

# December 2009 Newsletter

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## CELEBRATING ADVENT

### WHAT IS ADVENT?

We sometimes forget that Christianity is not just a set of beliefs but it is a way of life. Part of the way in which we live out the life of Christianity is in the observance of Christmas and Easter. At the most basic level the Christian calendar is the cycle of work and rest that God set up in creation. We begin our week with rest. That is what Sunday and Sabbath are all about – beginning with rest so that we can have the strength for the tasks of the week ahead. Unfortunately even at this most basic level the church has lost its focus. For many of us Sunday is not a day of rest; it is a morning where we go to church and then we go on with the rest of our weekend. Sunday is not set apart as special in any way shape or form.

I bring this up because if it is true that we have lost our focus at the most basic level, how our weeks are structured, then we can see that it is also true at the broader level of the Christian feasts of Christmas and Easter. Each year as we get closer and closer to Christmas I hear the same things over and over – “We are so busy.” “I still have presents to buy.” “I just don’t have enough time to get it

all done.” These statements come from a position of having lost our focus on why we celebrate Christmas.

If we look at the two major festivals of the Christian calendar we see that they are each preceded by a period of time set aside for preparation. The time before Christmas is Advent. The time before Easter is Lent. The word Advent simply means “coming.” When we speak of the advent of Jesus we are talking about his coming. If this were a Catholic or an Episcopal church we would have the ministers wearing purple right now, the pulpit would have purple on it, the choir would have purple stoles on their robes. (Purple is the color of royalty and it is used in Advent to announce the birth of King Jesus.) That color would be a visual cue that we have entered into a time of preparation for the celebration of Christmas. In most Presbyterian churches the colors of Advent are not used, but we do incorporate the advent wreath and advent readings into the life of the church. This means that Advent is the time where the church prepares for the birth of our King. This is the time we give to reading and re-reading the prophecies about Messiah’s birth and the stories in the Gospels. But we also understand that there is not one but two advents of Messiah. The first Advent

was when he was born in the manger, but we also look forward to his second advent, when he will come again to judge the living and the dead. In the first advent Jesus came in humility (Phi. 2:5-8). In his second advent he comes in glory (Rev. 19-21).

### WHY SHOULD I CELEBRATE ADVENT?

At the most fundamental level the reason we should celebrate Advent is because it helps us to reflect on what Jesus came to do. We all know that this time of the year calls us to be hectic. We see the ads for the big sales and everyone in the ad is hectic, trying to find the best gift at the best price. We see it in movies, how a man is all caught up in busyness and it takes an angel, or Santa, to cause them to slow down. This is not the way it is supposed to be. We should celebrate advent so that we force ourselves to slow down. To take time out of our day to purposely say, I am not going to allow myself, or my family to get swept up with this false idea that this is supposed to be a busy time of the year. Celebrating Advent provides us with the opportunity to slow down and reflect on why we celebrate Christmas. It runs counter to the hurried nature of this season in the world at large. But that is

not the only reason we should celebrate advent. We should celebrate it to teach ourselves and our families the importance of Jesus' birth. As we rehearse the stories of the Gospel and the prophecies of the OT we are being reminded that what we are celebrating is the expectation of God's people from the time of the Fall. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit God gave them a promise:

*"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."*

*(Gen 3:15)*

Since that day his people were longing for Christmas – not the toys, not the gifts – the birth of Messiah, the Christ. So we teach ourselves and we teach our children by rehearsing the words of God about his Son. We want to instill in our children a longing for Christ not for toys and presents. And we do it because repetition is the key to making something a part of who you are. When we come to the time before Christmas, if we force ourselves to repeat the stories of Christ's birth they begin to become a part of us. The manger scenes we see begin to mean more to us because we are reminded of the story. The angel



that Jesus was made a servant, that he was made sin, poor, and that he was made man? How should we live our lives in light of that fact that these things are true?

### **WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? CHRISTMAS?**

Ah, it's Christmas time! The time of the year when the weather is cooler, when the stores are more crowded, when people seem kinder and friendlier. It is a time of surprise and unexpectedness that we do not find throughout the rest of the year – a time of excitement and anticipation that builds up to the finale of Christmas Day. I remember as a young child seeing the presents wrapped in boxes under the tree for much of the month of December. I felt an excitement about each gift that had my name on it, wanting to pick up and shake each one with a hint as to what was buried inside. I remember Christmas Eve nights and early mornings when I would lie awake in bed, thinking of what I would find in the morning when we were allowed to look in the next room. I do remember one year when I peeked before I was allowed, but that is another story for another time! Then, there was the joy when that anticipation was fulfilled – when we finally got to see the presents

with our own eyes and touch them and play with them.

It's getting closer to Christmas. You can almost see the excitement in the eyes of the children. You can walk down the street and almost hear people humming familiar Christmas tunes. You can nearly feel the warmth in the hearts of people that the holidays usually bring. There seems to be a lot to expect from this time of the year.

But sometimes I wonder if we expect too much of Christmas time and Christmas Day. David Grayson, an American journalist and writer, made the comment: "We try to crowd into it the long arrears of kindness and humanity of the whole year. As for me, I like to take my Christmas a little at a time, all through the year. And thus I drift along into the holidays – let them overtake me unexpectedly – waking up some fine morning and suddenly saying to myself: 'Why this is Christmas Day!'" Bob Hope said something similar: "My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others. Come to think of it, why do we have to wait for Christmas to do that?"

He brings up a good question – why do we have to wait for Christmas to do that? Why do we have to wait for Christmas to be kinder and friendlier than usual? Why do we have to wait for Christmas to talk about Jesus as the “reason for the season”? Why do we have to wait for Christmas in order to sing hymns and songs we typically only enjoy between Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day? To read passages of Scripture that center on the birth of Jesus Christ? To give gifts that bring joy to each other?

Why wait?

I am reminded of the story of the Good Samaritan. After being beaten and passed over by two of his own people, a Jewish man was helped and saved by a Samaritan. The Samaritan did not wait until the time was convenient for him to assist. He did not pass over the Jewish man because relations between their races were rocky, at best. He did not wait to show love and kindness. He simply acted. Jesus tells this story in answer to a question raised about the greatest commandment – you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself. It is implied that loving God and loving each other isn't done at our convenience or when

the season is right. Loving God and one another is an everyday occurrence. There is no reason to wait until the holidays. So, break out the eggnog and turn to the first part of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. It's time to celebrate Christmas – now and well after the decorations are packed away for the remainder of the year. The wait is over!

*Jay F.*

## **From the Youth-side...**

As we enter the holidays, we are reminded of the different traditions and memories we have shared throughout the years – the time we got that hideous sweater from our distant relative or how each year we go Christmas caroling in spite of the fact that we are not the best singers. Those special memories make us laugh and smile as we look again to what the holidays will bring. This year, the youth want to share those special memories and traditions that we have enjoyed with the rest of our church family. Here are the things that make us laugh and smile:

- My favorite holiday tradition is when all the kids in my family pile in the back of my dad’s truck with blankets and pillows to enjoy the beautiful bright lights at a drive-thru light show at a park in Coral Springs. *Cammy Hair, 14*
- Every year we would open a gift on Christmas Eve, which was our Christmas PJs. However, one year my grandma forgot which present was my Christmas PJs, so I had to open three gifts to get it. *Michaela Grimmig, 16*
- I have always enjoyed sharing Christmas dinner with my family. The food is great. *Stephen Harding, 14*
- My favorite things we do at Christmas are setting up the Christmas tree together and going to the Christmas Eve service at church. *Megan Wade, 17*
- My grandparents come to our house, which was cool because they bring a trunkload of presents. *Mitch, 13*
- I like to look at all the Christmas lights. *William Harding, 11*
- Every year for Christmas when I was younger, I would always look forward to going to my grandmother’s because I got to see all my uncles, aunts, and cousins. We would all have Christmas dinner together. *Anna Walker, 17*
- Every year me and my family either come to my house or my Auntie Jen’s house and my grammy brings crafts. We work on Christmas crafts with my whole family. Working on Christmas crafts is my favorite tradition. *Kaycee Hair, 13*
- On Christmas Eve, my family always watches a Christmas movie together, while eating cookies and drinking eggnog. We watch either “A Christmas Carol”, “A Christmas Story”, or “It’s a Wonderful Life”. *Caroline Tate, 15*
- My family always goes up to Orlando to be with family. It’s always fun because we open presents with each other and go to a movie. *Melissa Myers, 16*
- My family looks at Christmas lights together. *Justen Hunter, 14*

- I always enjoy the elaborate decorations at Grandma’s house.  
*Chris Lennon, 16*
- I love eating Cornish game hens at Grandma’s house and making Christmas Cookies.  
*Katlyn Lynch 16*
- I like waking up in the morning and eating an awesome breakfast. Then, we sit on the couches around the tree, listening to music and opening presents.  
*Emily Wade, 15*
- My favorite memories are breakfast quiche with the whole family, wrapping paper everywhere, and a dog going through a “forgotten” stocking.  
*Anna Forester, 26*
- I remember sneaking the “Santa’s whiskers” cookie dough out of the refrigerator before they make it to the oven. *Charlie Gauger, “20”*
- Every year my family gets together for the loudest Christmases you can imagine. One year, we took a school bus to look at Christmas lights while singing Christmas carols at the top of our lungs. It still makes me smile. *Jay Forester, 29*

We hope that as the year winds down that you would take time to stop and think about the special traditions and favorite memories you have shared with your family and friends. And maybe this year you can begin a new one!

*Merry Christmas from:  
Jay Forester and the youth*

## **CHILDREN’S MINISTRIES**

Children’s Activities in December:

On Sundays during Children’s Church we will stop our Old Testament lessons and start learning about the life of Jesus although we learned about Jesus in our Old Testament lessons too.

**Dec. 6<sup>th</sup>: *God meets our needs.*** – Luke 1:68-79 Zechariah Prophesies About Jesus

Teacher: Tatiana Cardona  
Helper: Caroline Tate

**Dec. 13<sup>th</sup>: *Living right honors God.*** – Luke 3:7-18 – John Prepares People for the Coming of Jesus

Teacher: Lisa Lennon  
Helper: Christy Gauger

**Dec. 20<sup>th</sup>:** *The birth of Jesus is something to celebrate.* – Luke 1:26-45; 2:1-20 – The Son of God Is Born!

Teacher: Carol Brandt  
Helper: Hazel Brown

**Dec. 27<sup>th</sup>:** *Jesus is amazing.* – Luke 2:39-52 – Jesus Grows Up

Teacher: Lisa Lennon  
Helper: Jennifer Wade



On Wednesdays we have learned more than 50 catechism answers! We are learning so much about our faith.

Dec. 2<sup>nd</sup> - #56 How does God justify you? And #57 How does God sanctify you?

Dec. 9<sup>th</sup> - # 58 What must you do to be saved?

Dec. 16<sup>th</sup> - #59 How do you repent of your sin?

Dec. 23<sup>rd</sup> – A Birthday Party for Jesus – Bring one small wrapped gift (something for a boy or a girl) for a gift exchange. We will have a Catechism contest for the gifts. Everyone will get a gift!

Dec. 30<sup>th</sup> – A New Years party to thank God for all He has done for us in 2009 along with a video on thankfulness.

Please continue to pray for our covenant children and their activities. If you would like to help in any of these programs, we would love to have the help. Please call Lisa Lennon 433-2540 or e-mail her at [l.lennon@live.com](mailto:l.lennon@live.com).

*Lisa*

## **LIBRARY NEWS**

What's the best kept secret at LOPC?  
It's the LIBRARY!!

How many of you know that we have one of the very best libraries in town? It's located downstairs next to the session room and is worth looking for..

The library is stocked with many wonderful books, both fiction and non-fiction for all ages. It also has videos CDs and DVDs

Some of the new non-fiction books are:

*"Lord, Change My Attitude"*  
by James MacDonald

*"The Fruitful Life"*  
by Jerry Bridges

*"Your Questions Answered-  
A Reply To Your Muslim Friends"*  
by E.M. Hicham

*"Grace Abounds"*  
by John Bunyan

*"Instruments In The Redeemer's Hands"*  
by Paul David Trip

There are also many new fiction books by our reader's favorite authors. So come on down and take advantage of this wealth of books just waiting to be read.

Library hours are:

Tues 12:00 noon to 2:00 pm

Wed. 6:30 pm to 6:55 pm

Sun 9:55 am to 10:20 am

and after the church service.

## **OUTREACH "Out There"**

For many of us who've been directly involved in outreach here at Lake Osborne for the past two years, it's been more about being friendly and welcoming to people as we've drawn them to us than it has been about being "out there". I think of events like the rummage sale and the fall festival. The Outreach Team took advantage of these times in the life of our church to "show forth" our concern for our neighbors, to

actually be interested in them enough to say "hello" and engage them in conversation when they came to these events.

There was also a striving to "cultivate an outreach mentality", the hope being that as our thinking transformed we would, more and more, simply think in terms of outreach. Those means, those goals haven't changed but they are being expanded.

Pastor Ortiz has, and rightfully so, been asking some good questions and setting before us some proper challenges. Those questions have begun to get us all thinking more in terms of "getting out there", of getting "off campus". We're trying to set the bar higher and think more "long range". Trying, also, to understand how the rummage sale or the fall festival can be leveraged into a more "extroverted" event has become a real challenge! Frankly, I'm not confident that I know how it can be done but...that's what teams are for!

Happily, Omar brings to LOPC a personal experience with outreach off campus. The work day we had with Habitat for Humanity back in late October was a good beginning, a real "first step" for many of us. Our Habitat

work days are just the first step we are taking in cultivating a new outreach mentality here at the church. We are continually assessing new ministry opportunities for LOPC such as First Care, volunteering for community clean-up days, and working with ESL.

I feel as though we've set our feet on a path more in the direction He would have us go. That's what I want to believe. I'm excited to see how it all may unfold before us but not as a spectator - I intend to walk that road.

*Jay Myers,  
Outreach Team Leader*

### **GREETINGS FROM THE WIC COUNCIL**

We are very excited about our upcoming Christmas Glow. It will be held on Friday, December 4<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 in the fellowship hall. We will be eating a delicious chicken marsala dinner and listening to a wonderful choral group from St. Andrews directed by our very own Dr. Carl Ashley. On top of that we will be brought a Christmas message from not one but both of our pastors' wives Kate Ortiz and Anna Forester. The icing on top of that is our wonderful

men are going to be serving us and cleaning up afterwards. It is definitely a "Church Family Christmas". The cost of the tickets is \$10. We will start selling them in the Narthex on Sunday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>. We really hope you will make this a part of your Christmas celebration! Please feel free to invite friends to join us. If you have any questions, feel free to contact any of the Council members or Melissa Backus at [bmback@comcast.net](mailto:bmback@comcast.net) or 370-9266.

We have not decided on a specific date yet, but sometime in late January or early February we will be having a new members' tea. We had one last year and it was quite a success. It was nice getting to know our new ladies in a home setting. We will be having a cookie exchange at that time also. It is sure to be a fun time for all. We will be getting that date out to you as soon as possible.

The WIC Council wishes all of you and your families a very blessed and safe Christmas season!

*In Him, Becky Forester*



## **MATTHEW SMITH**



### **Upcoming Event:**

In the Spring we will be hosting a concert with Matthew Smith. We are incorporating some of his music into our Sunday morning worship. He will also be leading a seminar on why we should still sing hymns. More information will be available in the next newsletter.

Here is a brief bio:

Matthew Smith is an East Nashville singer-songwriter who writes brand new music to centuries-old hymn texts. He is a founding member of the Indelible Grace community, whose work has drawn acclaim across denominational lines and is used in churches around the world. Born out of a college ministry, the reimagined hymns have found wide acceptance both among college students and the church at large, joining people who desire to honor tradition with those who want a modern musical approach. His latest album, *All I Owe*, focuses on how Jesus sets people free from the burden of both God's law and self-imposed laws, by crediting his perfect life and death to those who trust in him.