony permitted nonbelievers among them to celebrate Christmas in the early 1620s, Davis said. But when some nonbelievers were seen playing a game on Christmas Day, the colony's governor “confiscated their game equipment and said they were free to not work, but they had to stay indoors and would best spend the time by reading the Bible and praying.”

Caution about Christmas in British territories prevailed until the 1800s, Davis said, because of a desire not to return to Roman Catholic practices.

'Scraps' from God's table

The Reformers' and Puritans' reticence about Christmas should not be dismissed altogether in the modern world, Davis said, noting the holiday often is celebrated with “fantastic busyness” and “materialism” but “no real, vibrant piety.”

Even when charity and thankfulness are involved in the celebration, said Davis, meaningful references to Christ can be removed, as in Charles Dickens' famous novella “A Christmas Carol.”

Yet “you can go too far in the opposite direction” by eschewing traditional Christmas celebrations altogether, said Davis.

“The ‘eat, drink and be merry’ thing is like scraps that fall from the table of God. It's common grace blessings that people enjoy,” he said. “... Why wouldn't you want something like that?”

It's understandable that some Christians reject Christmas activities that are merely cultural with no celebration of Christ, said Davis. But the culture “just doesn't get it” when Christians denounce the holiday altogether.

A more productive message in 21st-century America is, he said, “These blessings are gifts from God. But He has so much more to give you than that. He came into the world to save sinners.”

Kasich: Veto of Ohio 'Heartbeat Bill' was strategic

COLUMBUS, Ohio (BP) – In an action that drew divided response from the pro-life community, Ohio Gov. John Kasich signed a bill Dec. 13 banning abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy and vetoed a measure outlawing abortion following detection of a fetal heartbeat.

The 20-week ban includes an exception only for saving the life of the mother, *The Columbus Dispatch* reported. The so-called “Heartbeat Bill”

would have banned most abortions after approximately six weeks of pregnancy.

Kasich, a Republican, said in a statement he strives “to strengthen Ohio's protections for the sanctity of human life” but believes enacting a fetal heartbeat law is not a wise legal strategy at present.

“Certain provisions” of the Heartbeat Bill – Amended Substitute House Bill 493 – “are clearly contrary to the Supreme Court of the United

States' current rulings on abortion,” said Kasich.

“Similar legislation enacted in two other states has twice been declared unconstitutional by federal judges, and the Supreme Court declined to review those decisions. Because the federal courts are bound to follow the Supreme Court's rulings on abortion,” the bill “will be struck down,” said Kasich.

“The State of Ohio will be the losing party in that lawsuit

and, as the losing party, the State of Ohio will be forced to pay hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars to cover the legal fees for the pro-choice activists' lawyers,” said Kasich. “Furthermore, such a defeat invites additional challenges to Ohio's strong legal protections for unborn life. Therefore, this veto is in the public interest.”

The bill Kasich signed – Senate Bill 127 – imposes the 20-week ban based on evidence babies aborted after that

point can feel pain.

“I agree with Ohio Right to Life and other leading, pro-life advocates,” said Kasich, “that S.B. 127 is the best, most legally sound and sustainable approach to protecting the sanctity of human life.”

Ohio Right to Life President Mike Gonidakis thanked Kasich for saving “hundreds of unborn lives each year” and positioning Ohio “to directly challenge” the U.S. Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* ruling.

An illustration depicting the biblical story of the Three Kings. In the foreground, the silhouettes of three kings riding camels are visible against a dark blue night sky filled with stars. A bright, multi-pointed star with a long tail (the Star of Bethlehem) is prominent in the upper right. In the background, a city with white buildings and golden domes is illuminated from within, suggesting a warm, glowing light. A palm tree is visible on the left side of the city. The overall scene is set in a desert landscape.

the wise seek

*And you will seek Me and find Me, when
you search for Me with all your heart.*
—Jeremiah 29:13

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