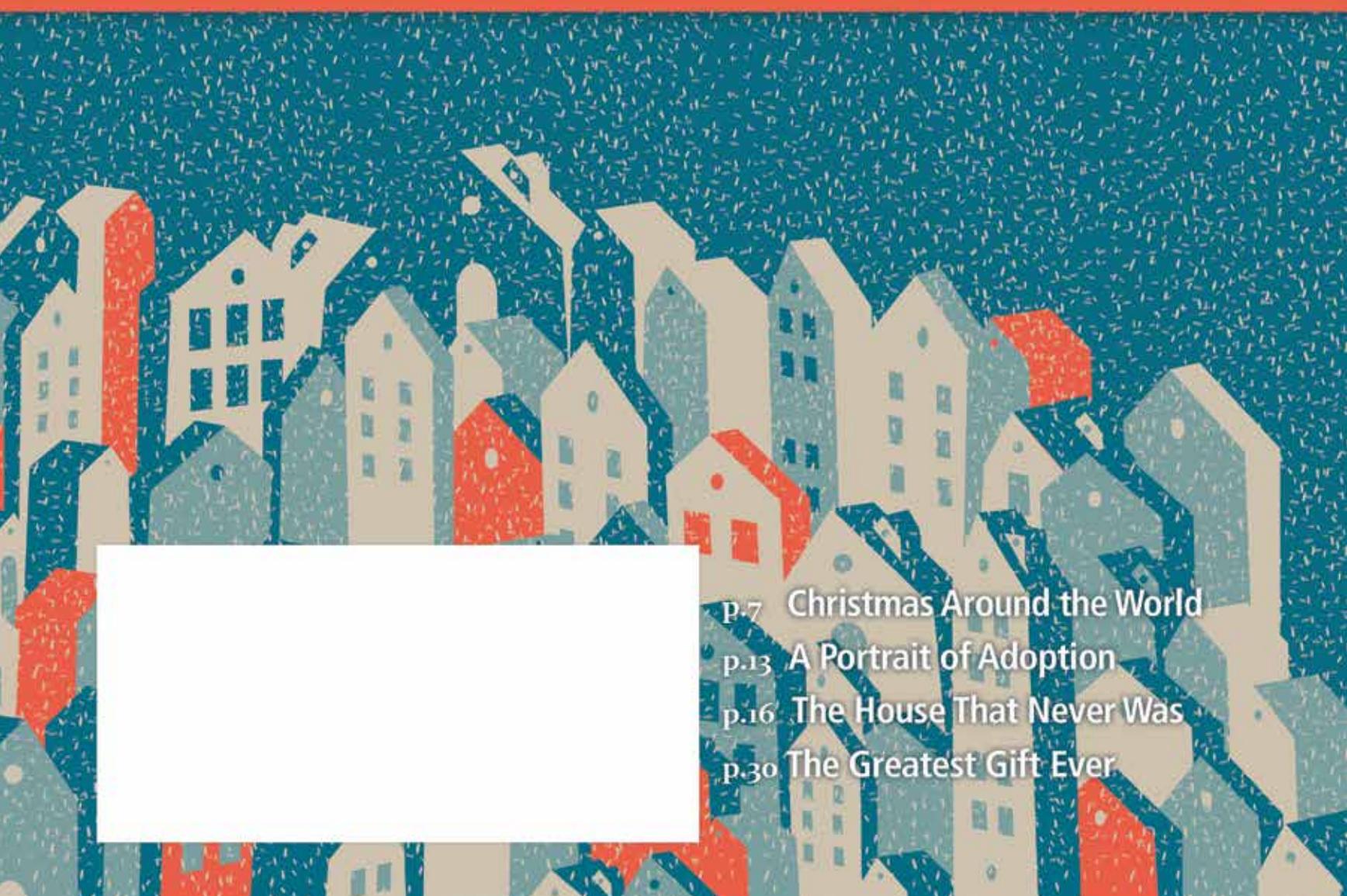


B A P T I S T B I B L E
T R I B U N E

DECEMBER 2016

Christmas 

The gift for the whole world

- 
- p.7 Christmas Around the World
p.13 A Portrait of Adoption
p.16 The House That Never Was
p.30 The Greatest Gift Ever

MERRY CHRISTMAS

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THE MISSION OFFICE

Donations to the Mission Office of any amount are always appreciated. However, as a general guideline, the operational cost incurred by the Mission Office to process support for a donor who supports 20 missionaries is \$4.50 per missionary (20 x \$4.50 = \$90).



VISIT THE
NEW
MISSION OFFICE
WEBSITE
AT BBFIMMISSIONS.COM

  @BBFIMMISSIONS

2017 MISSION OFFICE CALENDAR

- January 1 Missionary Applications Due for May Approvals
- April 11-13 World Mission Forum - BBC
- April 28 5th Annual Missionary Care Golf Tournament - Rivercut Golf Course
- May 1 Missionary Applications Due for September Approvals
- May 8-10 Missionary Candidate Approvals
- Summer 2017 MK Highlight at VBS
- June 19-23 Missionary Family Reunion
- July 10-14 Missionary Candidate School
- July 20-30 Mission Trip to Romania
- August New Mission Conference Theme Packs
- September 19-20 Missionary Candidate Approvals

AND A
HAPPY!
NEW YEAR!



ON THE TABLE
Merry Christmas

by Randy Harp | Editor

Merry Christmas! As the song states, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year.” Yes, there is some stress that goes along with the season, but to many, it is still their favorite time of the year. We have our favorite Christmas traditions: decorating the tree, opening the “surprise” gift of pajamas on Christmas Eve, and driving around town looking at Christmas lights. We have our favorite Christmas movies and cartoons. We can even debate whether the *Grinch* is better as a 30-minute cartoon or a full-feature movie. Some even debate if *Die Hard* should be considered a Christmas movie at all. We have our favorite Christmas food and sweets, possibly my favorite part. And we all have our favorite memories. Most of these memories include time with family.

This year I am blessed to officially start building memories with two new members of my family. No, no one in my family got married and no one delivered any babies. So how did my family grow? My brother and sister-in-law recently, after a year of foster care, adopted the two most precious girls. One of my favorite sounds is hearing my little nieces yell, “Uncle Randy” and come running to me. I can honestly say I love them just as if they were part of my blood family. God has taught me so much about my adopted relationship with Him through this process. BBFI missionaries Patrick and Ann Janel McClure do an outstanding job writing in this issue on the doctrine of adoption and how it relates to the Christmas story.

A second feature article I think you will enjoy is “Christmas Around the World.” We solicited feedback from our missionaries on various aspects of Christmas. I really enjoyed reading through their email responses as they came in and I am sure you will like hearing all the ways people celebrate Christmas. Steve Van Winkle rounds out our feature articles in an illustrative way that only he can.

As I wrap up my first full year as editor of the *Tribune* I am anxious to hear some feedback from you. It was in this same space last December that I encouraged our readers to participate in an online survey to help me understand them a little better. We are doing the same this year. Would you take a few minutes to complete a brief survey about your thoughts on the *Baptist Bible Tribune* and the new BBFI Communication Office? You can access the survey by scanning the QR code to the right or by visiting www.tribune.org/surveys. I look forward to another year at the *Tribune* and introducing you to a few new features as we roll out the new year next month.

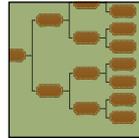
As always, thank you for allowing me to serve Christ as I serve you.



CHRISTMAS



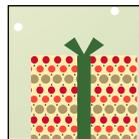
Christmas Around The World _____ **7**
Missionaries report from around the globe on what makes Christmas different on the field.



In The Family: A Portrait Of Adoption _____ **13**
The picture of our adoption “to Himself” in Ephesians 1:5 reveals a loving plan established before the foundation of the world.



The House That Never Was _____ **16**
Pausing to reflect on a lifetime of choices and decisions, Steve Van Winkle came to the realization that everything pointed to Christmas.



The Greatest Gift Ever _____ **30**
Imagine what our world would look like if everyone truly understood the true meaning of Christmas.



Don’t miss any of the *Tribune’s* digital offerings on our website www.tribune.org. You can find old articles, a digital page-turn version of this month’s magazine, and a link to sign up for the *Tribune* Update email.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT CHRISTMAS

My wife's favorite Christmas memory occurred the year our youngest son, James, was born. He was born that summer and we were shocked to hear he had Down syndrome. It had been a tough five months. What would life be like for this little boy of ours? How would people accept him? How do we face the future with so much uncertainty? We entered a dark season of grief, confusion, and pain.

When Christmas rolled around someone from our kids' school asked if we would let James play the role of Jesus in the Christmas program. Just them asking was a thrill. We did not know what our baby would ever be able to do, but this Christmas he could play Jesus. You can't have a more meaningful part than that.

The night of the program Mary and Joseph, while holding baby James, began to sing. We found ourselves in tears as we listened to the lyrics:

*All things work for our good
Though sometimes we don't see how
they could
Struggles that break our hearts in two
Sometimes blind us to the truth
Our Father knows what's best for us
His ways are not our own*

*God is too wise to be mistaken
God is too good to be unkind
So when you don't understand
When you don't see His plan
When you can't trace His hand
Trust His heart*

You know, that is the message of Christmas. God's good intention toward us is clearly demonstrated at Christmas.

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Romans 8:31-32



Eddie Lyons
BBFI PRESIDENT

WORLD MISSIONS CHRISTMAS: A PATTERN FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Jesus says, "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18).

As Jesus Christ came into the world to save the world, so we should go into the world to tell them of salvation through Jesus Christ. He is the supreme example of a cross-cultural missionary. Jesus came to earth from God's throne room in Heaven to be born of a virgin and placed in a manger. We must send missionaries if we are to fulfill the task the Lord gave His church. We are to bring people from every tribe, language, and nation to Jesus. Missionaries must go cross-culturally just as our savior did for us.

Jesus became a man to pay for our sins — the sins of the whole world. He came to show no cultural barrier will keep people from God. He came to seek and save that which was lost. Most of our world is lost and without hope, and we must cross every cultural barrier to reach them before it is too late.

Christmas should be a time to focus on the task of the Great Commission given by Jesus. This task is similar to our Lord's purpose, and is made possible by his incarnation: crossing cultural barriers and going to hard, resistant people — even when it may be uncomfortable and perhaps dangerous.

So, at Christmastime, let's

lift up our eyes and look at the harvest fields of people around us and around the world and see them as God sees them — in need of the savior of the world who came many years ago in Bethlehem.

Missions is a mirror of Christmas. As he was sent, so are we.



Jon Konnerup
BBFI MISSION DIRECTOR

BBFI LEADERSHIP

CHURCH PLANTING HOW IS YOUR FOCUS

Planting a church requires focus. As a church planter you have multiple tasks, but the majority of your focus should revolve around:

- (1) Your personal spiritual development and your relationships with the unchurched.
- (2) Providing, protecting, and nurturing your family — spiritually and financially.
- (3) Planning your daily, weekly, and monthly schedule, and preparing and presenting the Sunday service or Bible study.

Unfortunately, church

planters have so many distractions. They are faced with trying to become all things to all people at all times. I guard you against this approach. Remember, you are planting a church to reach the unchurched and establish a local church.

In the 21st-century, a great distraction is the media temptation. Today we have Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Periscope, Reality TV, video games, text messaging, YouTube, NetFlix, Chill, and many other avenues of distraction that cause us to lose focus. Focus is a matter of self-discipline. If you become too distracted, you will not focus long enough on what it takes to

become a successful planter.

Don't allow yourself to become so busy that you forget the business you are in: reaching out, making disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the son, and the Holy Ghost, and teaching them to go and do likewise. We can become so busy serving the service that we forget our responsibility of serving the savior.

How is your focus today?



John Gross
BBFI CHURCH PLANTING (APEX)

Christmas is coming! BBC students have decorated, worn their ugliest sweaters, eaten every cookie their grandmas have sent, and quoted their favorite Christmas movies — “The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear” (*Elf*).

One of my favorite Christmas movies is *It's a Wonderful Life*. It shows the profound difference one man can make in the world. The angel Clarence sums it up: “Strange, isn't it? Each man's life touches so many other lives. When he isn't around he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?”

I began to think, what would our world be like if there was no Baptist Bible College? The

purpose of BBC is to proclaim the true meaning of Christmas — the baby born in the manger became the savior on the cross. Our students are trained to share the Gospel message with the world.

If BBC weren't around, it would leave an awful hole. There would be fewer churches. There would be no church planters like John Rawlings, Ron Taylor, and Brandt Liech. If not for BBC, would you have a church? A pastor?

There would be no missionaries like Jack Baskin, Chad Braymer, or Ali Alexander.

There would be no Boston Baptist College, Liberty University, BBC Asia, Baptist Bible College Japan, and several

others — all founded by BBC graduates.

There would be no Camp Chautauqua, no MANNA, and no New Hope Initiative.

Every student has touched so many other lives. If there were no BBC, it would leave an awful hole, wouldn't it? As you prepare to celebrate Christmas, let me ask you, what would your life be like without BBC? Only heaven will reveal the profound difference BBC has made in the world.



Mark Milioni
BAPTIST BIBLE COLLEGE PRESIDENT

PERSPECTIVES

CHRISTMAS

We all know that look when someone receives a gift they could never have imagined — the unspeakable, over-the-top joy of receiving.

I saw that look the other day. Esther, a Boston student from Maine, was in a research course I taught this semester. I watched as she was drawn to the first Baptist missionaries much like I was when I was her age. So, just the other day, Esther came into my office with a very old, rare book about the three wives of Adoniram Judson (incidentally, three of the most remarkable women in all of Christian history, in my mind). I oohed and aahed at such a rare find.

Esther then told me she was

giving that book away! I suggested, in such an extravagant case of generosity, Rebekah would be blown away by that book. Rebekah Butler works in our office now, but during her Boston student days I think Rebekah might say the Judson women changed her life. I knew she would treasure that rare little book. What did I want in the deal? To watch Esther give it to her.

So it happened! I watched Rebekah look at the book and digest what it was. Her eyes got bigger as she told Esther how precious that little book was. Then Esther told her, “It's for you. It's yours.” First, confusion. Then, shock. Then ... that look. Now, I would have loved to have that book myself, but I would rather

see that look on somebody's face than have a whole stack of treasured first editions!

This is the very heart of Christmas — a gift so far beyond our wildest hopes. A gift we could never have expected. And a gift — the gift — that shows up with our name on it! I think God the father chuckled at that look when Mary, Joseph, shepherds, and wise men saw the “unspeakable gift.” If we do Christmas right, He still sees that look on our faces today.



David Melton
BOSTON BAPTIST COLLEGE PRESIDENT

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2017

12
MONTHS

12
WAYS

THE *TRIBUNE*
WILL PUT YOUR
MONTHLY
SUPPORT
TO WORK

Will you consider adding the *Tribune* to your monthly budget for 2017?

There are approximately 150 churches that support the *Baptist Bible Tribune* on a monthly basis. For the long-term health and sustainability of our ministry, this number must be increased. **Our goal is for 100 new churches to begin financially supporting the *Tribune* on a monthly basis in the coming year.** Will your church be one of them?

1. ENCOURAGE CO-LABORERS

Every Fellowship pastor and missionary receives the *Tribune* monthly.

2. HONOR THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US

Retired pastors and missionaries and their widows receive the *Tribune* without charge.

3. CONNECT WITH THE NEXT GENERATION

Every BBFI college student has access to the *Tribune* and the magazine is mailed to 46 college and university libraries across the country.

4. EQUIP PASTORS AND STAFF

Content ranges from inspirational features, to doctrinal treatise, to strategies for pastoral leadership, to prayer guides, to mission support ideas.

5. ENGAGE MEMBERS AND LAYPEOPLE

The *Tribune's* content can support and enhance the pastor's message and approach to ministry.

6. OFFER A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE

No other publication provides insight into what God is doing among the churches and missionaries of the BBFI.

7. PROVIDE A CENTRAL DIGITAL CONNECTION

Tribune.org complements the print magazine. *BBFI.org* is a landing page for all BBFI entities, state Fellowships, specialty networks, corporate information, and practical resources.

8. SPEAK INTO THE WORLD OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The Communication Office manages 5 different social media sites. Facebook alone has over 5,000 "likes" and an average weekly reach over 12,000. We are also on Twitter, Instagram, and Vimeo.

9. INSPIRE LEADERS

The BBFI Leadership Podcasts are monthly conversations posted to encourage and inspire today's leaders. Interviews focus on a wide range of leadership topics from dynamic leaders.

10. STAY CONNECTED ON THE GO

Within the BBFI mobile app, you can connect with any BBFI entity or Fellowship leader, you can listen to the BBFI Leadership Podcast or audio from previous National Fellowship Meetings, watch videos of previous Fellowship Meetings, read various BBFI connected blogs, search job openings, see a calendar of all upcoming national and state-level Fellowship meetings, and even read the entire *Tribune*. It literally puts the entire Fellowship in the palm of your hand

11. STRENGTHEN FOR THE MINISTRY

Lord willing, the new BBFI Coaching Network will launch with the National Fellowship Meeting in February 2017. This will be a great tool for pastoral accountability and to help pastors grow in their leadership and pastoral skills.

12. SUPPORT PERSONNEL

Karri Joy Perry, Director of Office Services, has been with the *Tribune* since 2002. Rob Walker, Assistant Editor, has been with the *Tribune* since 2006. Randy Harp is the new guy on the block. He is just finishing up his first year as the new Executive Editor and Communication Director. Monthly support goes much further than just ink on paper. It also supports these families including the combined eight children, all under the age of fourteen.

A
LOOK
AT
SPAIN
TAIWAN
GERMANY
URUGUAY
NEW ZEALAND
PHILIPPINES
CROATIA BRAZIL
CHRISTMAS ISRAEL
CANADA **AROUND THE**
THAILAND **WORLD**
KENYA MEXICO JAPAN
GUATEMALA PORTUGAL
UKRAINE GREECE WALES
ENGLAND COSTA RICA
AUSTRALIA SOUTH AFRICA

We asked BBFI missionaries a few questions about what Christmas is like where they serve. Their responses provide insight not only into what Christmas looks like around the world, but also the opportunities and struggles this season brings for our missionaries. We are thankful for all those who responded and we trust this article serves as a reminder to keep our missionaries in prayer throughout the Christmas season.

[\(continued\)](#)

Kenya: A big family day with a feast of goat, if the family can afford it. *Jerry & Sharon Daniels*

Brazil: When we first went to Brazil in 1973 the people weren't accustomed to giving and exchanging gifts on Christmas. This was done on New Year's Eve, which we have continued through the years in our churches. *Hank & Nancy Mantonya*

Canada: Every Christmas tradition in Canada is celebrated the same as in the States!
Greg & Nina Hunt

Wales: Crackers – round tubes filled with a paper hat (hat has to be worn during Christmas dinner), a joke, and a small novelty gift. *Larry & Dixie Quade*

Ukraine: Children go from house to house singing Christmas carols and sometimes they spread seeds around – wishing for a good harvest next year – and maybe getting candy or money.
Ron & Nancy Minton

England: Christmas lasts two days in England – Christmas and Boxing Day which is the day after Christmas. The story goes that on Christmas day the servants would be working for the family, then, on Boxing Day, the servants would have the day off and receive a gift from their masters. Even today, the milkman, postman, and others who serve you through the year traditionally are given some sort of token of thanks at the Christmas season.
Tom & Gail Gritts

Thailand: Christmas is viewed as an interesting "foreign" holiday. But, because of the potential for increased retail sales, the shopping centers try to promote celebrating Christmas. *David & Joy Speights*

Germany: We celebrate Christmas on Christmas Eve by attending a church service, then go home for a special meal and the opening of presents. The 25th and 26th are holidays and family is usually invited over on those days. The main celebration is on Christmas Eve. *Linda Fitzgerald*

Taiwan: There are absolutely no Christmas traditions in Taiwan or in the Chinese culture. The current culture is picking up on the consumer side of Christmas. Many department stores decorate in some sort of a Christmas theme. A few stores even sell trees! *David & Cherie Green*

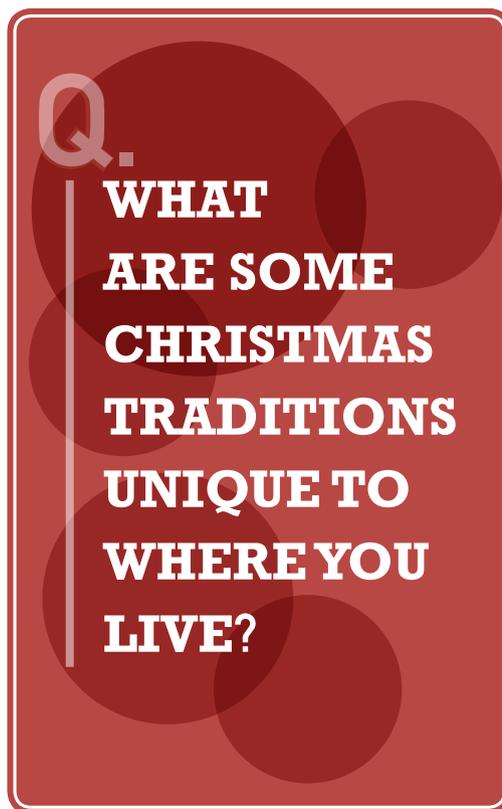
Philippines: Filipinos begin the Christmas season in September, so I decorate my tree in early September. Two of the delicacies eaten at Christmas are made with rice and are usually sold during the midnight masses before Christmas day. One is *puto bum-bong* made with sticky rice, sugar, and coconut flakes. It is dyed purple and put inside a small bamboo tube which is lowered into boiling water and steamed until done. Then it is removed and butter, sugar, and coconut flakes are added to the top. On the other hand, *bibingka* is made with ground rice, milk, baking powder, and egg and cooked surrounded by charcoal. Then topped with cheese, salted egg, and coconut flakes. Christmas Eve night is like a family reunion in a special family dinner called *noche buena*, eaten at midnight after mass. *D. Louise Warner*

Costa Rica: Tamales are made of chicken or pork that has been wrapped in plantain for cooking. They are shared with families and friends. Apples and grapes are popular, which can be bought in road side stands and of course in the supermarkets. *Anna Marie West*

Greece: The Greek people decorate sailboats, *karavaki*, or small ships, instead of trees, although they also decorate trees now as they embrace the Western culture. Greece's 3,500 islands influenced the use of the ship, as so many families had sailors who would return home for Christmas after a long time at sea. Wives would decorate a wooden boat to welcome the sailors home. It is also believed to be influenced by St. Nikolas, the patron saint of the seaman. This saint is celebrated December 6, which is the beginning of the Christmas celebration.
George & Luisa Dimakos

Spain: A few gifts are exchanged but mainly the gifts, especially for the children, are given on January 6 (*Día de Los Reyes*) where supposedly the wise men bring the gifts. There is a big parade in most every city on January 5 with three men dressed as Wise Men, many of them riding on camels, as well as floats, etc. As they pass through the streets of the cities, they throw candy to all the people gathered on the sidewalks. At the end of the parade, they usually present gifts to the Christ child in a manger scene in front of the local Catholic church or else distribute gifts to the poor.
Lavon & Carolyn Waters

New Zealand: Christmas comes in the summertime here, so instead of a white Christmas, hot cocoa, or sleigh bells, a Kiwi Christmas is more about sand, sun, and backyard barbecues. The national Christmas tree is in full bloom, the Pohutukawa. It's fish and chips (fries) on the beach. Topping Christmas meals off with *pavlova* (dessert), Kiwi fruit/berries and (real) unsweetened whipped cream. Yum! *Dalton & Paulette Walker*



Israel: We live in the land of Christmas and we are privileged to visit the church of the nativity and the shepherd's field and see the country flooded with tourists from all over the world.
Ramzi & Ruth Kammar

Uruguay: The holiday is called "Family Day" not Christmas. Some families start eating after midnight and stay up all night long.
Esteban & Emily Alvarez

England:

- Brussel sprouts with the Christmas meal
- Christmas pudding
- Pulling Christmas crackers at dinner with another person until they crack open revealing a small gift, paper crown, and a joke inside
- Mince pies
- The Queen's televised speech

Kevin & Sarah Pine

Mexico: *Posadas* – It is a re-enactment of Mary and Joseph going from house to house to try to find lodging. It is also accompanied by a piñata and a Catholic rosary. Many Mexican families will have their big Christmas dinner at midnight on Christmas Eve and celebrate most the night and then sleep most of the 25th. *James and Lori Bradley*

Australia: Playing cricket on the beach and having barbecues on the beach Christmas Day. Large seafood meals for Christmas Day. Since it is summer, many families go away camping during the Christmas season. The day after Christmas, Boxing Day, is also a very big holiday and many people head to the beach for a barbecue. *Dwayne & Valerie Keefe*

Brazil: Christmas celebrations in Brazil mostly have something to do with the Catholic church, especially in northern Brazil. Christmas Eve many Brazilian families meet at the home of parents to have a late supper close to midnight. Those who follow the Catholic church will watch the pope in a service from the Vatican. In our area there will be firecrackers lit both on Christmas Eve and for sure on New Year's Eve. *Steve & Marilyn Trask*

Portugal: Christmas traditions here are very family-oriented. The traditional Christmas Eve late night dinner includes cod fish, boiled potatoes, and greens. This dinner is followed by the opening of gifts. Then, for those who are faithful, the whole family goes to midnight mass, "Rooster Mass." Everyone sleeps in on Christmas and the family gets together for leftovers. *Dan & Rachael Smith*

South Africa: We live in the Southern Hemisphere and Christmas is in the heat of the summer. Our home is in a coastal city, so many people go to the beach and have a barbecue. You can imagine how funny it is to go to the shops and hear Amy Grant singing, "Walking in a winter wonderland!" *Brent and Sheila Moeller*

Native Americans: In our ministries both in Hawaii and with the Native Americans (Navajo and Southern Utes) we saw the emphasis of Christmas was on giving gifts and parties, and much alcohol was involved. We always took the opportunity to teach and preach on the first coming of Christ and how all scripture regarding his first coming was fulfilled so we know the Scriptures on the second coming will also be fulfilled. *Bob and Verna Griggs*

Japan: Christmas in Japan is known by name only and totally commercial. All the stores go in for it big time and most of them think Christmas is about Santa Claus, not Jesus. Making money is what it's all about! Sound familiar? *Lavern Rodgers*

Croatia: In Croatia, people traditionally wait until Christmas Eve to decorate the tree. It is usually a fresh-cut tree, so it is rarely bought or cut more than three days before. The entire day is spent together as a family. Extended family arrives in time for lunch and everyone attends evening mass. *Kevin & Kristina Brown*

Guatemala: On December 24th, Christmas Eve, Guatemalan families celebrate together and eat the main Christmas meal. It is made of several traditional dishes, but it always includes some Guatemalan tamales. In some regions they are made of corn, and in others rice or potatoes. They can be sweet or not, and have several different ingredients inside like olives, prunes, peppers, chicken, or pork. Everyone waits until midnight to light fireworks to celebrate the birth of Jesus. A family prayer is said around the tree and it is the custom to open presents shortly after midnight. *Jerry & Mindy Kinman*

Q. DOES YOUR CULTURE RECOGNIZE THE BIRTH OF CHRIST AS THE FOCAL POINT OF CHRISTMAS?

- Yes No
- Brazil
- Costa Rica
- Kenya
- Germany
- Great Britain
- Greece
- Guatemala
- Israel
- Mexico
- New Zealand
- Philippines
- South Africa
- Spain
- Taiwan
- Thailand
- Ukraine
- Uruguay

In a way...

Wales: It used to, but Christ is slowly being devalued and less recognized. People are worried about offending Muslims. *Larry & Dixie Quade*

Ukraine: Officially they do because it is Russian Orthodox. But in reality few believe it any more. *Ron & Nancy Minton*

Taiwan: The word for Christmas in Chinese is *Sheng Dan Jie* which literally translated means "holy birth holiday." The sad fact is that although almost everyone here has heard the term, most of them have never even heard the story of Christmas. *David & Cherie Green*

Spain: Yes, they recognize the birth of Christ as the focal point but a lot of emphasis is given to his mother Mary more than to Jesus himself. *Lavon & Carolyn Waters*

Mexico: Yes, but much of the focus is on Mary. *James and Lori Bradley*

Australia: Yes, but it is more commercial and more of a day off than a religious event. Businesses have a lot of parties and alcohol is usually a big part of the events and given as gifts. *Dwayne & Valerie Keefe*

Brazil: The current culture still has recognition of Christ's birth. Mary is given a lot of emphasis as the mother of Jesus. *Steve & Marilyn Trask*

Brazil: In most of the churches, a Christmas program is put on, which helps children invite their parents to come participate (if they aren't Christians). Through the years, there have been many souls saved through Christmas plays portraying the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hank & Nancy Mantonya

Ukraine: I like the influence we have on our Ukrainian friends and helpers. They often want to do things like Americans and we have given several adult workers their first Christmas present. This makes it easier to influence them for Christ.

Ron & Nancy Minton

Germany: Our Christmas Eve church service. The auditorium is usually packed! *Linda Fitzgerald*

Thailand: Sometimes the local schools, out of curiosity about Christmas, will allow us to come and explain what Christmas is all about. We have actually been able to perform Christmas plays at the local schools to talk about the birth of Jesus.

David & Joy Speights

Philippines: All the wonderful lights and decorations remind us of the true meaning of Christmas. *D. Louise Warner*

Israel: Being in the Holy Land.

Ramzi & Ruth Kammar

Costa Rica: I enjoy having Christmas dinner and fellowship time with other missionaries.

Anna Marie West

Q. **WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS ON THE FIELD?**

Taiwan: Easily, the best thing is the opportunity to share Christ with people who have never once heard the Christmas story! To see their eyes light up in amazement is a highlight of my life. *David & Cherie Green*

Mexico: The season lasts until January 6, Day of the Kings. It feels like we get more celebration time. *James and Lori Bradley*

Greece: I like celebrating Christmas in Greece because we can still celebrate Jesus freely. I felt depressed when we were on furlough watching the media fighting Christmas in America.

George & Luisa Dimakos

Uruguay: Fireworks citywide, greeting the neighbors after midnight. *Esteban & Emily Alvarez*

Spain: The best part about celebrating Christmas on the field is that the Spanish people celebrate on the 24th and we can spend that time with church family. On Christmas morning we can celebrate as a family without conflicting with other activities.

Susanne Cardenas, daughter of Steve & Kelli Mowery

South Africa: We love our Christmas services as Brent gets to play Father Christmas. We hand out numbers to each person at church and then call out random numbers. There is a table of kids gifts and a table with adult gifts. One gift we give out to the winning adults are frozen chickens for their Christmas dinner. It is always a big deal to win a Christmas chicken! *Brent and Sheila Moeller*

Croatia: The best part of Christmas in Croatia is visiting the various Christmas markets near us – the food, and crafts are truly works of art.

Kevin & Kristina Brown

Guatemala: We are now accustomed to the huge firework display at midnight on December 24. It's bigger than anyone can even imagine. The U.S.A. celebration now seems small and peaceful. *Jerry & Mindy Kinman* 🎄

What is the #1 thing missionaries like least about celebrating Christmas on the field?

family not here with us...I miss my family...being away from so many of our family members...not spending Christmas with my family...missing grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles...not being able to be together with all our family...we always miss family...not being with family...to have extended family so far away...being away from our older kids and our families...missing that hug from grandparents and parents after opening their gifts...kids and grandkids are stateside...we miss family and friends.

Q.
**DOES YOUR
 CURRENT
 CULTURE
 RECOGNIZE
 SANTA
 CLAUS?**

Wales: Yes, but he is traditionally called Father Christmas, although that is slowly changing because of American influence.

Larry & Dixie Quade

Israel: Yes, but he does not have the important role like in past years. *Ramzi & Ruth Kammar*

Ukraine: Santa Claus is *Ded Moroz* - Grandfather Frost. In schools they have some plays about him, and his granddaughter - Snow Maiden (*Snigurochka*). Santa is not common, mostly in a few advertisements. *Ron & Nancy Minton*

England: The Santa for the British is called Father Christmas. He wears a longer red robe and is usually slimmer than the American Santa. In many families, the father will dress up like Father Christmas and pay a visit on Christmas Eve to deliver gifts. *Tom & Gail Gritti*

Thailand: Yes. Thai people believe that there are different deities for each "new year." The Chinese New Year is usually in February with its own deities. The Thai New Year is in April with its own deities. Christmas is often seen as the Western countries' "new year." Santa Claus is the deity who oversees Christmas. *David & Joy Speights*

Germany: We have Saint Nikolaus who comes on December 6. Children either receive a couple of small presents from him or the presents are left for them while they sleep; or they get a piece of black coal left for them in their shoe, if they've been naughty. *Linda Fitzgerald*

Uruguay: Papa Noel brings the gifts after midnight. No need to wait until the next day!

Esteban & Emily Alvarez

Philippines: Many children believe in Santa Claus as a gift giver at Christmas if you have been good. Children will hang a stocking out on Christmas Eve to receive presents.

D. Louise Warner

Taiwan: Santa is called *sheng dan lao gong gong* in Chinese which literally translated is "holy birth (Christmas) old man." The only thing they know about him is what is learned from American culture. An old man with a red suit and white beard bringing toys to children. *David & Cherie Green*

Greece: Greece recognizes Santa Claus but they call him Saint Basilis, a Greek Orthodox saint from Caesarea, Asian Minor. He died January 1, 379 A.D. and this is the reason they open presents on New Year's Day. *George & Luisa Dimakos*

Spain: Santa Claus is recognized but the influence comes from movies and American pop culture. *Susanne Cardenas, daughter of Steve & Kelli Mowery*

New Zealand: A resounding, yes! Santa is huge and they celebrate with Santa parades in almost every small community to the largest of cities. Many churches will incorporate Santa into celebrating for the children. *Dalton & Paulette Walker*

Australia: Yes, some here call him Father Christmas from our English heritage, but Santa is more popular. Traditions are similar to America, but there is a legend that Santa has six white boomers (kangaroos) instead of reindeer which is a popular Christmas song here.

Dwayne & Valerie Keefe

South Africa: Yes, but he is known as Father Christmas.

Brent and Sheila Moeller

Brazil: Yes - It is kind of humorous to see a Santa Claus in outfit in the hot summer temperatures in Brazil, since December 25th is in our summer season. *Steve & Marilyn Trask* ▲

Santa Claus



Father Christmas



Saint Nikolaus



Ded Moroz



Kenya: Christmas tree and house decorations. Baking cookies, a big Christmas dinner, get together with other missionaries. We don't do a lot of shopping. *Jerry & Sharon Daniels*

Wales: We always start listening to Christmas music on Thanksgiving. A Christmas family tradition that we still do is have Mexican food on Christmas Eve. *Larry & Dixie Quade*

Ukraine: We still put up a small tree and give a few gifts, but not as much as in the States. *Ron & Nancy Minton*

Germany: I get together with friends on Christmas Day. *Linda Fitzgerald*

Philippines: I still decorate for Christmas with a tree and lights and drive around our neighborhood to see the lights. I still get to hear caroling from young people who come to my house. I do not write or send Christmas cards. *D. Louise Warner*

Taiwan: We love to decorate for Christmas. We put up a tree each year and we try to decorate with lights on the outside, making us the only house in our community with bright lights! People like to come by and take pictures! On Christmas Eve, as a family, we go to each of our church families' homes and carol for them at their door and give them a plate of cookies! *David & Cherie Green*

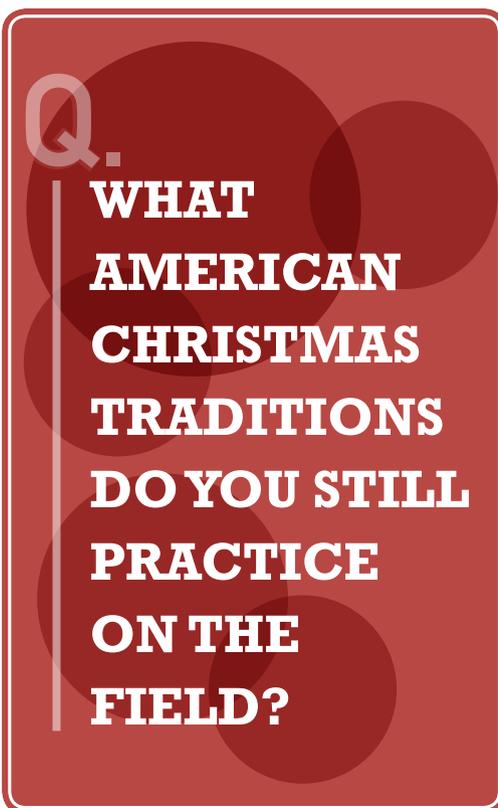
Greece: We decorate the traditional Christmas tree as well as the ship. We exchange Christmas gifts, specially for the children, which we open on Christmas day. We do not decorate or teach about Santa Claus. *George & Luisa Dimakos*

Uruguay: We no longer have lights in our front yard – they will not last! We still sing with family and read the story of Jesus' birth. *Esteban & Emily Alvarez*

Spain: As a family, we meet on Christmas day with our traditional turkey and dressing (if possible) dinner and exchange gifts. We decorate our home with a traditional manger scene and sometimes with a Christmas tree as well. It is important our neighbors see we are celebrating Christmas since the Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate and many times they feel all "evangelicals" are the same. *Lavon & Carolyn Waters*

Spain: We celebrate on Christmas morning. We have a Christmas tree, stockings and a fire in the fireplace. *Susanne Cardenas, daughter of Steve & Kelli Mowery*

New Zealand: In our home, we decorate in a slightly American traditional Christmas tree, manger, lights, etc...but use things common to the summer season like butterflies and summer flowers. We still observe our family traditions and have added ones from here (barbeques, NZ traditional foods, tried the beach once but very crowded). *Dalton & Paulette Walker*



England: We put up our Christmas tree and decorate the house. We hang stockings on our mantel. We bake Christmas cookies and treats to enjoy. We have Christmas services and fellowship with our church. Our Christmas looks very similar to what we have always done, we just do not have our families around to celebrate with. *Kevin & Sarah Pine*

Mexico: We have a Christmas tree in our house, stockings, hang lights outside, and celebrate pretty much like we did in the States. However, much of the candy we find in our stockings has chili powder on it. *James and Lori Bradley*

Australia: Gathering with family to exchange presents on Christmas day. Big Christmas day meals. Going to church on Christmas day. Decorating the home with a Christmas tree and Christmas decorations. House-to-house Christmas caroling isn't popular where we are. *Dwayne & Valerie Keefe*

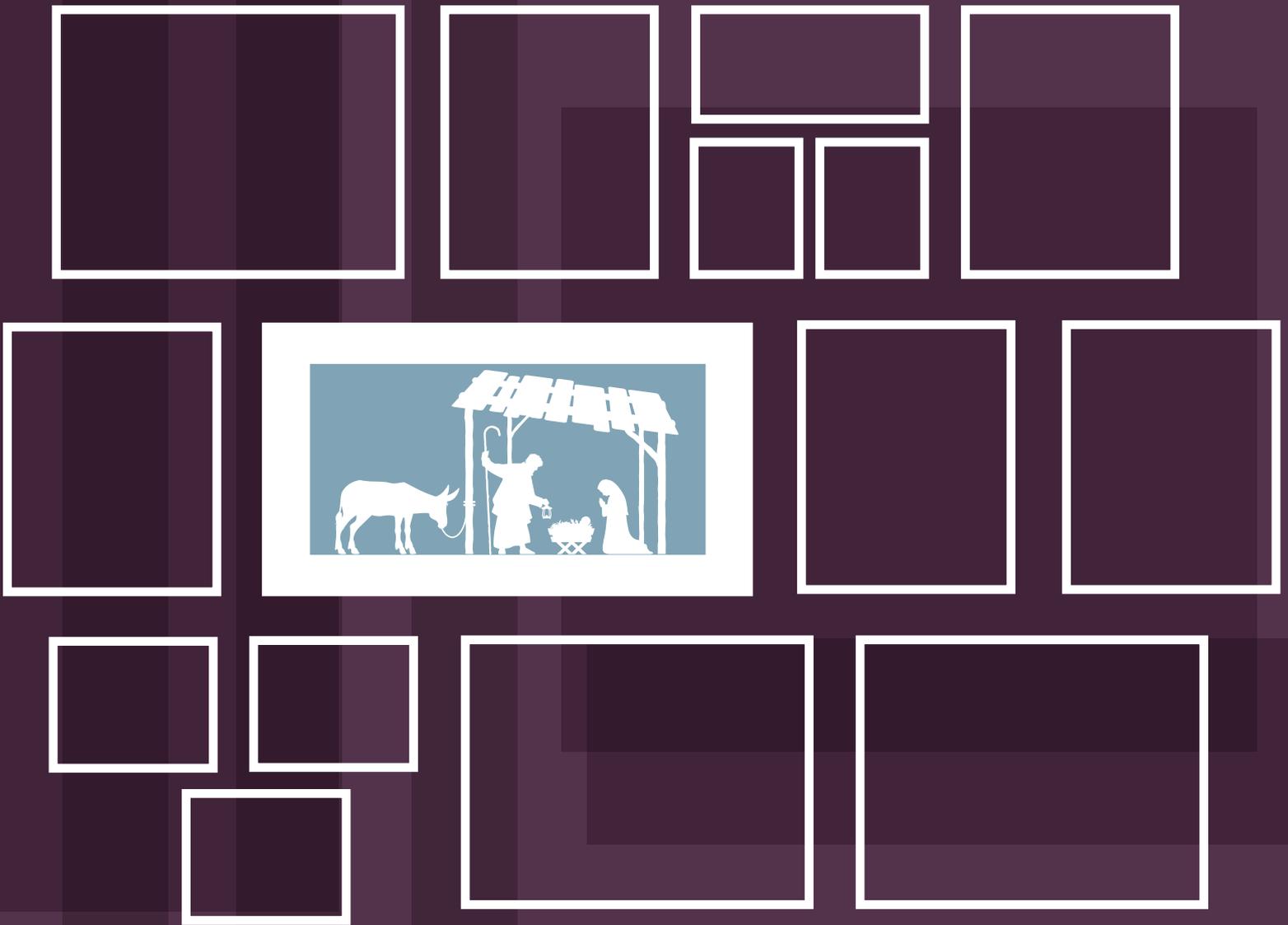
South Africa: We have tried to maintain the same family traditions we had while we were in the States. We felt like that was/is important for our kids growing up on a foreign field. My wife still cooks the turkey in the oven even in spite of the heat and humidity! We certainly don't have snowball fights! There are traditions we love to keep like listening to "The Twelve Voices of Christmas," produced by Back to the Bible. We also put "Proclamation Ornaments" on our tree. Each ornament gives one of 25 different names of our Lord Jesus connected with his incarnation. *Brent and Sheila Moeller*

Croatia: We still decorate our artificial tree the day after Thanksgiving, open Christmas PJ's on Christmas Eve so we can look cute for pictures on Christmas morning. We don't have a traditional Christmas dinner, but we video chat with family for most of the afternoon. *Kevin & Kristina Brown*

Brazil: We have, over the years, when possible met at the home of a fellow missionary in the area for a Christmas dinner. Caroling is not a practice here. Especially in the north, communities have events on the 12th of January celebrating the arrival of the three wise men. *Steve & Marilyn Trask*

Guatemala: We had to decide not to use a manger scene in our home like we did in the U.S.A. Here, other believers view that as idol worship, so we chose not to use that in our celebrations. We still do use a big Christmas tree, but we share with Guatemalan friends and believers that it is not an item of worship, but only a decoration as we celebrate our savior's birth. *Jerry & Mindy Kinman* ▲

THROUGHOUT THE CHRISTMAS SEASON, WILL YOU MAKE IT A PRIORITY TO PRAY FOR YOUR MISSIONARIES?



PART OF THE FAMILY

A PORTRAIT OF ADOPTION

By Patrick McClure

When I first met my wife nearly 20 years ago, I didn't know many people who were adopted. Since then, just in our circle of friends, we have seen a rise in the number of adoptions. There are couples who have struggled with infertility, longing to give a loving home to a child. Other couples, living in foreign countries, have shown

compassion for disabled children who likely would never be adopted in their culture. More recently, we have seen couples, with several children of their own, opening their homes to children from difficult situations. At least one such adoption was the result of a family's compassionate decision to start fostering children in their home. And it is

truly a picture of our globalized culture; although these couples are all American citizens, their adoptees hail from at least eight different nationalities. These adoptions all have one thing in common: these children were adopted because a family wanted to give a loving, safe home to a child whose future wasn't sure. Regardless of the specific

circumstances, adoption is a positive solution to a negative situation.

It is easy to assume through our 21st-century lens that adoption has always been a loving transaction that seeks to find a happy ending, both for the childless couple who longs to have a young one to love, and for the homeless child who just wants someone to love him or her. History shows, however, that until relatively recently, adoption was centered primarily on those who were adopting, and wasn't typically motivated by love. While there are recorded cases of the adoption of orphans and foundlings in ancient times, adoption usually dealt with answering the problem of childlessness as it related to the transfer of property. In other words, if a family was going to pass on their name, goods, or lands, they needed an heir. In fact, if a family adopted such an heir and later went on to have a natural son, that child became rightful heir.

The Old Testament is strangely silent about adoption. The Law itself does not stipulate any adoption procedures. Scholars point to the practices of polygamy, surrogacy, and levirate marriages as alternatives to the problem of childlessness. There are, however, a few instances where adoption, formal or not, seems to have taken place. The most common examples are Jacob adopting his two grandsons (Genesis 48:5, 6), Moses' adoption by Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:10; Acts 7:21), and Esther's adoption by Mordecai (Esther 2:7, 15). Also, while passages such as Jeremiah 3:19 and 31:9 may not represent clear-cut adoption procedures, it is evident God was declaring His adoption of Israel. Clearly, the apostle Paul understood it this way when he described "the adoption" as a benefit bestowed on Israel by God, along with "the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises" (Romans 9:4).

The apostle Paul is the only New

Testament writer to speak directly of adoption, and does so only five times (Romans 8:23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5). Also, in each of these instances, he is not referring to literal adoption cases, but rather applying the picture of adoption to a spiritual truth. There is some debate as to whether he had Jewish or Roman adoption in mind when he spoke of this, and the truth is there are attractive parallels in both worlds. Unlike Old Testament literature, which spoke more indirectly about adoption, Roman law had specific regulations regarding adoption. Whether the adoptee was under a parent's

THE PICTURE OF ADOPTION "TO HIMSELF" IS PART OF A LOVING PLAN HE ESTABLISHED BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, BY WHICH WE CAN BE, IN CHRIST, PRESENTED HOLY AND BLAMELESS BEFORE OUR FATHER...

power or not, Roman adoption removed the adoptee from the previous state, relinquishing their former life, so to speak, in order to enter into a new state under a new father's authority. As an adopted son, this child, though an heir, often was under the authority of other household members and even slaves until such time as the father appointed him of age, with all the power and responsibility it entailed.

The apostle's usage of the picture of adoption is quite interesting in that it describes something similar to the adoption procedures he and his audience were acquainted with (Jewish and Roman, at least),

but also differed greatly in certain key points. If one organizes the five adoption passages in their chronological order, they provide a panoramic view of God's plan through the ages to offer believers the adoption of sons. (Chronological refers to the time of the event described, not the order of the books.)

The first passage is a glimpse into a moment before time itself was created. While Paul doesn't elaborate on the picture of adoption in Ephesians 1:5, one thing is left abundantly clear: it has been part of God's plan since before creation. Without digressing into the stickier debates surrounding this

passage, it is self-evident the picture of adoption "to himself" is part of a loving plan He established before the foundation of the world, by which we can be, in Christ, presented holy and blameless before our Father, "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (verses 4-6).

As history begins unfolding, we can trace hints and shadows of this part of God's plan woven into the fabric of the redemption story. This is why Paul's reference to "the adoption" in Romans 9:4 offers the New Testament reader deeper insight regarding God's relationship with Israel.

Looking back with new eyes, we can see something we might have missed: as with so many other doctrines, God's adoption of Israel can be seen foreshadowing the believer's adoption into God's family.

In many ways, Romans 8:15 is a timeless passage, since it speaks to the constant, present comfort of every believer. It refers to a past point in the life of each believer, that moment when he or she accepted God's salvation by faith in Christ alone, and received the "spirit of adoption" versus the "spirit of bondage." The believer is free from fear under slavery, because now he is a son, with full rights as co-heir with Jesus, the son of God.

The references to adoption even go so far as to point to the future, when believers will be glorified. Again, as a comfort for this present time of suffering, Paul refers to adoption as connected to the fulfillment of the promise of eternal life in glory in Romans 8:23. John beautifully describes this tension between our current present adoption and its future glorious fulfillment when he writes, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

The final adoption passage (Galatians 4:1-7) actually fits into the middle of the chronology described above; it is the pivotal moment to which all of God’s redemptive plan points. This is where adoption meets Christmas. Here Paul offers the fullest description of the doctrine of adoption, and he connects it to the work of Jesus Christ on earth. Possibly alluding to Roman adoption, the apostle reminds the reader that, before salvation, the believer was a slave to sin. Then, in fulfilling everything planned since before the foundation of the world, and guaranteeing everything promised after the world’s end, “when the fulness of time had come,” (verse 4) in such a humble and nearly unnoticed way, the son who makes us sons was born. He was born of a woman and under the law in order to redeem those who were under law, and give them full rights as sons of God. Again the Roman adoption can be seen here, presenting the believer as an adoptee, being removed from his former sinful state and placed into a new relationship under the headship of his adopted Father.

Perhaps what is most amazing about Paul’s usage of the picture of adoption is how different God’s adoption of believers really is from any form of adoption mankind has developed, whether in ancient or modern times. In other words, the illustration is powerful both in how what God has accomplished in Christ resembles human adoption, and in how it is, oh, so much more than that.

God’s adoption is motivated by His love, not His need for heirs. Put simply, a being who doesn’t die doesn’t need heirs, so why is God adopting anyone? As discussed previously,

for much of human history, adoption was largely aimed at solving the problem of men dying without descendants to carry on the family name or inherit the family property and land. God’s adoption doesn’t have to make provisions for that; He isn’t going to pass off the scene in order for us to inherit. Unlike earthly inheritance, which is only obtained and enjoyed in this brief lifetime because of a father’s absence, God promises His adopted children an inheritance to be enjoyed with eternal life in the Father’s presence.

God’s adoption must be for our benefit, because He is not childless. As mentioned, a number of families in present times are adopting despite having natural children. The goal is to help a child who needs it, not to answer childlessness. God does not adopt because He is lacking children, but because He loves people. He already has a son, an heir, His only begotten. What does that mean for us? God isn’t following the pattern of ancient adoptions, which answered the legal needs of the adopter. In love He establishes the pattern for modern Christian adoptions: He is answering the desperate need of the destitute and the fatherless for a Father.

God’s only son was born into our family so we could be born into his. The birth of Jesus was the crucial moment in which God took on flesh and dwelt among us. His sinless life, his blameless sacrifice on our behalf, and his resurrection all began with this incredible moment we celebrate at Christmas. Every step he took in obedience to the Father fulfilled the righteous requirements we could not accomplish so that by grace, through faith we could become the sons of God (Galatians 3:26). We don’t often connect Christmas and adoption, but the wording of Galatians 4:3-5 should serve as a reminder that when we observe the birth of Jesus, we are observing the crucial moment when in the fulness of time, God turned our desperate story around with a glorious and hopeful solution. ▲

Patrick and Ann Janel McClure are BBFI missionaries to Brazil. They are both graduates of BBC and were approved as missionaries in 2003.

I am adopted. This expression has described part of who I am for as long as I can remember. My parents never hid this knowledge from me. From the very beginning, they let me know I was wanted, chosen, and special. If my mother had her way, she would have had a dozen children, but troubled pregnancies that almost cost her life, made that dream impossible. That’s when adoption became a real option.

My parents first adopted a little toddler. After adopting him and then having their one and only biological child, my father was approached by the adoption agency asking if they would be interested in adopting another child. He thought my mother needed a daughter and said they would be interested in adopting a baby girl. So it was that, months later, on a hot July morning, as the family sat down to their pancake breakfast, the phone rang. When my mother picked it up, a voice on the other end said there was a baby girl waiting for her family to come get her. Breakfast was abandoned and the trip to the adoption agency quickly made. It was there that, straight from the hospital, I was placed into my parents’ arms and completed their family. My parents were thrilled. They had three precious children, gifts from God!

I grew up knowing my parents had chosen me. I also knew a young unwed mother who couldn’t properly take care of me had chosen to give me life and give me up so I could be raised in a godly home with two parents. As a child of the late 1970s, I understood my biological mother could have made a much “easier” choice, a legal choice to end my life. Instead, she left home, lived in a home for unwed mothers, and chose to place me for adoption. I know it was God working in my life from the very beginning that took an unpleasant situation and turned it into a beautiful life story – an adoption story!



THE HOUSE THAT NEVER WAS

By Steve Van Winkle

I finished reading the handwritten, gilded script on the face of the paper:

November 24, 1983.

A few minutes earlier, I was making my way toward a house in the distance that sparked a memory, without being familiar in this neighborhood of two-dimensional houses where no one lived, lined with sidewalks no one strolled along, and streets that went nowhere — gray and dark gray were the only colors.

How I arrived here, I couldn't say; I didn't belong here but neither was I a stranger. As shadows twisted on the ground from an icy wind whipping leafless branches stiffly under a stark, lifeless sky, this Neverland seemed

exactly as I had left it, despite having never been here.

The concrete path leading to the house was strewn with rubble. Jagged chunks of debris from buildings mingled with furniture fragments, and charred fabrics snagged on exposed rebar to form chaotic monuments of things that were no more.

I traversed this urban wilderness where debris often forced me off the path onto unfamiliar terrain. Every few feet confronted me with a decision about where to place my next step; the destruction laying all around seemed to warn that poor choices at these junctions were punished mercilessly.

I nearly reached the house when I froze with terror. I recognized this rubble. This destruction was the catastrophic result of

decisions I had seen people make in moments of hurt, self-deception, or in the throes of uncertainty.

The world spun as I frantically looked for evidence of my own life amid the ruins. It seemed futile from the outset, but I was driven by a fear that perhaps everything I knew to be true about my family was only conjured to keep me sane in this world I woke up to where friendship and love are inevitably reduced to rubble.

My search ended as peace displaced panic with the calm assurance my life wasn't in ruins; it wouldn't be found in this debris field.

Turning to the house, I walked through the final feet of destruction and stepped onto the porch. I stood looking out onto the neighborhood, windswept, sterile, and dead.

Wind scraped my cheeks and I resisted the urge to turn around. When I did, a weathered screen door with mesh peeling from the corners greeted me. Rusted hinges that withstood my pull finally gave way with a scream, and I pushed open the cracked, careless front door. A tattered tapestry that once covered its grimy glass dangled from an edge, falling off when I pushed open the door.

Foreboding chilled me at the impulse to move forward. Though nothing of mine lay in the fallout along the street, I knew that was about to change. I had never been here before, but I knew, somehow, this house was mine.

Stepping through the door, the musty smell of time assaulted my senses. My eyes darted, saving my head the trouble of turning. Among outdated couches, chairs, and sundry tables stacked aimlessly beneath peeling wallpaper and yellowing curtains, piles of ... stuff ... dotted the room.

The piles were made of items believed necessary for happiness or satisfaction at one time or another. Now just heaping mounds of crumbling, fraying obsolescence, everything from hobbies to appliances were cluttering the room; all worthless now; none living up to the expectation of their purchase.

The floor creaked as I lifted a foot toward photo albums stacked haphazardly in a corner. Pausing before lifting a cover, within I discovered pictures of someone I once knew: Me. They were images of me younger, me stronger, me innocent, me ideal.

Dust puffed up with each page turned, and the pictures told my history. Beginning as a vibrant young guy running headlong into life, they eased into a middle-aged man bracing against the throes of life, and, finally, they foreshadowed a graying elder unable to hold onto life any longer than God wills.

With the evidence surrounding me in this room, I considered again that, indeed, nothing lasts forever and we all age into people we never expected to be. I was somehow fine with that, but, I also understood such peace with the passage of time wasn't natural.

I had met many people who seemed to try filling an invisible hole with fads or the newest things. Others appeared to consider nothing more valuable than youth or beauty; for them, life seemed to be about freezing a moment, refusing to accept that life itself is

the one thing we can't hold onto in life.

This room invited such pursuits and welcomed distractions from this truth. That it was in disrepair suggested it had been abandoned long ago.

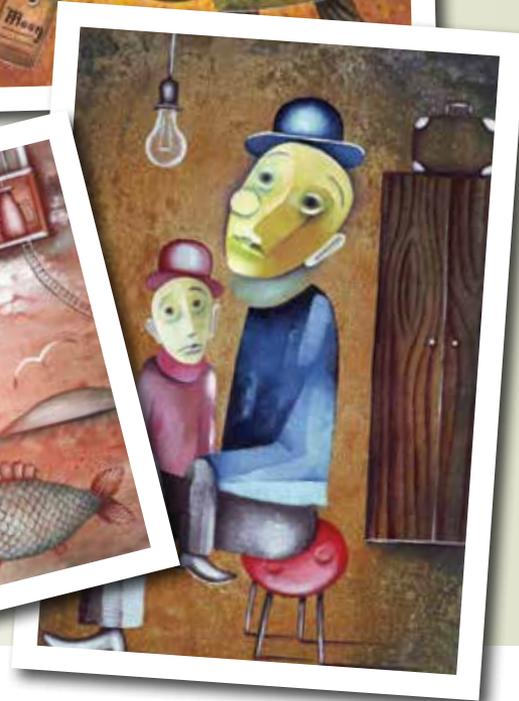
Sudden sounds of destruction snapped my head around where I saw an opening leading further into the house. Hard crashes directed my steps along the oddly curving, dim hallway until I stopped at the edge of a room casting fleeting shadows out its door. The shadows coincided with the breakage of things smacking the floor; the vibrations of the impacts reverberated to my feet.

My head slowly peeked in to where my feet feared to take me. This room was expansive, colorful as I peered inside. The high ceiling appeared as severely blue skies dotted with drifting, friendly white clouds.

Optimism greeted me here; nothing seemed impossible. I felt a smile invade my face as I took in the warmth of the moment, and my eyes closed to let anticipation wash over me.

Almost as soon as they closed, my eyelids registered darkness and opened to a different sight. The room grew sullen as resignation rolled in like a mist; a flash of shadow drew my gaze upward.

**Pausing before
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I once knew: Me.
They were images
of me younger,
me stronger, me
innocent, me ideal.**



A cloud dropped from above and shattered hopelessly onto the floor; in the pieces before me I found images of what never were. With frantic urgency I tried salvaging every sliver of the remains, but each time I reached out to gather, they vanished.

The cycle repeated itself, always ending with me exercising the futility of trying to repair that which defied saving. For a reason I didn't understand, my attempts continued compulsively until I finally recognized in the shards something personal, something devastating: Dreams.

With each piercing sound, I witnessed a dream shatter — my dreams. Dreams of success and importance, dreams of achievement and creativity, dreams subtle and bold that never materialized in my life crashed to the floor and broke in front of the dreamer.

I stood to leave, not for the reason I expected, but because sadness over their final collapse escaped me. I somehow knew that, had I pursued these lesser dreams, I never would have dreamt the better ones that architected my life.

After a final turn to look upon the dreams I never captured, I backed into the dark hallway once more; it pulled me further down its length. Somewhere, I stole a moment to consider what was happening.

There was no answer for how I arrived here; was this a dream? It had to be. But, why did I feel a connection to this place I had never been?

Remembering the destruction on the street, I wondered not so much at how lives had blown up for taking a wrong step or indulging a fleeting sin or reacting to hardship without consulting faith. I wondered at how mine was never blown sky-high for the same reasons, why pieces of my life weren't found in the wreckage.

I was no superman, not above the temptations and bewilderments that consumed others' lives. How did my steps not fall on mines? How did my selfishness not trigger an explosion?

I didn't know.

I thought back on the things eaten of oxidation and time waiting for me inside the front door; I remembered them all with a note of disappointment. I remembered the guy in the pictures. He thought he'd never age. He thought life would always serve him.

He thought he'd never be me.

After spending decades I can't account for, I know now there is a way all flesh goes. I know obsolescence is built as deeply into life as vibrancy, and no one can keep his or her life or times from becoming an eventual anachronism.

So, why hadn't despair accompanied me through the years? Why had I not cried out like Solomon about life's vanity, ultimately despising everything because I could keep nothing?

A moment ago I was audience to the final collapse of dreams I cradled for years before their shelf life expired. Why wasn't it bothersome?

Everything wove together and wrapped around a single question. Despite experiencing lives of friends in ruin, days of youth vanish, and dreams die, the only thing troubling me in this colorless Neverland was, "Why me?"

Why was my life not strewn in the streets? Why was I not clinging to what cannot be kept? Why was I fine in the

irreparable splatter of my own dreams? Why was this neighborhood, this house, not the sum of my own life?

Laughter flowing over my shoulder startled me, then beckoned me. Turning toward it, cautious steps guided by anxious eyes navigated a long curve in the hall. I peered around the bend to see light flooding in from a doorway. As I approached it, the brilliance dimmed to an inviting glow that was warm against my face and in my spirit.

The room within was obscured by a circle of windows that spun like a carousel. Composing my focus in the brightness, I saw in each window moments from my life — the best moments.

I saw the birth of my children on one. On another, the first sermon I ever preached as a pastor. I saw Cheryl take my hand and felt the warm press against mine as we clung to each other when life washed too far upon our shore.

Windows rolled by like credits on my life, and I caught glimpses of smiles from people I never knew I had helped. I watched choirs of kids in makeshift sets of cardboard and cotton



balls sing of God's love in holiday pageants. I beheld again some of those same kids standing before me reciting wedding vows.

I saw my own daughter's smile on the day she repeated them after me.

This was my life. These were the better dreams that made life worthwhile and the prizes that couldn't be purchased.

The visions came faster and faster. I watched my wife play with our kids on grass as green as emeralds; I saw smiling faces stream by me in lines on Pastor Appreciation Day; I listened to prayers and singing; and saw myself give my mom's new husband permission to kiss her after their wedding ceremony.

Standing there, I realized these were more than random scenes; they were answers to unspoken questions — Would I matter? Who would I marry? What would my kids be like? Would we be happy? ... These moments reminded me of the happiness found in the answers and that a more blessed life couldn't have been scripted if I wrote it myself.

Here, as the carousel slowed, I heard Cheryl say again, "I'll never leave you." I felt

Madison leap into my arms with abandon when she was a little girl; my daughter Baylee's patented hugs enveloped me. My eyes closed in renewal, opening to see a single card drop out of a window.

I knew this card, just like I knew its author had survived falling out his own window when he was a toddler. This was the note our son, Hayden, gave us just before his senior night football game. I read the words like sacred prose. The ending said everything,

... And, most of all, thank you for always believing in me ... you guys reminded me that I can do anything because Cheryl and Steve Van Winkle believe I can.

- Your biggest fan, Hayden

When my eyes, heavy with joy, looked up, one window remained. I saw me, kneeling beside my bed decades ago, praying. It was Thanksgiving 1983, and this was my first genuine prayer asking Christ, by his grace, to save me from my own sin. This moment would seize my life; it was here all the answers to questions I never knew to ask at the time were born.

Then, the carousel picked up speed, spun faster and faster until it became a blur and ejected all the windows onto the wall like portraits of time. When they did, a flash of light hit me so forcibly that my arms instinctively shielded my face.

The light faded and I sheepishly looked out from my own forearms to the first thing to make sense since my journey began. I was home, in the house I knew and the living room I remembered. It was immersed in welcome and aglow with peace, and, in its familiar place stood ... a Christmas tree.

The only light in the room, its softly colored bulbs bounced brightly off the surface of deep glass ornaments, surrounding me with the colors of joy. The garland encircling the tree seemed strung with hope and laughter and life. Above it, a star shimmered like a diamond in the sun, and heavenly notes cascaded down onto me under its brightness.

This was my life. My bleak tour ended, my heart ached in gratitude to be home.

Only one present lay beneath the tree, a box that fit in the palm of my hand. Picking it up, I pulled on the golden ribbon and

cautiously opened the lid.

Inside was only a small slip of paper, folded in half. The face of it had two lines of crimson text:

To: Steve

November 24, 1983

I unfolded the tiny paper tent; this is all it said:

Life. Abundant and Eternal.

I finally understood. Here was the ultimate answer to "Why me?" — Why was my life not in ruins? Why was I not raging against life's inevitable end? Why was I not bitter over dreams unrealized?

Christmas.

The life I love was gifted me on that night thousands of years ago when God became flesh in a manger on a lonely hillside in Bethlehem. Bound up in the Christ child was the ultimate answer. In new wonder, I understood this gift that had saved me from my sin had also saved me from that musty, menacing house and that freezing wasteland of a neighborhood.

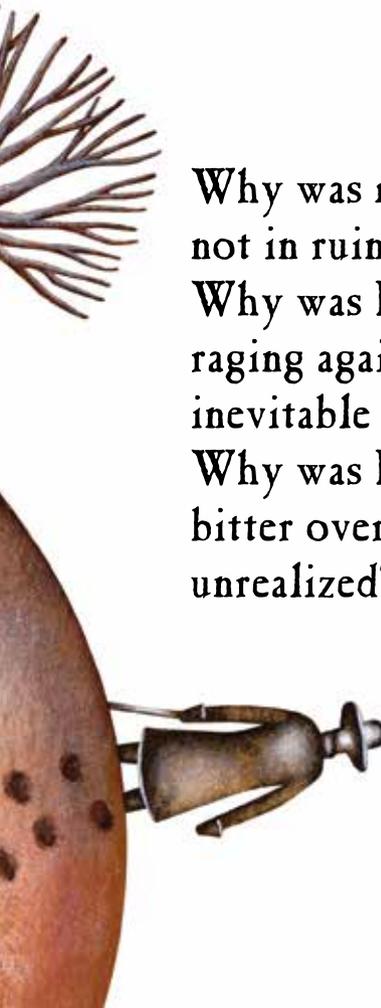
Suddenly, it all made beautiful sense. That house was dilapidated not from time nor from neglect or tragedy; it was broken down, dark, and foreboding because it had never been used.

Because selfishness hadn't overtaken my life, because lesser dreams weren't pursued at the expense of the best ones, because my life hadn't been about the moment, it was the house that never was. I had never lived there.

None of which was a credit to me; I was only the beneficiary of a gift. This gift of God was given me the night He declared to the world that, in receiving His son, sin would be defeated and we who sat in darkness need no longer grope down dark hallways, desperately fumbling for life and joy.

Because, in the gift of Christmas, is an exchange of futility and lament for a lifetime of splendor found in irreplaceable, sublime moments made possible only by glad tidings of great joy.

This gift is offered to us all in Christ ... It is the gift of escaping the house that never was. ▲



**Why was my life
not in ruins?
Why was I not
raging against life's
inevitable end?
Why was I not
bitter over dreams
unrealized?**

JOSEPH HUGHES — The British and Foreign Bible Society

For a decade after William Tyndale's English New Testament was printed in 1526, it was violently suppressed by the Church in England. Then, in 1536, Tyndale suffered martyrdom for his work as a Bible translator. His dying prayer was "God, open the king of England's eyes," a prayer that found quick answer, for Henry the VIII, no later than 1537, granted Miles Coverdale the right to publish in England, an English translation of the Bible.

Since those monumental days almost five centuries ago, we English-speaking people have not been without access to the Bible in our own language, though it was not always readily accessible to the lower classes, primarily due to the cost of such a printed volume. The large folio and quarto editions usually printed were priced far beyond the means of the great majority of the people, and even the least expensive small New Testament editions were an extravagance for many.

Joseph Hughes (1769-1833) was London-born and studied for the ministry at Bristol Baptist College and in Aberdeen and Edinburgh. He was ordained pastor of the Baptist church at Battersea, on the far western edge of metropolitan London, in 1797. There he remained for the rest of his life. Hughes had a lifelong testimony of unblemished character and doctrinal soundness.

Pastor Hughes became a founding member of the Religious Tract Society in 1797, and served as secretary of the society from 1799 on. The society's purpose was to provide Christian literature to the many people who thronged London and other parts of England.

In 1802, an urgent request came to the society for Welsh Bibles — thousands of them. As the committee of the society deliberated on how to meet this pressing need, Hughes took a larger view, noting that not only Wales, but many other parts of the British Isles — and for that matter, the rest of the world — were in desperate need of ready access to the printed Word of God, and he therefore proposed a Bible society be formed to address this need and disperse the seed of the Word far and wide among all nations. (There had been some earlier small and scattered efforts and organizations working toward this noble end, but nothing world-encompassing). The British and Foreign Bible Society, named by Hughes, was organized in March 1804 at a meeting of some 300 supporters. Hughes was elected one of its secretaries, and remained such for life. In emulation of the British example, Bible Societies were soon formed in many nations, including the American Bible Society

(1816). Scriptures by the thousands and tens of thousands began going out in an ever-increasing number of languages.

From its founding, the British and Foreign Bible Society was non-denominational, as evidenced by its decision to publish and distribute Bibles with only the Biblical text, and without notes or comments. Within a couple of decades, the non-denominational position led to a crisis. Certain missionary translations made in Asia and funded at least in part by the Society rendered the Greek word *baptizo* by native words as "immerse" (because that, after all, was what the Greek word meant). Funding for these versions was cut off, over the strong objections of Baptists.

A second crisis in the Society's first half century was over the question of whether Unitarians should be allowed into membership. A majority, in the interest of a misguided broad-mindedness, said yes, and so some members withdrew support for the Society and formed the still-functioning Trinitarian Bible Society in 1831. In subsequent decades and centuries, the British Society, like most of its sister organizations, became quite ecumenical, and very latitudinarian in theological perspective, resulting in the sponsorship and publishing of more than a few translations that were tainted with modernist denials of fundamental doctrines (while still publishing some conservative versions as well). Other doctrinally sound societies (such as the Gideons and the New York Bible Society) were organized by those who could not conscientiously cooperate with those who denied fundamental Biblical truths.

Of course Joseph Hughes, whose association with the British and Foreign Bible Society lasted a scant three decades, is not to blame for the issues and problems that developed long decades and more after his death. His heart's desire of scattering the seed of the Word as far and as wide as possible remains worthy of our emulation today.

John Leifchild wrote A Memoir of the late Rev. Joseph Hughes, A.M. (1835; 496 pp.). A brief account of Joseph Hughes's life can be found in William Cathcart, The Baptist Encyclopedia. Both M'Clintock-Strong, Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature, and Schaff-Herzog, Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge have articles on "Bible Societies." Thomas Armitage, A History of the Baptists (pp. 893ff), details 19th century Baptist involvement in Bible societies in England and especially America.

Heaven's headlines

Horrific headlines roiled over Chicago like angry storm clouds this past summer. Murder numbers skyrocketing. Shootings being tallied literally by the minute. August was Chicago's most violent month in 20 years. As I write this, on a Monday morning, the headline for the weekend is, "17 Killed and 41 Shot."

One incident stands out because it was early in the season and close to home.

"Six-year-old Girl Shot in Back on Logan Square Block Rocked by Violence." ABC 7 Chicago interviewed Jeremy Crowe, one of our pastors, in the wake of the madness. He talked about the work Armitage Baptist does day in and day out, year after year in the name of Jesus. The media, the general public, politicians, and police want to know, "What are you doing to help quell the violence?"

In the face of this bloody tsunami, the routine Gospel work of a local church may seem insignificant, if not irrelevant. It seems removed from the immediacy, the drama, the tragedy of human bodies ripped apart, families shattered, and lives snuffed out.

For the most part, the work of Christ goes on unheralded. We know the work of our church, the work your church does day in and day out, week in and week out, year in and year out is what the world needs, and it holds the ultimate answer.

It may seem a farmer planting corn row by row in the middle of Iowa has little to do with a child in North Sudan who has not eaten for days. However, without food from somewhere there is no hope for that child. The tedious routine work of the farmer is not just necessary — it's vital. It is a piece of the solution.

The night Jesus was born, Bethlehem slept. When the sun rose the next morning, you can be assured it was a typical day in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Judea, and across the Roman Empire. No TV trucks. No photographers. No scribes. No

lines waiting to worship. Sure, some shepherds got the news and went looking for the savior. But sleepy little Bethlehem went on with its business. There were no headlines.

Rome didn't care. The empire carried on. Thirty years later, Jesus' home folk tried to run him off a cliff. The holy city, Jerusalem, killed him, lied about the empty tomb. Life as usual was only temporarily disrupted by the spiritual explosion of Pentecost. However, it's clear reality prevails as believers are scattered by persecution several chapters later. Headlines in scripture, not in history.

Over the next generation, the Gospel of Jesus Christ penetrates the empire. City after city sees a church planted. Believers multiplied. Good works abound. There is an occasional ruckus, riot, or earthquake. I'm fairly certain the Philippi Herald did not read, "Prisoners Don't Flee Quake Damaged Jail — Jailer Gets Saved!"

The empire strikes back with a vengeance! Waves of Gospel advance are met with savage persecution for generations to come.

All that to say, Jesus created a stir, but he did not win Jerusalem to himself. His church was birthed and then was pretty much evicted. Rome never blinked. Local churches influenced and impacted the whole empire. No headlines.

Much of the work of evangelism goes on quietly, privately, far from public notice. Over lunch. At work. Standing next to a locker in a school hallway. Across an aisle on a commuter train. An email to a distant family member. A phone conversation. A prayer of repentance and faith after a church service.

Pastors nurture and guide disciples in Christ-likeness. Counselors oversee miraculous marriage transformations. Small group leaders and Sunday Bible study teachers sow the Word into minds being renewed. Thousands of churches reach out to pray for and evangelize youth, raising money to run programs, sponsor kids to camp.

Who is recording the murders that never happen? The shootings that never took place? Bullets that were never fired? Divorces that don't happen? Children who were never abused? The drugs not bought? The alcohol not consumed? The drivers that quit driving drunk. The domestic abuse Satan scheduled that the Gospel canceled? Who is counting the money that wasn't embezzled, the lies that weren't told, the babies not born out of wedlock?

I'll tell you who and where. God in heaven sees and notes every advance of the Gospel, all the evil it cancels, and all the good it produces. He knows every tear not shed, every heart not broken, every family not shattered, every life not taken, and every war not started.

This year, Christmas will mark yet another celebration by Christians all over the globe who have provided fresh water, started and operated hospitals and clinics, served AIDS victims, loved and housed the homeless, provided tons of food and clothing to needy people, Founded and funded schools, served immigrants and refugees, addicts, and young girls who decided not to have an abortion, as well as women who have. Believers have pursued, rescued, and served trafficked chattel. They have opened their hearts and homes adopting orphans and wards of the state.

All this and more, because the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

Make no mistake, heaven's headlines are the ones that matter.

"Unto you is born this day, a Savior ..."

by Charles Lyons, Pastor
Armitage Baptist Church,
Chicago, Illinois
charles.lyons@armitagechurch.org



NOTICE IS GIVEN FOR A SPECIALLY CALLED BUSINESS MEETING TO BE HELD DURING THE FEBRUARY 2017 MEETING OF THE BAPTIST BIBLE FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL AT CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH IN TYLER, TX.

The key agenda item will be the updated Constitution and By-Laws, as presented during the September 2016 meeting, with a recommendation for vote and approval of same to be taken at the meeting.

According to Article IV of the current Constitution and By-Laws, the president of the Fellowship may call a special meeting as the need arises with 30 days advance notification of such business sessions to be published in the Baptist Bible Tribune. Visit www.bbf.org/legal to review official documents. For more information contact BBFI Communication Director Randy Harp at raharp@tribune.org.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED CHANGES

Article I - Name

No changes made

Article II - Purpose

No changes made

Article III - Affiliation

No changes made

Article IV - Meetings

Clarified the date of annual meeting in September to match current practice. (Changed from 4th Monday in September to allow any week in September).

Article V - Voting Rights

Each pastor shall have one vote regarding issues submitted for decision. Guideline indicating that pastors may only hold one national office at a time has been moved to this article.

Article VI - Officers

Existing Article VI has been expanded to Article VI, VII and VIII for better clarity regarding: officers, directors, and committees
Separated the Articles, putting like (similar) content together for the sake of clarity.

Clarified that the Board of Directors is in fact the Executive Committee. (This was previously inferred, based on corporate structure and the language of the Articles of Agreement filed with the Secretary of State in Missouri.) Also made clear that the Executive Committee is “the highest executive authority.” Previous language was confusing.

Moved former Article VI section 5 to Article V section 2. (re: no multiple offices being held by one person) as the second paragraph defining officers in the fellowship.

(New) Article VII - Directors

Clarified the language used and made distinction between directors and state representatives. Previous language was confusing: “national director” was used as a label for state representatives and “director” was used to indicate the leader of a fellowship entity.

Removed references to a national education director. This position was never filled and is not needed.

A director is an appointed position for the purposes of overseeing a Fellowship entity (currently, the Mission, Church Planting and Communication Offices).

A state representative is elected/appointed by a state fellowship to represent that state’s interests in national fellowship meetings.

Included language to clarify that directors serve at the discretion of the Executive Committee.

(New) Article VIII - Committees

Clarified that State Representatives are responsible for the formulation of the ballot for election of the Executive Committee. Pastors elect the members of the Executive Committee.

Combined other areas of the bylaws into the section about Committees for clarity.

Created a section on elections to indicate that state fellowships will determine who their representative will be. Language was removed that indicated term and election methods, allowing states to determine this for themselves.

Added a section to reflect current practice regarding missing representation in a state; if a state fellowship does not send a representative, the executive committee may appoint a qualified pastor from that state as a temporary representative to develop that states Fellowship of pastors.

Mission Committee

Cleaned up language for mission vs. missions (made all statements reflect current practice of “mission” singular).

Education Committee

Complete rewrite. All language related to BBFI oversight of colleges has been removed to reflect current legal and practical realities. ALL NEW language in Article VIII, section G. has been included at the request of the current Vice President of Education and both college presidents (BBC Springfield and BBC Boston).

Communication Committee

This section is new and was added to reflect the change from BBFI Tribune to a larger scope communication office. It also includes language missing from the previous bylaw iteration defining the Tribune or the communication office of the BBFI.

Article IX – Subsidiaries and Properties of the BBFI

Moved the statement about an annual audit to this section.

Article X - Constitutional Amendments

Clarified that the constitution may be changed at any annual meeting, as long as proper notice is given.

Article XI - Relationship to Churches

No changes made.

(New) Article XII - Dissolution

At the recommendation of our attorney, this has been included to clarify the distribution of assets in the event an entity ceases operations.

PLANT CITY, FL

CHURCH USES FACEBOOK PHOTO CONTEST FOR COMMUNITY HALLOWEEN OUTREACH

Being a small church with limited resources, Pastor Tim Forgette and Knights Baptist Church realized there was no way they could host a large-scale fall festival like other churches in town. Rather than pull members out of their neighborhoods and away from traditional trick-or-treating families, they opted to host a Trick or Treat Photo Contest through the church's Facebook page.

The church made information cards explaining how the photo contest worked and distributed them to members, who then handed them out (along with candy) at their homes to trick-or-treaters. The contest was simple: parents could take pictures of their kids dressed up and post them on the Knights Baptist Church Facebook page and then the church would pick out a few winners (best boy costume, best girl costume, proud parent helper) and award prizes.

Pastor Forgette says, "It generated a lot of positive feedback even from those who chose not to participate in the photo contest, and the contest provided good publicity for the church. We added a number of new followers to our social media, and we were even contacted by a family who said they are looking for a church home and wanted to visit. I love that we were not trying to compete with other churches doing the same thing, or pull our families away from their neighborhoods on Halloween night. In my neighborhood alone we had nearly 200 kids come to our door. The Facebook photo contest was a way to use the system and resources already in place for our benefit."

AURORA, MO

AURORA BAPTIST TEMPLE HAS ALMOST ONE-THIRD OF TOWN POPULATION COME TO HALLOWEEN EVENT

Pastor Nathan Burch and the people of Aurora Baptist Temple hosted a community Halloween event complete with inflatables, live music, food, and trick-or-treating, resulting in a record turnout of around 2,500 people.

SPRINGFIELD, MO

BBC HOSTS FIRST MID-AMERICA MINISTRY AND ALUMNI CONFERENCE

Baptist Bible College welcomed over 100 alumni to its campus for the Mid-America Ministry and Alumni Conference (MAMAC) November 7-10, 2016. The conference was designed not only to educate and encourage alumni in attendance, but also offered opportunities for alumni to connect with and mentor current students.

The conference featured Jimmy Draper, president emeritus of Lifeway, and Fred Young, pastor of East Side Baptist Church in Independence, MO. Other guest BBC alumni speakers included Cynthia Petty (1971) of Saddleback Church, D.J. Cabrera (2011) of Christ Fellowship in Tampa, FL, Shawn Koonce (2006) of the Tin Roof Society, Troy Wolfe (2010) of Movement Church in Ft. Worth, TX, Chad Cassidy (2009) of Innovative Ministry, Lonnie Lehrman (1992), Lonnie (1990) and Disty (1984) Short, and Scott Kemper of Granbury Baptist Church, Granbury, TX, Tiffany Lyons (2008) of High Street Baptist Church, Springfield, MO, Scott Bettinger (1997) of Echo Media, and Don (1971) and Sheryl Rooks of Connecting Point Ministries.

The event included six main sessions and several breakouts offering practical methods for ministry. State fellowships were also encouraged to use this time to meet individually.

The conference allowed students and alumni to engage on a personal level through the Student/Alumni Banquet, at breakfast in the Student Center, and at lunch in the BBC Cafeteria. Following the banquet, the BBC Patriots men's basketball played St. Louis Christian in a special homecoming game. During halftime the homecoming court was introduced with seniors Matt Kick and Kaylee Marino crowned as king and queen.

A watch-night election party, that lasted until the election was called at 2 a.m., was well attended, as were the annual alumni versus students volleyball and basketball games. The conference ended with the alumni presenting a \$250 scholarship to BBC freshman Samantha Alleshouse during the final chapel session featuring Shawn Koonce and D.J. Moz from Nairobi, Kenya.

The next Mid-America Ministry and Alumni Conference will take place November 6-9, 2017, at BBC.





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SPRINGFIELD, MO

WEST DIVISION STREET BAPTIST HONORS VETERANS

West Division Street Baptist Church and Pastor Rob Hoffman honored veterans and their families with special recognition and gifts November 6, 2016. “The 25 million veterans living within our borders today served faithfully and sacrificed greatly to preserve the freedoms we enjoy. On this special day, the church honored them for their courage and sacrifice,” says Hoffman.

BBFI pastor, evangelist, and missionary Dale Peterson was special guest for the day. “Dale, whose oldest son, USMC Justin Peterson, was killed in action October 1, 2006, while serving in Iraq, has a great love for America and our military,” states Hoffman. “This special day, just a few days before our national election, provided the perfect occasion for us to be reminded of our civic obligations as Jesus-followers. Dale’s passionate message was timely and encouraging to our people. Many gathered in prayer for our nation at the end of the service.”



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FORT WORTH, TX

TEXAS BBF HOSTED BY OASIS SOUTHWEST BAPTIST CHURCH

The Texas Baptist Bible Fellowship held their fall meeting October 17 and 18 in Amarillo, TX, hosted by Oasis Southwest Baptist Church and Pastor Bradley Speer. "They graciously opened their doors and were amazing hosts," says Mike Marcellus, Texas BBF chairman and pastor of First Independent Baptist Church, Austin, TX.

The themes, Courageous Leadership, Servant Leadership, and Consistent Leadership were addressed respectively by

Pastor Ed Trinkle (Canyon Creek Baptist Church, Richardson, TX), Pastor Michael Haley (Cross Creek Baptist Church, Fountain, CO), and Leny Funtecha (24-year missionary to Haiti). The TXBBF officers also presented a check for \$50,000 to church planter Chris Kitts and Glen Rose Baptist Church, Glen Rose, TX. This is the second church plant in three years the TXBBF has helped launch.

Other special guests for the meeting included John Arnold, retired pastor of Library

Baptist Church, Finleyville, PA, Assistant Mission Director Steve Bender, and Pastor Doug Cox, BBFI vice president of education. Business conducted at the meeting included approving \$5,000 be given to Central Baptist Church and Pastor Kim Beckham for the February 2017 national Fellowship meeting. "Pastor Kim Beckham is working hard to host an outstanding meeting," says Marcellus, "and we are proud to support him and Central Baptist Church."

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SPRINGFIELD, MO

GRACEWAY CELEBRATES 40TH ANNIVERSARY; 20 YEARS FOR PASTOR BOB STEPHENSON

Graceway Baptist Church in Springfield, MO, celebrated the church's 40th anniversary September 11, 2016, with over 600 in attendance. Former pastors Bill Alexander and Leland Burch returned for the celebration. Originally named Del Prado Baptist Church,

Graceway was started as a mission of South Side Baptist Church in Springfield. Alexander started the church in 1976. Burch followed in 1981, pastoring Graceway for the next 19 years. The church called their current pastor, Bob Stephenson, in 2000.



Left Graceway's three pastors (left to right) Leland Burch, Bob Stephenson, and Bill Alexander. **Right:** Bob and Kim Stephenson.

CLOVIS, NM

STAN AND JOSIE WHITE CELEBRATE 60TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Stan White and Josie Maness were married in June 1956 and this year celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary.



Stan was saved under the ministry of Howard Ingram while serving in the USAF in Roswell, NM, at Tabernacle Baptist Church. After graduating from BBC (1959), he founded Temple Baptist Church in Rockingham, NC, in 1962. He later worked for J. C. Joiner in Tucson, AZ, and Howard Ingram in Abilene, TX, before pastoring Westbrook Baptist Church in Clovis, NM, for 32 years. White retired from Westbrook Baptist in 2004, but remains pastor emeritus and teaches a seniors class.

BERLIN, VT

VERMONT BBF MEETS AT BIBLE BAPTIST

Bible Baptist Church and Pastor Jim Lake hosted the October Vermont BBF Pastors' Fellowship October 14. "We had a great group,

sweet fellowship, and strong preaching," says Randy Boardman, assistant pastor of Victory Baptist Church, Vergennes, VT.



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TAYLOR, MI

MICHIGAN BBF MEETS AT BEACON BAPTIST

Co-pastors Herb Gilbert and John Reilly hosted the October Michigan BBFI meeting at Beacon Baptist Church October 18. Pastor Greg Burdine of Faith Baptist Church, Adrian, MI, and BBFI Communication Director Randy Harp preached. New officers were elected and the

MIBBFI By-laws were amended during the business meeting. New officers for the state fellowship are John Reilly (chairman), Walt Yeomans (vice-chairman), Dallas Berry (secretary), Richard Smith (treasurer), and Greg Burdine (state representative).



FT. WORTH, TX

DRAKE ELKINS ORDAINED BY ALLIANCE BAPTIST

Alliance Baptist Church and Pastor Terry Kizer ordained Drake Elkins into the Gospel ministry October 16. Elkins has served on staff at the Alliance church for eight years, six as student pastor. He is now preparing to plant a church in Boulder, CO. "Drake has been assessed by the North American Mission Board and will be mentored by men like Nick Olsen, Michael Haley, and Doug Dameron as he assimilates into the culture there," says Kizer. "We are honored to serve as his sending church!"



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VICTORY BAPTIST HOSTS MEN'S CONFERENCE

Victory Baptist Church and Pastor Tim Taylor hosted the New Hampshire fourth annual Men's Conference September 23 and 24 at Camp Good News, Charlestown, NH. Guest speaker for the event was Jeff Amsbaugh from Greater Rhode Island Baptist Tabernacle, Johnston, RI. "We had a great group of men from five of the six New England states plus

New York who came to enjoy fellowship, food, and edifying preaching," reports Randy Boardman, assistant pastor of Victory Baptist Church. "During free time, men mingled and challenged each other while fishing, target shooting, sitting around a bonfire, or simply 'chilling' in the many comfortable gathering places this facility offers."



WITH THE LORD

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK

CHARLES H. JOHNSON



Charles Johnson, 90, went to be with his Lord October 1, 2016. Johnson enrolled at Baptist Bible College in 1950 and graduated in 1952. While a student he helped draft the original seal for BBC. He pastored churches in Wyoming, Texas, and Oklahoma before founding the OKC flight school in 1972 to train missionary pilots. He also served his country during World War II in the U.S. Air Force.

Johnson is survived by two sons, three grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. He was married to Ethel Susan (Meiss) Johnson for 64 years before her death in 2010. Services were held October 7 in Oklahoma City, officiated by his son, David Johnson.

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The greatest gift ever

By Randy Harp

Gift giving is one of the most popular traditions of Christmas. Retail sales are expected to exceed \$650 billion this November and December — approximately \$950 per person. That is a lot of gifts! But what makes a gift a good gift? The person who gave it to you? The beautiful wrapping? Because it's personal? Or maybe because it's so practical?

As we approach this Christmas season let's remember the greatest gift ever given was Jesus Christ. As John 3:16 so clearly states, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Why Jesus is the Greatest Gift Ever

Jesus is the greatest gift ever given for many reasons. First, because of who gave the gift. Sometimes a gift is just "more" special because of who it comes from. This is nowhere more evident than with Jesus. God is the One who loved the world so much that He gave this gift. According to Galatians 4:4, when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son.

Second, because of why the gift was given. My favorite gifts are usually the ones given to me by my children when they are completely unexpected — simply because they love me. Jesus was given because of God's love. "For God so loved the world." This love has no conditions, no limits, and never ends. God doesn't love you because of what you have done or not done. He loves you because He is love. First John 4:9 reminds us God showed His love to us by sending His son into the world.

Third, Jesus is the greatest gift ever because of how the gift was wrapped. Wrapping presents makes what's inside a surprise. The greatest gift ever was wrapped in a way that surprised many. An angel told the shepherds on that first

Christmas night that they would find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Even those expecting the Messiah weren't looking for a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. Even more amazing is that God was wrapped in human flesh, clothed in humanity. Philippians 2:7 speaks of Jesus taking on the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men. Someone once said, "The Word did not become a philosophy, a theory, or a concept to be discussed, debated, and pondered. Instead, the Word became flesh, the Word became a person to be followed, enjoyed, and loved."

Fourth, because of how much the gift cost. Recently I was at a store and saw a gentleman purchasing ten iPads. Yes, that was a minimum \$5,000 purchase. I was curious, so I struck up a conversation with him. He was purchasing an iPad for each of his grandchildren. I, somewhat jokingly volunteered to be an adopted grandchild. Jesus was far more expensive and valuable. He was the "only begotten" — the only one! The cost was sacrificial — Jesus was sent, according to Romans 5:8, with the purpose of dying for you and me.

Finally, Jesus is the greatest gift ever because of how practical the gift is. If I get a toaster for Christmas I expect it to make toast. If I get a Blu-ray player, I expect it to play Blu-rays. If I get a Christmas sweater, I re-gift it. The gift of Jesus Christ has the power and ability to literally change a life. Second Corinthians 5:17 says when we receive this gift of God we become a new creation. John 10:10 states our enemy, the thief,

comes to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. But Jesus has come to give life, a rich and satisfying abundant life.

What To Do With the Gift

The reality is that a gift is useless if it is never opened. What good is it if we just look at it from a distance? We have to embrace it. We must willingly receive it. Romans 6:23 boldly declares, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." How does one receive this gift? Romans 10:9 states, "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." If you have never received this gift, I urge you to consider it today. Contact the church or the person who gave you this magazine and share with them your need.

For those who have received this great gift, what are you to do? Re-gift it. This is actually part of God's plan. Before Jesus ascended to heaven he left us this responsibility, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." These next few weeks before Christmas provide the greatest opportunity for you to share this gift with your family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

Imagine what our world would look like if everyone truly understood the true meaning of Christmas and the greatest gift ever given.



DECEMBER 2016

PRAYER CALENDAR

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 	2 	3 
				MISSIONARY Greg & Collene Kent <i>Canada</i>	CHAPLAIN LCmdr Gregory & Evangelina Cates <i>US Navy</i>	MISSIONARY Joel & Wendy Solomon <i>Chile</i>
4 	5 	6 	7 	8 	9 	10 
T.E.A.M. MISSIONARY Brennan & Libby Penner <i>Belgium</i>	MISSIONARY George & Luisa Dimakos <i>Greece</i>	MISSIONARY Mona Bowles <i>Zambia</i>	MISSIONARY Dan & Vicki Weaver <i>Belize</i>	MISSIONARY Kevin & Sarah Pine <i>England</i>	MISSIONARY Alta Mae Lingo <i>Retired</i>	MISSIONARY Bill & Quessie Harvey <i>Mexico</i>
11 	12 	13 	14 	15 	16 	17 
MISSIONARY Joanne Foltz <i>Tanzania</i>	MISSIONARY Allen & Michelle Ketel <i>Russia</i>	Workers in Creative Access Countries	MISSIONARY Vernon & Mary Smith <i>Tanzania</i>	BBFI MISSION OFFICE - SPRINGFIELD, MO IT Department	MISSIONARY David & Peggy Disney <i>Chile</i>	T.E.A.M. MISSIONARY Chad & Jennifer Braymer <i>Costa Rica</i>
18 	19 	20 	21 	22 	23 	24 
MISSIONARY Vaughn & Dana Wilson <i>Mexico</i>	MISSIONARY Ken Board <i>Japan</i>	MISSIONARY Gordon & Brenda Pulley <i>S.M.O.R.S.</i>	MISSIONARY Rickey & Angela Freeman <i>Argentina</i>	MISSIONARY David & Tonya Liles <i>Peru</i>	Baptist Bible College <i>Springfield, MO</i>	MISSIONARY James A. & Amy Smith <i>Japan</i>
25 	26 	27 	28 	29 	30 	31 
MISSIONARY Ray & Ginger Crocker <i>Singapore</i>	MISSIONARY Shelly Henderson <i>Tanzania</i>	MISSIONARY Cody & Danielle Wilbanks <i>Italy</i>	APEX (church planting)	MISSIONARY Greg & Janet Peterson <i>Zambia</i>	MISSIONARY Mark & Michele Hale <i>Portugal</i>	MISSIONARY Wesley & Melina Lane <i>Dominican Republic</i>

As is the business of tailors to make clothes and cobblers to make shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray.
Martin Luther

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