

Tri-State Bible College
2024 Advent
Devotional

Devotion 1

Pondering Jesus' Humility

By Adjunct Professor Dr. Brad Brandt

"Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men"

Philippians 2:6 (ESV).

It's impossible for our finite minds to appreciate the change in living conditions the Son of God experienced when He came to earth. He left heaven—the loving presence of His Father, the praise of the angels, conditions of absolute bliss and total comfort. He left all that and far more, and came to earth—where there's sickness, suffering, pain, disease, sin, and man's greatest foe, death itself. But He didn't just come to earth. This was no casual, impersonal visit. He whom angel hosts adore entered this world as a human being. The Maker came as a mortal and robed Himself in human flesh. And for this we say to Him be the glory.

Devotion 2

The Savior and the Deliverer

By Adjunct Professor Barry Davis

"And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8 ESV).

The miraculous incarnation of Christ as a humble babe in Bethlehem's manger beautifully illustrates God's love and plan for humanity's salvation. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, willingly took on human flesh, in the form of a servant, becoming our perfect, sinless Savior (Philippians 2:6-8). This first coming of Christ fulfilled numerous Old Testament prophecies and provided the means for our redemption through His sacrificial death on the cross. Similarly, the anticipated rapture of the Church showcases Christ's role as our Deliverer. Just as He came to save us from the penalty of sin, He will return to rescue His bride, the Church, from the coming wrath during the Tribulation period (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, 5:9). Both events - the incarnation and the rapture - depict Christ's unwavering commitment to His people's salvation. Whether coming as a vulnerable infant or returning as the triumphant King to catch away His saints, Jesus demonstrates His love, mercy, and power as our eternal Savior.

Devotion 3

Eve's Hope

By Adjunct Professor Jenny May

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15).

As she looked down at the sleeping baby cradled in her arms, she remembered Yahweh's promise. Stroking his face, she hoped in her heart that this baby, her son, would be the One to crush the head of the serpent, to restore all creation back to its original perfect completion. She lovingly held him tight and proclaimed his name, "Cain (קַיִן)," stating "I have acquired (קָנִיתִי) a man from the LORD (Genesis 4:1)." She believed so certainly that this first son was the Head Crusher of the Serpent, that she named her next son Abel (הָבֶל), meaning "vanity" in Hebrew (cf. Eccl 1:2). What was the purpose of this second son if Cain was the Restorer of All Things? Years later, Eve's heart broke anew when the report came that Cain had murdered his brother Abel. How could this be possible? Her hope for restoration was as broken as Abel's body bleeding in the field. Sin had a grip on her entire family, on all of humanity, because of her decision. She had doubted God's instructions and had trusted her own judgement about the forbidden fruit. As she wiped the tears from her eyes, she determined in her heart that she would not doubt His Word again. She would look forward to the One that God had

promised, the Seed of the Woman that would crush the head of the Serpent. Another baby came, and she named him "Seth (שֵׁת), declaring, "God has appointed (שָׂם) for me another seed (Genesis 4:25)." Certainly, God would keep His promise to restore creation, to eradicate sin, to regain the community between Himself and humanity that originally existed in the Garden. She would look forward in faithful anticipation to the One who would make all things new. And generations later, at the absolute perfect time in human history, He would arrive! "And you shall call His name Jesus (יֵשׁוּעַ) for He will save (יִשְׁעַ) His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21)."

Devotion 4

The Rock Is Our Rock

By Adjunct Professor Dr. Alicia Malone

"[A]nd while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by" (Exodus 33:22 ESV).

Because of the accomplishments of the first Advent, when Christ entered the world to save humanity (cf. Gal 4:4), we will soon experience the second Advent at the return of Christ and be united with Him in the resurrection. When revisiting the resurrection epic as told by Mark, the Holy Spirit drops a golden nugget of insight! The women asked a poignant question in Mark 16:3, *"Who shall roll away the stone?"* However, that stone was no match for the Rock of Israel! God was known by the Psalmists and the Prophets as *the Rock of refuge* (cf. Ps 18:2; 31:21; 62:7; 71:3; 94:22; Is 17:10; 44:8; Hab 1:12). God, himself befriended Moses (Ex 33:22) and granted him the privilege to experience His presence: *"when My glory passes by, I will put you in the cleft [of the rock] and cover you with My hand."* Life is filled with obstacles and faux rocks, none of which compare to our matchless Rock of refuge. Brothers and sisters, God as our Rock is our protection, provision, promise (cf. Mt. 16:18), and purpose. He is Jesus Christ, the Rock of our Salvation! Thank God for the Rock and the resurrection, because He lives, we live!

Devotion 5

The Story of Mamaw Ruth: The Moabite at the Christmas Dinner

By Adjunct Professor Dr. Jacob Marshall

“Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth...” (Matthew 1:5).

Many of our Appalachian communities have a few families with some history. Just hearing their last name alone can tell you plenty about how they were raised, how they treat people, and what kind of person they are.

In the Hebrew Bible, we see something similar. Deuteronomy 23 explains how Moabites were banned from being part of God's people. This family had a shameful beginning and a cruel legacy of treating God's people badly. Yet, from this cursed family, a woman named Ruth found a new beginning and a new family through a relationship with a new God.

This Christmas, folks from every kind of family in Appalachia, every tribe and clan, are invited to a new beginning and a new family through Jesus, the Lord and Savior of all. Be they Moabites or Marshalls, Adkins or Cartwrights. Don't believe me? Just ask Ruth, one of Jesus' mamaws, this Christmas. *Merry Christmas!*

Devotion 6

In the Middle of It All

By Adjunct Professor Jeff Canterbury

"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27 ESV).

Christ is at the center of Scripture. When Jesus said to the disciples after the resurrection that all things written by Moses and the prophets "concerning himself" had to be fulfilled (Luke 24:27, 44), he uses a preposition in Greek (*peri*) that at its root means "surrounding," or "encircling." While I don't want to be guilty of the "root fallacy" in my interpretation of the text, I still believe this creates a great image by which we can see the relationship of the Scriptures (especially the Old Testament) to Jesus the Messiah. Picture Jesus in the middle of a great circle of people, all of whom are facing the central character. If we were to ask their names, we would hear the names of the great prophets and messengers of God through time, that succession of preachers and teachers who prophesied about both the first and second comings of Christ. In this rollcall of the main players in redemptive history, you will find Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Hosea, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and many more. And in a unified refrain and pointing to the central person, they are all saying, "He's the One!! It's all about Him!"

There is no doubt, the Bible is a “Jesus Book.” J. Vernon McGee said many years ago that Jesus is on every page of the Bible. You may not always be able to see Him there, but He is there, nonetheless. While this may be in many ways oversimplistic, let’s not dismiss it too quickly out of hand. Remember, Jesus said that the Old Testament spoke of the things “concerning himself.” He is both the Bible’s center and circumference. It’s perimeter (there’s a preposition *peri* again!) is marked out by Him! You just have to look for Him!

Now, the question is... Is He the center and circumference of your life? This Christmas season, may Jesus be “in the middle of it all.”

Devotion 7

In the Middle of It All

By Vice President of Academics Dr. Mark Phillips

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen
with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands,
concerning the word of life..." (1 John 1:1 ESV).*

That which is eternal could not have existed *physically* prior to Creation; therefore, the Word *took on* flesh and walked into His temple (cf. Malachi 3:1). The arrival of the unseen God to the world He created, clothed in human flesh, apprehended in a sensate manner — heard by human ears, seen with human eyes, touched by human hands, broiling fish over a wood fire smelled with human noses and tasted by human tongues — left no doubt of His being completely human, yet at times speaking the words and doing the deeds of YHWH in such a way He could be recognized as being God Himself. The advent of the incarnated Christ demonstrates that a fully Divine God desired to be understood to the best of our limited abilities and in such a way He could be perceived as One of Us, forgiving us, redeeming us, and giving us the ultimate Gift of Gifts, His eternal Life (cf. 1 John 5:11,12). May this season's Joy last year 'round for you and yours!

Devotion 8

When Bethlehem Became the House of Bread

By Adjunct Professor and Former TSBC President Dr. Kevin Bloomfield

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days” (Micah 5:2 ESV).

Soon after he made Christianity legal across the Roman Empire, the emperor Constantine commissioned the building of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem to commemorate the place of Jesus' birth. My wife, Crystal and I were touring Israel a few years ago and one of the sites we saw was the Church of the Nativity. It was in the second week of December. Bethlehem was packed with tourists who were singing traditional Christmas carols in languages we didn't understand. We watched the final touches of Christmas decorations being put in place in Manger Square and we reveled in the excitement of actually being in Bethlehem during this wonderful time of year.

“Bethlehem” is a Hebrew word that means, “house of bread.” Bethlehem was an important village in Old Testament times. It was the scene of Rachel's

death after Benjamin was born and also the location of the love story of Ruth and Boaz. Also, it was the place where David, Israel's greatest king was born. But it was never known in reality as the "House of Bread" until the Lord Jesus was born there as prophesied by the prophet Micah (5:2). In the passage, Micah draws a remarkable contrast between the "One coming forth unto Me" and yet "His goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." Even the Jews understood this to be the place of Messiah's birth (Mt 2:3-6). This special Ruler to be born there would be God's eternal Son for Micah said He would be "from everlasting." In this season of the year more people may be asking the question, "Can this Babe born in Bethlehem that Micah spoke about show us the way to heaven? Can He give us eternal life?" Micah's point is that this Babe to be born in Bethlehem came from heaven itself. This Babe is no blind guide. He has been there before, and no one can lead others to a place better than Someone who has already been there. Merry Christmas!

Devotion 9

Christology for Our Circumstances

By TSBC President Rex J. Howe

“[A]nd I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ” (Philemon 1:6 ESV).

The Apostle Paul wrote the New Testament letters to Philemon and to the Colossians during his first imprisonment around AD 60. Philemon's house church was also located in Colossae. From his prison cell, Paul wrote that he had heard of Philemon's faith and love toward the Lord Jesus and the saints (vv. 4–5). Philemon had earned a reputation for being a refresher of the affections of the saints. In his prayer of thanksgiving to God for Philemon, Paul made a request that the fellowship of Philemon's faith might become effective through the knowledge of all the good things in him for Christ's sake. The occasion for Paul's writing involved extremely difficult circumstances in which Paul hoped to experience the Christ-honoring-good-things in Philemon to result in effective fellowship.

In Paul's persuasive letter, he practiced his Christology to demonstrate the fitting thing for Philemon to do toward his runaway slave Onesimus. First, in verse 18, Paul wrote, “If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.” Paul practiced his Christological understanding of imputation for

the benefit of Onesimus (cf. Rom 4:1–8). Second, Paul wrote in verse 19, “I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.” Paul practiced his Christology to make things whole between Philemon and Onesimus (cf. Eph 2:14). The word “repay” is only used here in the New Testament; however, you can find this Greek word thirty times in the Greek Old Testament. The Hebrew verb typically behind it is “shalam,” which is related to the Hebrew noun “shalom.” The verb means to make restitution and thereby to make whole (cf. Lev 24:18; Ruth 2:12; Ps 37:21; Eze 33:15).

Paul put his doctrine about Christ and his cross to work in his life and discipleship. He persuaded Philemon to do the same regarding the serious circumstances with Onesimus. Ponder the good things in you for Christ's sake because of the work of his first advent. What circumstances do you face that require a fitting Christological response? As you anticipate the second advent of the Lord Jesus, will he return to find you as a refresher of hearts? Will he have heard of your faith and love? May your fellowship become effective in your circumstances, in the church, and for Christ's honor!