

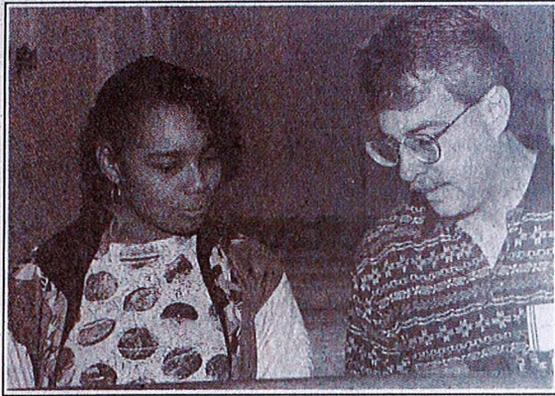
TENNESSEE'S BAPTIST & REFLECTOR

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this week's news

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Association's Toy Store cheers about 3,400



WITNESSING to a recipient of the Toy Store, Sheryl London, left, of Nashville, is Ken Harmon of Valley View Church, Nashville.

By Connie Davis
Baptist and Reflector

NASHVILLE — Many of the volunteers at Nashville Baptist Association's Toy Store keep coming back year after year. They do it for the sake of the children, who receive gifts, often the only gifts they will receive, from the store. The volunteers also come to see the joy and surprise on the faces of parents who come to choose gifts for those children.

The parents are constantly amazed at the gifts provided by Baptists and friends, said Susan Nally, volunteer from Crisewood Church, Nashville. She told one mother who had

tears in her eyes, "If you start that this early, you'll have us crying all day."

Amazement isn't the exclusive purview of the parents. Many volunteers are amazed when they lead a recipient of the ministry to find God during spiritual counseling sessions.

The association's Toy Store was held Dec. 9-13 at Shelby Avenue Church, Nashville. Offered since 1951, the store provided toys for about 3,400 people, mostly children, and resulted in 69 people making professions of faith.

Carolyn Demonbreun, advisor for the project who was director for 24 years and who



ADMIRING a homemade bear which she has chosen for her child's Christmas gift is Sophia Morrow, left, of Nashville, with help from worker Jennie Pittman, Tusculum Hills Church, Nashville. — Photos by Connie Davis

has volunteered for 41 years, explained that "the church can help the circumstances they are in and we have been able to do that through the years." She is especially proud of the volunteers who follow up with families they meet during the project. Demonbreun is a

member of Shelby Avenue Church.

Another long-time volunteer, Nadine Dalton, who has served for 33 years, said she comes to see the results of faith realized at the store. The member of Parkway Church. — See Association's, page 4

MOVING? Cut out and mail address label and new address to *Baptist and Reflector*, P.O. Box 726, Brentwood, Tenn., 37024

And how can they believe, if they have never heard?

Of all the words in Christmas carols and cards we exchange at Christmas time, none is so poignant — even sad — as a few from the deeply moving anthem, *O Holy Night*.

That particular message reminds us that the world was overwhelmed by the darkness of sin, and that when Christ appeared, "the soul felt its worth." So then, what is the worth of a soul?

The "souls" pictured here are standing beside a small, muddy pond in Burundi. Dressed in white, these 97 new Christians awaited baptism.

We watched as missionaries and the local pastor led them into the water. We know them as brothers and sisters in Christ. The world was no longer dark to them, they had reason to celebrate new life, new birth in the Savior.

They knew, as we did, that the Christ of Bethlehem, was also the Christ of Burundi. And we were all filled with his joy.

This Christmas, though the exact date of the first one is uncertain, we great Tennessee Baptists with the fervent hope and prayer for HIS best in 1997 — for precious souls, like these, to be welcomed into the Kingdom. *We must tell them!*

All the lost people of the world need to hear

the Gospel. Scripture says, "How can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14b-15). Go, tell it on the mountain ... and everywhere. Blessed Christmas, Tennessee Baptists. — *Editor*



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Bold Mission Thrust moving on God's timetable: Rankin

By Louis Moore
For Baptist Press

JACKSON, Miss. — Bold Mission Thrust is gaining momentum and is well on its way to being fulfilled in God's time frame, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin told the agency's trustees during their Dec. 8-11 meeting here.

And trustees called on the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee to rework the SBC Cooperative Program allocation formula "as a tangible demonstration" of its "heightened focus on missions."

While their resolution did not spell out how Cooperative Program receipts ought to be divided, it clearly signaled a desire for an increase in foreign missions funding. Currently, the board receives 50 percent of all funds that arrive undesignated at the Executive Committee from states, churches, or individuals.

Rankin's comments challenged critics who claim Bold Mission Thrust is a failure because several numerical goals established more than 20 years ago have not been achieved.

"Those who, with pes-

simism, announce the failure of Bold Mission Thrust from a statistical analysis are absorbed with human programs and plans and are out of touch with a sovereign God who is moving in providence and power 'that repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all nations,'" Rankin said. "They are locked into a narrow denominational view that has traditionally 'commended ourselves by ourselves and measured ourselves by ourselves' rather than seeing divine activity through a filter of faith."

During their meeting, trustees also approved a proposal creating a new category for missionary appointment — an apprenticeship — that eliminates one of the hurdles some have felt detoured potential missionary candidates from the field.

The new apprenticeship program allows candidates to go straight to the mission field from seminary without the required two years of full-time work experience in the United

States. Proponents of the change have argued that the two-year requirement diverted attention away from the mission field to other forms of ministry in the United States.

Seminary graduates intending to go to the mission field sometimes accept church assignments in the United States to meet the two-year requirement, but then get involved in that work, start families and move away from their original calling to international missions, explained Lloyd Atkinson of the board's office of mission personnel.

Under the new program, missionary apprentices will use their four-year term to meet the requirement for appointment as career missionaries. Trustees also voted to place a maximum age of 45 on those seeking appointment as career missionaries.

During the trustee meeting 51 new missionaries were appointed Dec. 8 at Jackson's First Church. The 51 appointments insure the board will again break records for total missionary appointments in one year, Rankin said. He predicted the total count will exceed 580. The board currently has 4,138 missionaries under

appointment, plus more than 15,000 volunteers this year.

During business sessions trustees also approved:

(1) a new charter to be presented to the SBC Executive Committee. That charter officially changes the name of the Foreign Mission Board to the International Mission Board. The name change is expected to take effect next June.

(2) a recommendation from the board's location study committee that the board's headquarters remain in Richmond, Va., where it has been based since its beginning in 1845. The committee said it would cost \$40 million to \$50 million to relocate the board and such a move would divert energies and funds away from international missions at a time when God is opening new fields and providing new opportunities worldwide.

(3) authorized the agency to enter Iceland and Greenland as new mission fields. The board will now seek missionary personnel for those countries.

(4) honored Thurmon Bryant, who is retiring after four years as vice president of the office of mission personnel. He joined the FMB as a missionary in 1958. ■



RANKIN

In Kingsport

Local parents to try once again for 'released time'

By Ken Walker
For Baptist Press

KINGSPORT — Despite failing to establish off-campus religious instruction for public school students in this northeastern Tennessee community, a parents group that includes several Southern Baptists will try again.

"Religious liberty is an issue that will not go away," said Ann Bennett, a member of the eight-person steering committee seeking to organize "released time" classes in Kingsport. "People haven't given up in the past."

While the Kingsport city school board unanimously voted down the concept in early December, the parents' group expects more favorable treatment from the adjoining Sullivan County school board.

Bennett, a member of Indian Springs Church, said the county board is likely to approve soon a pilot project for a middle school. Parents plan to approach educational authorities in neighboring Bristol as soon as they find a church to sponsor a class.

If the parents convince the city school board to reconsider, six churches already have agreed to teach the Kingsport sessions. Three are Southern Baptist churches — Indian Springs, Calvary, and Lynn Garden.

"We want to give parents in the public school system an alternative to morals that are already being taught," Bennett said. "The goal of family life education

classes is to prevent teen pregnancy, but it never asks if (premarital sex) is OK. We think that's terrible.

"Many programs are based on the idea that children are going to have sex anyway. A released time program will teach (abstinence)" and introduce biblical morality, Bennett said.

Although it is only one city with less than 40,000 residents, the struggle in Kingsport has nationwide implications. It is one of more than 10 school systems where programs either are being considered or have been implemented recently with the assistance of Scripture Union, a Philadelphia-based ministry which operates in 119 countries. Its work led to the formation of the well-known college campus outreach, InterVarsity Fellowship.

Roger Blankenship, vice president of Scripture Union and director of its national school division, said the resistance encountered in Kingsport is unusual.

Advance press coverage probably contributed to some negative impressions of the concept there, he said.

"When a school board perceives public sentiment is running against it, they'll vote it down, whether it's the right thing or not," Blankenship said.

Presently, Scripture Union has helped organize released time at two schools in Milwaukee; four school systems in South Carolina; and pilot projects in Paterson, N.J., and Philadelphia.

The ministry is planning to present soon a proposal to a variety of denomina-

tions, including the Southern Baptist Convention, encouraging their participation in released time. School authorities are generally more receptive to an interdenominational approach, said Blankenship, an ordained Southern Baptist minister.

Although it has been around for more than 80 years, he said released time is unfamiliar to millions of Americans. It refers to releasing students from public school classes to attend religious-based instruction, usually for an hour or two per week.

Although the Supreme Court ruled in 1948 that it was unconstitutional to use public classrooms for such classes, four years later it upheld the practice for off-campus sessions.

Bennett said she believes the need for released time education can be seen in 1995 statistics gathered by the federal Centers for Disease Control.

They show 80 percent of high school students have tried alcohol, 42 percent have used marijuana, and about 20 percent have sniffed glue or other inhalants. In the month before the survey, 20 percent had carried a gun or other weapon to school. Fifty-three percent had engaged in sex, a figure that rose to 60 percent in Tennessee.

"The moral state we're in is so serious we should consider it a judgment of God," she said. "We should repent of taking him out of our daily situations and making him into a Sunday and Wednesday God," she added. ■

HMB honors Larry Lewis; Tennessee native is successor

By Martin King
For Baptist Press

ALPHARETTA, Ga. — The Home Mission Board paid tribute to retiring President Larry L. Lewis and elected Tennessee native Ernest J. Kelley as his successor.

Meeting Dec. 9-11 at the board's suburban Atlanta headquarters, HMB directors named Kelley, who currently serves as executive vice president of the mission agency, as interim president until the board is dissolved as a part of the Southern Baptist Convention's reorganization.

The work of the Home Mission Board has been assigned to the new North American Mission Board (NAMB) which will be created when its trustees organize in June. Kelley begins his term Jan. 1, 1997, when Lewis completes nearly 10 years in that position.

Kelley told Baptist Press the next six months will be vi-

tal to the work of the new agency. "I will rely on the prayers of Southern Baptists and pledge my reliance on the direction of the Holy Spirit as we begin this six-month period of transition," Kelley said. "I believe it will be a difficult but productive time as we seek his leadership."

Kelley, a native of Sewanee, has served at the Home Mission Board 19 years, was a member of the Georgia Baptist Convention staff 12 years, and was pastor of churches in Georgia, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. He holds a D.Min. from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in California, having earlier earned degrees from Cumberland University, Lebanon, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. He and his wife, Eleanor, have two grown daughters.

Lewis, in his final report to the board, said the agency's progress toward Bold Mission Thrust goals, a convention-

wide, end-of-the-millennium strategy, has been significant.

"While other mainline Protestant denominations have declined during Bold Mission Thrust, Southern Baptist membership grew 19 percent. ... The number of SBC churches grew 13 percent, not including 5,000 church-type missions. ... And the number of home missionaries grew 73 percent," Lewis said. While goals for the number of Southern Baptist mission volunteers have already been exceeded, the number of SBC-endorsed chaplains and the number of churches involved in ministry are "on target," Lewis



LEWIS



KELLEY

said. Although expressing disappointment that evangelism goals have not been met, Lewis said he is confident they will be reached by the end of the year 2000.

"I still have faith that with the major emphasis on evangelism through Celebrate Jesus 2000, and the obvious moving of God in America, we will reach the goal of winning and baptizing one-half million people per year."

Pledging full support to the new North American Mission Board, Lewis encouraged its leadership to keep church starting and ministry as high priorities, and advised the SBC Executive Committee to provide the agency with sufficient resources.

"I trust the savings produced by the restructuring will indeed go to home missions. ... I join my colleague, Jim Williams (outgoing Brotherhood president), in asking our leaders to fund the North

American Mission Board at a rate of at least 25 percent of the Cooperative Program budget. Each year, the Home Mission Board turns down nearly 75 percent of the mission projects we negotiate with our mission partners simply because we do not have the funds," Lewis said. "I do not believe Southern Baptists want the money saved through the consolidation diverted to causes other than home missions."

The board passed a resolution of appreciation for Lewis and named in his honor the lake which was built as a part of the new national office building in Alpharetta, Ga. He also was presented with a new automobile during an evening retirement dinner attended by board members, SBC leadership from across the country, staff, family, and friends.

Lewis will begin serving the first of the year with Mission America coordinating the work of more than 100 evangelical denominations. ■

Three Tennesseans named to ASBCS board of directors

By Tim Fields
For Baptist Press

NASHVILLE — In their mid-year meeting, members of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools (ASBCS) elected a 15-member board of directors, which includes three Tennessee Baptists, to develop policies and oversee activities as the organization assumes some of the functions of the Education Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, which closes its doors Dec. 31.

The association, made up of 68 Southern Baptist-related seminaries, colleges, Bible colleges and high school academies, has operated in concert with the Education Commission, which, after 80 years of operation, is the first of six agencies to be dissolved or merged under the convention's "Covenant for a New Century" reorganization plan.

In an agreement worked out between members of the Education Commission and the Southern Baptist Convention's Implementation Task Force and ratified by the SBC Executive Committee in September, the commission is closing six months ahead of schedule and all employees and programs terminated in exchange for a \$150,000 grant to be paid to the association over a two-year period. The agreement will net the convention approximately \$200,000 in unused funds from the Education Commission's

nine-month 1996-97 budget of \$400,000, approved at the SBC annual meeting in June, and from commission reserves.

Ben Elrod, ASBCS chairman and president of Ouachita University in Arkansas, told association members Steve Carleton, executive director of ASBCS and also executive director of the Education Commission, will continue to serve as executive director of ASBCS through June 1997. At that time the association plans to elect a permanent director.

Carleton told members that due to budget restraints he probably will be the only full-time employee until June 1997 and additional services would be secured on a contract basis. Carleton told Baptist Press the ASBCS board is expected to name a search committee before June and he would then place his name in consideration for the permanent post.

Carleton reported to members 51 of the 68 Southern Baptist schools already had paid their association dues for 1996-97. The dues were increased approximately 500 percent during a called meeting of the association last September in Mobile, Ala.

"I am extremely pleased that these schools have stepped up to the plate to begin paying their own way as an association," Carleton said. "To date we have collected \$99,000 in dues. With the Southern Baptist Convention's grant of \$100,000 for 1997, the associa-

tion's reserves of \$25,000 and some funds that the Texas and Georgia state Baptist conventions have indicated they will provide, the association will have an operating budget of approximately \$230,000 for 1997," Carleton said.

"These funds will help us assume some of the programs formerly assigned to the Education Commission. I'm confident the remainder of the schools will pay their dues shortly and join us in this important venture," he said.

"Our greatest challenge is to find additional funding during the next two years to replace the grant from the SBC," he said.

During his report to association members, Carleton said the SBC Executive Committee will allow association offices to be located in the Southern Baptist Convention building in Nashville through Jan. 31, and the Tennessee Baptist Convention has given approval for the association to be located at its offices in Brentwood in space available later in 1997.

While it is unclear where the association will be housed after Jan. 31 and before space is available at the TBC, the TBC will begin receiving mail for the association Jan. 1. Correspondence can be addressed to the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools, P.O. Box 728, Brentwood, TN 37027. The phone number for the Association, beginning Jan. 1, will be (615) 391-9938.

Carleton told association members the ASBCS has been granted publishing rights to *The Southern Baptist Educator*, which has been published by the Education Commission the past 61 years. ASBCS will decrease the frequency of the magazine from 10 times a year to quarterly. Carleton said the association has contracted with Tim Fields, assistant director of the Education Commission and current managing editor, to edit, and publish the magazine through June 1997.

Carleton said other programs expected to be provided by the association include an employee referral service similar to the placement registry maintained by the Education Commission, promotion of workshops and seminars and electronic communication such as an Internet web site for communication among schools and promotion of the institutions to the public.

Among those elected to the board of directors were Cordell Maddox and Michael V. Carter, Carson-Newman College, and James Porch, TBC executive director. Other directors are: Ben Elrod, Arkansas; Pat Taylor, Missouri; Jairy Hunter, South Carolina; Howell Todd, Mississippi; Larry McSwain, Georgia; Doug Hodo, Texas; Thomas Corts, Alabama; Bob Agee, Oklahoma; Joseph Early, Kentucky; Don Schmellekopf, Texas; Bill Pinson, Texas; and Dan Grant, Arkansas. ■

Evangelism leaders practice what they teach

Baptist Press

HONOLULU — State directors of evangelism, seminary evangelism professors, and Home Mission Board staff seized the opportunity to practice what they teach during their annual winter meeting Dec. 4-8.

Seventy conference participants joined 100 Nuuanu Church members in a Saturday block party and intensive door-to-door witnessing effort resulting in 112 professions of faith in Jesus Christ.

Located north of downtown Honolulu, the church sponsored the project to reach its neighborhood for Christ. Thirty-five teams were sent into the communities surrounding the church to conduct a prospect survey and share the Gospel. Other volunteers went to a local park to provide a personal witness to the 600-plus people who came for the free food and entertainment.

"The response of the local people to the visitors from the mainland was incredible," said Rick Lazor, pastor of Nuuanu.

"Usually the Hawaiians are reluctant to new people," he observed. ■

Association's Toy Store cheers about ...

— Continued from page 1
Goodlettsville, said it has never ceased to amaze her how needs are met since no one knows how many people who live in the area served by the store will need toys, how many toys Baptists will give, and how many volunteers will help.

Dalton, who coordinated volunteers for the Toy Store, said the store had changed lives. She noted that recipients had returned to serve as volunteers.

The ministry also is spreading, she added. A former volunteer, Billy Kemp, who worked while he was attending Belmont University, returned this year although he is serving on the church staff of Central Church, Crossville. Kemp brought workers from his church and reported that the church had begun a similar ministry.

Pat Malone, current director from Haywood Hills Church, Nashville, said she has worked for more



MALONE

than 20 years because she has seen needs met miraculously. One year, she said, a mother came with a child who was about two years old. The child didn't have any shoes. Although the Toy Store that year didn't receive many clothing donations, Malone found a pair of shoes which fit perfectly.

This year, she said, a volunteer heard a father ask if the store had a certain doll his daughter wanted. The volunteer found the doll on the top of a huge mound of toys in the storage area.



DEMONBREUN

Malone explained that the project, because of its magnitude, is a year-long effort. The Toy Store is subsidized by gifts from Baptists and by the association, which gave \$3,000.

The Toy Store receives referrals from the Council of Community Services Christmas Clearing Bureau. The people referred, said Malone, are those receiving aid from government programs. The store serves families living in an area which has the zip code 37206.

From these referrals, letters



CHECKING OUT of the gift area are Judy Merrimon, right, of Nashville, and her helper Jennie Pittman, Tusculum Hills Church, Nashville, with the help of Jack Shepherd, Woodbine Church, Nashville, and Janice Cox, Harpeth Heights Church, Nashville.



PUSHING a new tricycle for her children is Cherica Lynch, center, of Nashville, as Bonnie Breland, left, Tusculum Hills Church, Nashville, and Joanne Ramsey, Creevewood Church, Nashville, watch.

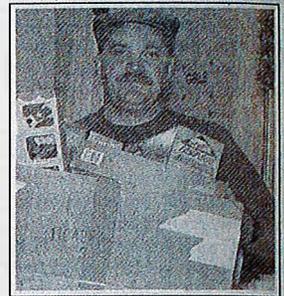
were mailed to about 700 families inviting them to participate. Additionally, the Toy Store accepts referrals from churches.

Demonbreun explained that the ministry can be complex as people with needs request help. During this interview, both Malone and Demonbreun received many phone calls and personal requests for help. They are checked to avoid duplicating ministry.

Demonbreun said it is a blessing. "I do it for the children," she said. **BGR**



ADVISING on the distribution of food items is Carolyn Demonbreun, left, as volunteers, from left, Vivian Hampton, Grace Church, Nashville; Edith Anderson, Creevewood Church, Nashville; and Joan Morrissey, Grace Church, listen.



DELIVERING a box of toys is Dwayne Lindsey of Park Avenue Church, Nashville.



RECEIVING instructions from Nadine Dalton, right, of Parkway Church, Goodlettsville, are, from left, Millie Malone, Faith Maxwell, Mary Armstrong, and Jodi Ervin, all of Creevewood Church, Nashville.



INFLATING basketballs are Jack Shepherd, left, Woodbine Church, Nashville, and Jim Dalton, Parkway Church, Goodlettsville.

Christmas — It is Immanuel's time

Before we get totally involved in the busy-ness of Christmas, perhaps before we talk about music and ornaments for the tree, bells on the street corners, church choir cantatas — we should look again at the way Jesus (not the Baby in the manger) explained the fulfillment of Scripture.

It was in his town, Nazareth, that he was rejected. We read Luke's account as Jesus read from the scroll, 4:17-20:

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

"Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down."

And then, Luke tells us, Jesus the Christ, said something remarkable and different. He said, *"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

The Scripture says that "all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips."

Only a few minutes later the people were enraged when Jesus poured on them his knowledge that "no prophet is accepted in his hometown."

And he knew their hearts.

Someone there may have been present when the angels told the glad tidings at his birth near Bethle-

hem. Someone may have taken him seriously. Some distant friend of the family may have wished him well in his ministry.

Probably not.

He had reminded them of their own narrow-mindedness and unwillingness to accept people outside their circle.

So before we begin our trek to Bethlehem, before we are totally absorbed in our own festivities, let's remember the Savior's words on that day in Nazareth.

Christmas, as we call it, was announced and celebrated by a chosen group. The voices were loud, clear, full of praise and glory.

Shepherds, in humility and awe, had no hymns to sing, no offering plates to pass around, no coffee and donuts to eat while they listened.

Not that they would have wanted to do any of that — it wasn't the time or place.

There was not one negative voice or action recorded about that first "Christmas." Only the strong, sweet truth about the birth of Messiah!

We can say hurrah with an exclamation point, but even that is feeble. Testimony shows that those worshippers were fastened to one point in time, for one grand event.

Ah, let it be so for us.

We have been flooded with Christmas greetings and many reminders of the world's kind of Christmas. We have observed a certain sadness, because many people think, even now, that Christmas is little more than getting and spending.

The cards of joy, the messages from those who re-

ally know about the Christ who is the Joy that the angels announced, they hear the glad tidings of truth.

Letters from Baptist missionaries remind us not only of the answered call, but of the love expressed by Christians who want to share Christmas. So they tell us what the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions means. They tell us how the gifts help in South Africa and Costa Rica, in Benin and Brazil, and assorted places in between.

They tell us how the gifts help provide necessities when the budget falls short of needs. They tell us about Bethlehem and Jerusalem!

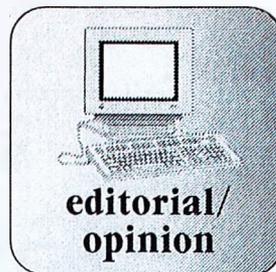
You see, the missionaries have the burning desire to tell people everywhere about the birth of Jesus. But more than that, their desire is to tell about the Christ of Salvation!

We must have that same burning desire, we must. If the world is to be won to Christ, every Christian, every Christian, must be willing to do their part.

A recent survey says that Americans don't place the birth of Christ at the top of the list of important reasons for Christmas. It's the family, most say.

Well, what better time to celebrate the life of Christ than with a family. What better time to tell the truth about Christmas!

"Long lay the world in sin and error pining — till he appeared and the soul felt its worth." So may it be with every Christian, tell the Good News! **B&R**



By Wm. Fletcher Allen, Editor

Just for today

By Fred Wood
pastor emeritus
Eudora Church, Memphis

Start with a smile

Waitress to older man: "Your daughter is a bigger tipper than you are."

Older man, responding: "Of course, I know. She has a wealthy father."

Take this truth

Have you ever noticed how few children of wealthy parents carry over a disciplined, sacrificial life into their generation?

Also, what about the third generation? How long does a family fortune usually last?

An old cliché says, "Shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves in three generations!"

Memorize this Scripture

"Wisdom is as good as an inheritance, a real profit for mankind." — Ecclesiastes 7:11, Moffatt

Pray this prayer

Lord, please help me to understand early in life that usually only those who earn money know how to spend it wisely. ■

How far to Bethlehem, how long until it's Christmas?

Have you ever wondered about Christmas in the minds of peoples who waited for the dawning of the Light — long ago?

What did they call it, that calendared time on God's schedule?

Christmas — the word and the day, has a distinctive, almost mysterious aura about it. Christmas.

Each of us has seen a dozen Bethlehems, perhaps more. Though we did not see the special star, nor hear the celestial choir, we have been to Bethlehem.

Perhaps in our heart of hearts, the Savior is still in Bethlehem. But, in reality, God Almighty has not imprisoned him in the cradle-manger, he has loosed him upon the world.

And by that, Christ has carried a little bit of Bethlehem with him, wherever he is. Bethlehem is all around us.

It is necessary to believe in Bethlehem before we can put our faith and trust in Messiah. We have to know that he came into our world as we come, that he lived in our world as we do, and that he died a human death — as we will. Ah, there's the end of it. He arose, and so we must also

one word more

— by Wm. Fletcher Allen, editor

equate the Risen Lord with Someone more than we are.

I have visited real Bethlehem several times, always with awe and reverence.

But one of my Bethlehems came to me years ago when I served with the 14th Armored Cavalry Regiment in Germany.

At Christmas, some of us chose to share Christ's love with some homeless children at an orphanage some thirty miles distant.

We pooled our money and shopped in downtown Fulda for the clothing and toys the orphanage parents had said were needed. It was unbridled joy!

On the night before Christmas, we loaded our jeeps, climbed aboard, heading for Haselstein.

The snow glistened on the hillsides and trees under the silver moon. We drove through the little town, turned off onto a

one-lane road through a deep forest.

After several breathtaking miles, we emerged into a meadow of purest white with the stars like jewels above and the castle-like children's home beckoning across the way.

It was my imagination, of course, but one brilliant low-hanging star seemed to hover over the home. We were deluged by the children when we arrived. They jabbered in German, but we knew what they were saying.

Wilkommen, welcome, come in from the cold.

We did. Moments later they sang their carols to us, acted out the nativity drama (with Joseph happily chewing bubble gum), and the nuns smiling

with joy.

It was Bethlehem. They hugged us over and over again, and left our jackets wet with plenty of tiny tears.

I have known many Christmases. I have been to real Bethlehem. But, I think, that place of joy also was Bethlehem, and all that it means to us. ■



ALLEN



WOOD

Suggestions for beating the holiday blitz

families matter

— by Paul Barkley, counselor, professor

While this season of the year is anticipated by most people for a great part of the year, some dread it.

We want to celebrate the birth of our Savior, but we can get caught up in a frantic pace of involvement. This is enjoyable, but there is a subtle stress.

It is late to talk about planning, but the best way to avoid stress is to stay with a plan. Everyone then knows what to expect.

It is good to make healthy decisions. You have the right and responsibility to take care of yourself.

Here are some suggestions for emotions and expectations.

Emotions are FEELINGS.

Financial pressures are often driven by guilt. What will they think? Eliminate loneliness by making yourself attend some church activities. Endure the sadness that comes from job loss, death, a move, etc. Limit eating, drinking, and spending in order to limit remorse later.

Include others by going to social functions. Nurture yourself by attending your needs along with others' needs. Give your-

self permission to be tired and need rest. Share the love of this season with others.

Expectations need to be REALISTIC.

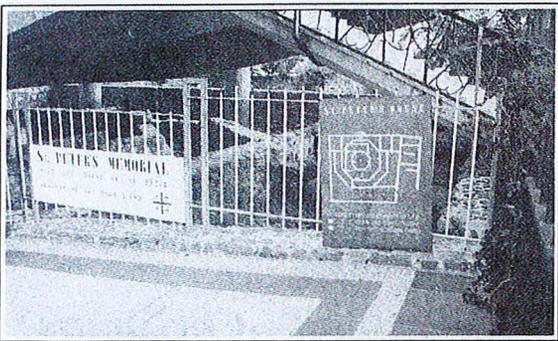
Remember to share responsibilities. Expect normal family tension at this time of year. Attend some social activities. Learn to keep a sense of humor. Insist upon limits for you and your children. Shop for sensible, creative gifts. Tell others how much you appreciate them. Instill an appreciation for the Reason for the Season in your children. Count your blessings instead of your problems. ■



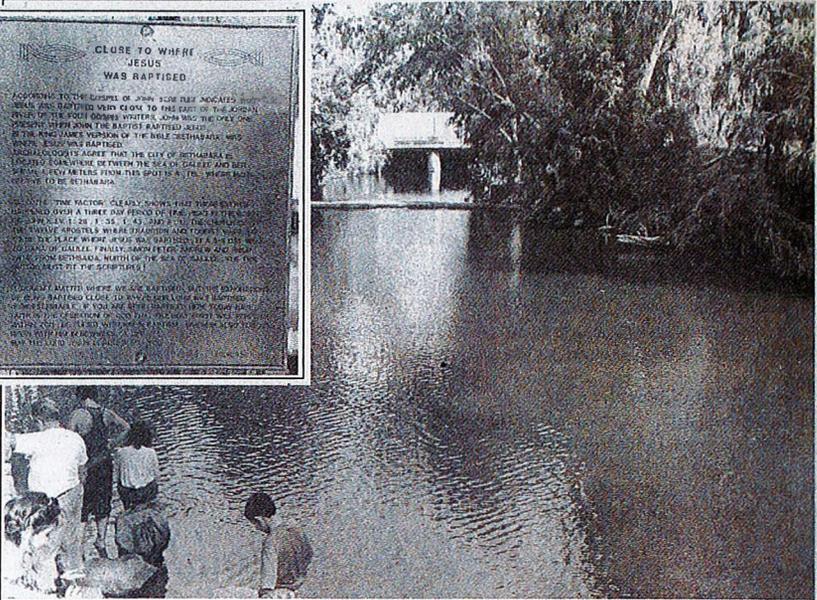
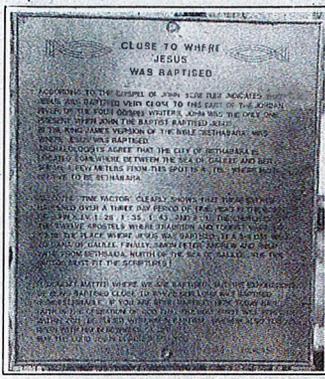
*The Holy Land —
Where Christ was born,
died for our sins,
and rose again!*



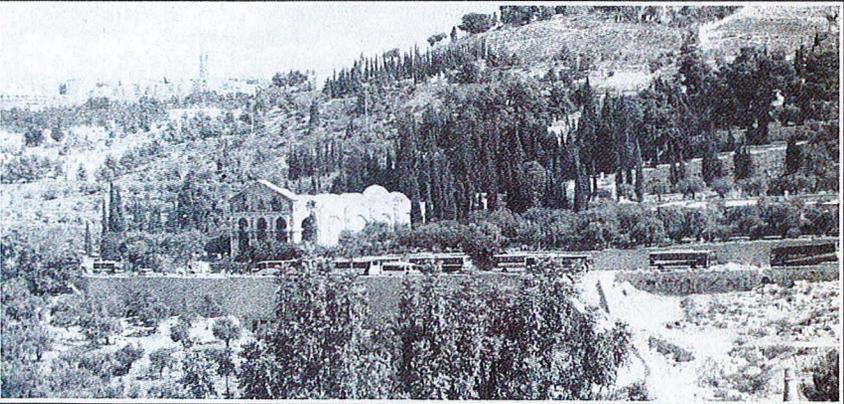
VIEW OF THE Sea of Galilee from the Mount of Beatitudes — "And seeing the multitudes, he went upon a mountain, and when he was seated his disciples came to him. Then he opened his mouth and taught them ..." (Matthew 5:1-2, New KJV)



ST. PETER'S MEMORIAL in Capernaum — "Now when Jesus had come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. So he touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she rose and served them." (Matthew 8:14-15, New KJV)



THE JORDAN RIVER — "Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him." (John 13:4, New KJV)

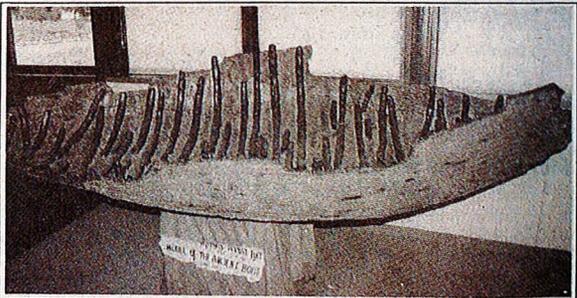
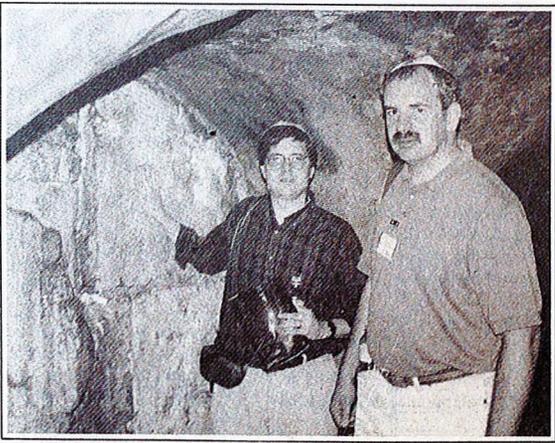


THE CHURCH OF ALL NATIONS now sits in the Garden of Gethsemane — "Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.'" (Mark 14:32, New KJV)



A STAFF MEMBER of the Garden Tomb explains why many believe this site, located in what was probably a rich man's garden could have been the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea — "Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the Kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus." (Mark 15:43, New KJV)

BAPTIST JOURNALISTS Todd Deaton, left, of South Carolina, and Trennis Henderson of Arkansas pause in the Western Wall tunnel of the temple in Jerusalem. — "And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple." (Matthew 11:11, New KJV)



MODEL OF THE ANCIENT BOAT discovered immersed in mud on the shore of the Sea of Galilee in 1986. The boat, which is being preserved, dates to the time of Jesus and his disciples — "Now when evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum." (John 6:16-17, New KJV)

Personal reflections

Holy Land visit provides insight to life of Jesus

By Lonnie Wilkey
Baptist and Reflector

BRENTWOOD — In late October I had the opportunity of a lifetime. I was invited by the Israel Government Tourist Office in Dallas and El Al Airlines to be their guest, along with several other journalists of various denominations, for a week-long tour of Israel.

It was an opportunity for me to actually visit sites where Jesus walked and ministered.

Because Christmas was only two months away when I made the trip, I was especially mindful of the fact that I was actually going to the land where God sent his only Son to be born, and then later die for our sins and be resurrected.

Despite all that, when I was given the invitation, I had to decide if I really wanted to go at that time. News reports had indicated an increase of violence in Jerusalem, especially at the entrance to one of the tunnels in the temple wall.

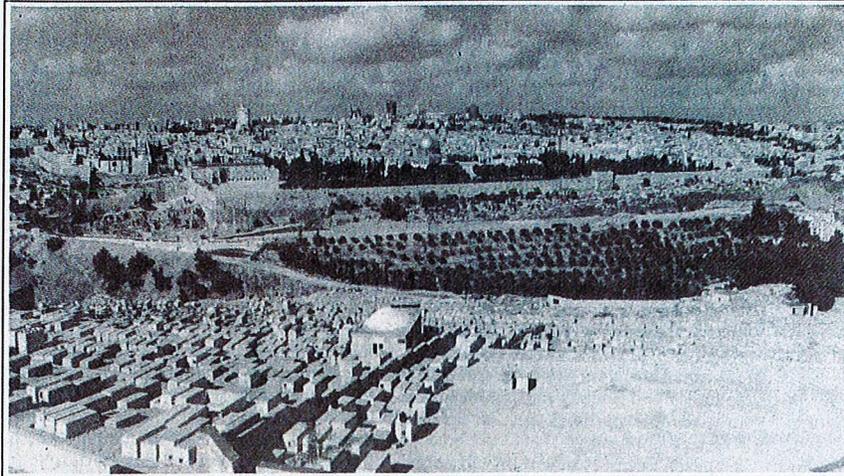
"Will it be safe?" I asked that question (many times to myself), as did my family and friends.

After prayer and some counsel from Fletcher Allen, editor of the paper who has been on several of these trips, I decided it would be safe.

My rationale was that the Israeli government and El Al Airlines would not want to put anyone, most of all a group they were sponsoring, in a position of potential danger.

At the same time I knew random acts of violence could occur anywhere and that there are no guarantees. But I also knew I would be going under a heavy blanket of prayer from friends and family.

I went with a sense of anticipation, of excitement of seeing the homeland of my Savior.



VIEW OF JERUSALEM from the Mount of Olives — "Now as he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?'" (Matthew 24:3, New KJV)

Though we saw many sites, some not necessarily related to Christ, I want to focus on those places which have special meaning to me.

Jerusalem

Upon arriving in Tel Aviv, we began the trek to Jerusalem with a stop along the way at Neot Kedumin, a biblical landscape reserve which has plants and trees that have existed since the time of Jesus.

As we drove into Jerusalem, our guide, Sophie, warned us to separate the concept we had of Jerusalem from the time of Jesus with the modern day city. I am so glad she did because if I did not know where I was, I could have been in any "big city" USA, complete with traffic jams, litter on the streets, graffiti on the walls, etc. If we don't keep the "two" Jerusalems separate it would be easy to be disillusioned.

Our official "tour" of Jerusalem did not begin until

the following day.

Our guide took us to the Mount of Olives where we could look down upon the city. I tried to imagine how the city looked the many times Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives. That was truly a spiritual experience because there is no doubt Jesus actually stood on that very area.

Inside Jerusalem near the temple it is very commercial. Lined down the street (The Via Dolorosa) where Jesus is believed to have walked on his way to Calvary are shops of all sorts, selling everything from T-shirts and caps to bottles of "holy water" and such things.

It was exciting to go inside the Western Wall tunnel and later observe people praying at the "Wailing Wall."

But with the crowds and confusion, I did not get the same spiritual feeling that I had gotten at the Mount of Olives.

The next day, however, made up for it. We went to The Garden Tomb, a site which some Christians believe could have been where Jesus was crucified and buried. Though not the traditional site, staff members at The Garden Tomb present a very good case that it could have been. One of the highlights was participating in the Lord's Supper adjacent to the tomb where Jesus may have lain. Our group of journalists accompanied a Christian advisory group and worshiped with them there. Richard Lee, a Southern Baptist pastor from Georgia, led the service. It was a spiritual highlight.

The Wilderness of Judea

The next day we trekked through the wilderness of

Judea on our way to Jericho, and then onto the area around the Sea of Galilee. Desolate and dry the wilderness was definitely what I imagined. I could envision Jesus being tempted by Satan there.

The Jordan River

One of our first stops after leaving Jericho was the Jordan River. And, yes, I did the typically tourist thing. I took off my shoes and waded into the river. Tradition has it that we were close to the site where Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. That truly was a spiritual experience. Whether or not Jesus was baptized at that very spot is not important. We do know, however, that somewhere in the Jordan River Jesus was baptized.

Sea of Galilee

After leaving the Jordan River we stopped by the Sea of Galilee. On that day the wind was gusting and you could see the waves rolling. It was easy to imagine the disciples on their boat when the storm hit and see Jesus walking on the water to allay their fears. We spent a couple of days around the Galilee area.

This area brought about a lot of spiritual emotions. The commercialization was not as great there and it was easy to envision Jesus' ministry there. So many historic accounts such as the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, and the meeting of James, John, and Simon occurred around the Sea of Galilee.

We went into Capernaum where Jesus spent a great deal of time. We saw Peter's house and a synagogue which had been built over the site of a synagogue where Jesus once taught his disciples.



Christmas '96

Late one afternoon we went to the Mount of Beatitudes where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. Like many such places there was a church on the site. With the sun setting it was a tremendous end to a busy day. Most everyone in the group pulled out their Bibles or a pamphlet and read beatitudes from Matthew 5.

Nazareth

On this particular trip we were unable to visit Bethlehem, but we did go to Nazareth, the boyhood home of Jesus. While we did not spend much time here, it did make the phrase "Jesus of Nazareth" come alive.

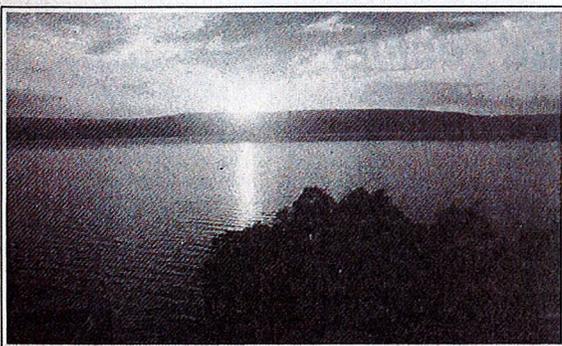
Conclusions

There is so much more to write about and perhaps I will touch on them in future columns. Going to the Holy Land was a dream come true. It didn't make me "any better or more knowledgeable" than someone who has not been. It did, however, allow me to explore my Christian roots. And, that perhaps is the allure of the Holy Land. Most people have a hidden desire to know about their ancestors (where they came from); thus the extreme popularity of genealogy. For Christians, the Holy Land is the beginning of our roots. Everything from Adam on down the line occurred somewhere in Israel. Times have changed; people have changed, but the historical accounts of Old and New Testament events in God's Holy Word will never change.

With Christmas just a week away, the time we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, I feel so blessed to have been able to walk where he walked and ministered. Standing in areas where I know Jesus stood brought new meaning to the song lyrics, "I am standing on Holy Ground."

Someone asked me the bottom line question when I returned. Would I go again if I had to pay my own way? The answer is yes. Some parts of the trip were much more meaningful than others, but every place I visited gave me a broader perspective on the Holy Land in general.

I sincerely hope some day I can go again and take my wife, Joyce, so we can enjoy the experience together. ■



SUNRISE on the Sea of Galilee — "When he had stopped speaking, he said to Simon, 'Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.' But Simon answered and said to him, 'Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at your word I will let down the net.' And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking." (Luke 5:4-5, New KJV)

Don't let Santa, ads detract from Christmas

By Pamela A. Terrell
For Baptist Press

NASHVILLE — Christmas decorations appear in stores in October, and Santa makes his grand entrance at the local mall before Thanksgiving has come and gone.

Because retail and discount stores make the bulk of their profits during the Christmas season, they want consumers thinking about Christmas gifts earlier and earlier each year. Children are bombarded with television commercials about the latest, and sale ad inserts fill newspapers.

With so much emphasis on gift giving, what are our children learning about Christmas? Are we simply using the birth of Jesus as an excuse for extravagant parties and elaborate purchases? Where does the myth of Santa Claus fit into all of this? The following suggestions may help you and your family plan a fun-filled, Christ-centered approach to this holiday season:

God loves a cheerful giver

Many Christian families are choosing to omit Santa Claus from their Christmas celebrations as they fear they are not being truthful to their children ("Santa lives in the North Pole with eight reindeer"), providing wrong motivation for expected behavior ("Santa only visits good children"), and encouraging greediness ("What is Santa going to bring you for Christmas?").

While these are valid concerns, there is no way to completely shield your child from Santa Claus. He is a part of Americana, and children encounter him in stores and on Christmas decorations, in addition to singing songs about him and hearing other children at school and church talk about him. So what is a parent to do?

First, don't count down the days until Santa comes or mention Santa every time you discuss Christmas. Count the number of days until Jesus' birthday instead. An inexpensive calendar can help you do this. Remember to choose one that culminates in Jesus' birth rather than Santa's arrival.

Second, tell your children the true legend of Saint Nicholas instead of rehashing familiar stories about Santa's reindeer and his house at the North Pole (See story below).

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world

Check out your Christmas decorations, and make some mental notes. If you are trying to emphasize Christ in Christmas, but most of your Christmas decor displays Santa and snowmen, you're sending your family a mixed message.

It is more blessed to give than to receive

Children start Christmas lists months before the big day arrives, stand patiently in line to tell Santa their Christmas wishes and eagerly pour over the latest Christmas catalogs. You're left wondering if that one special toy your child wants this year (along with a few thousand other kids) will lead to a fruitless search all over town trying to obtain that coveted plaything. Mom and Dad, you can help quell that greediness and enable your children and yourselves to experience the true spirit of giving this Christmas.

Children need to know they will not receive everything on their Christmas list. Even if you have the financial resources to make their Christmas dreams come true, you are doing them an ultimate disservice in the important lessons of giving and receiving if you cater to every whim. You might want to give a few requested items and some surprises. Christmas is also a good time to present children with useful gifts (underwear, socks, sweaters) and educational ones (books, a science kit, a sewing set).

For children of preschool age and older, let them have a hand at being "Santa" to someone. Many churches sponsor local families, and most communities have local programs like an "Adopt-an-Angel" program where you can purchase gifts off of an "adopted" child's Christmas list. Reading the "angels'" wish list may prove to be a lesson in itself as these underprivileged children often request warm winter coats or toys for younger siblings instead of indulgent gifts for themselves. Then your child can purchase a few items on the wish list and also purchase a "special surprise" — a toy he or she would most like to have but is willing to give to someone else his or her age.

Finally, for family gift giving, inspire your family to make gifts for one another. Odds and ends such as shoe boxes, paper

towel tubes and styrofoam meat trays can be transformed into creative gifts by a preschooler. Teach older children some of your favorite talents such as knitting, quilting, baking, woodworking, or leather tooling.

One last hint: As a parent it is tempting to go overboard at Christmas, especially when buying gifts for your children. Before you head out to the mall, plan a budget and make a list of prioritized items.

A Savior has been born

At last ... the big night and big day have arrived. Plan on making Christmas Eve a special family time. The evening might start out with a special service at church or a carol sing.

Once you are home for the evening, quietly enjoy the closeness of your family. Christmas Eve is a wonderful time to build a fire and sip hot chocolate while you look through old photo albums, watch home movies, or swap family stories. Your children will love to hear what you were doing when you were their age (especially from the grandparents' point of view). Before sending the children off to bed, sing Christmas carols by the light of the Christmas tree. Most important of all, read the story of our Savior's birth from the second chapter of Luke, so children can anticipate his birthday.

As Christmas morning arrives, the children will probably awaken in the early hours. After shouts of "Merry Christmas" and exchanging of gifts, encourage the family to enjoy a leisurely breakfast together. Keep breakfast simple — cinnamon rolls, coffee, and orange juice. This is a special family time, and you shouldn't spend your morning in the kitchen. Most families plan a big, special lunch on Christmas Day. Again, prepare as much of the meal ahead of time so you are not stuck in the kitchen all day.

Turn the meal into a special celebration of Jesus' birth. Set a place at the head of the table as a silent reminder of the special guest in your home. For dessert, sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus and enjoy a birthday cake in his honor.

In the afternoon, the family can relax together as the children enjoy playing with their new gifts. A wonderful way to end the day is with a family prayer of thanksgiving for the best gift ever given — Jesus Christ. ■



Christmas '96

Tips offered for gift Bibles

Associated Baptist Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — If you're planning to buy a Bible for someone this Christmas, you've got some homework to do.

In a society where everything from cereal to clothing to cars comes in a dazzling array of choices, it isn't surprising Bibles do too.

Dozens of publishers, all with the same core text, are turning to modern-day translations, study themes, and target audiences to increase or maintain sales of the Bible, industry officials said.

Bibles are available with devotional guides for men, women, couples, parents, and teens. Well-known authors and popular Bible studies also have generated Bibles for their devotees.

Gift shoppers buying a Bible will be less frustrated the more they know about the person receiving the book, said Ben Williams of Baptist Book Store in Louisville.

"The main thing would be where the person is spiritually: If they are saved, if they are not. If they attend church, if they don't. If they read the Bible. If they don't."

Other important information, he said, would be:

- What translations the recipient's church uses.
- The recipient's age and education level.
- Characteristics about the recipient. Is he or she analytical, or does he or she prefer someone else to offer interpretation?

Many elderly people prefer the King James Version, which for years dominated the market and is familiar to seniors who grew up in church, Williams said.

Others may like some form of parallel Bible, which combines KJV with one-to-three modern versions, such as the Living Bible, New Revised Standard, or New American Standard.

Generally, Williams said, younger readers like more contemporary styles.

Whatever the style or need, more than likely there's a Bible out there to meet it. ■



families

Legend of Saint Nicholas dates from third century

By Pamela A. Terrell
For Baptist Press

NASHVILLE — Yes, there was a Saint Nicholas, but he lived no where near the North Pole.

Nicholas was born in about A.D. 280 in the town of Patras, located in what we know as Turkey. He was raised in a wealthy and well-educated family and was named the Bishop of Myra as a young boy. He was well regarded for his extreme kindness and generosity as de-

scribed in the following story.

According to legend, there were three unmarried daughters in Patras who came from a good but poor family. They could not get married because they had no dowries, so their father planned to sell them when they reached a marriageable age.

Nicholas heard of these girls' fate and was quite distressed. He secretly delivered a bag of gold to the oldest sister of marrying age. Her family was ecstatic about her good fortune, and she was

happily married.

When the next daughter became old enough to marry, Nicholas delivered a bag of gold to her, too. Legend says Nicholas tossed the bag through an open window, and it landed in some stockings that were hanging by the fire to dry.

When the youngest daughter became marrying age, the father was determined to identify the mysterious gift giver as he suspected his third daughter would be secretly given a bag of

gold, too. The father kept watch all night and discovered Nicholas was the generous giver.

Nicholas' identity and generosity were made known, and similar stories of his charity and kindness spread across the land. From that time on, anyone who received an unexpected gift thanked the good Saint Nicholas.

We get our English word "Santa Claus" from the Dutch words Sinter Klaas, which is what they call their favorite saint, Nicholas. ■



Tennessee

leaders

■ **Tim Fleeger** has been called as pastor of Oak City Church in Sevier County Association. He and his wife, Dana, have two daughters, Andrea and Ashley.

■ **Walden's Creek Church** in Sevier County Association has called **Donnie Lamon** as

pastor. He and his wife, Neysa, have one son, Samuel.

■ **Clay Sutton** has been called as pastor of Bradley's Chapel Church in Sevier County Association.

■ **Mike Scott** and **Warren Bragg** recently were ordained as deacons at Glenwood Church, Nashville.

■ **New Union Church, Medon**, has called **Orville McMahan** as interim pastor.

■ **Evangelist Felix Snipes** led a crusade recently at Hilldale Church, Clarksville. There were 20 professions of faith and many other decisions.

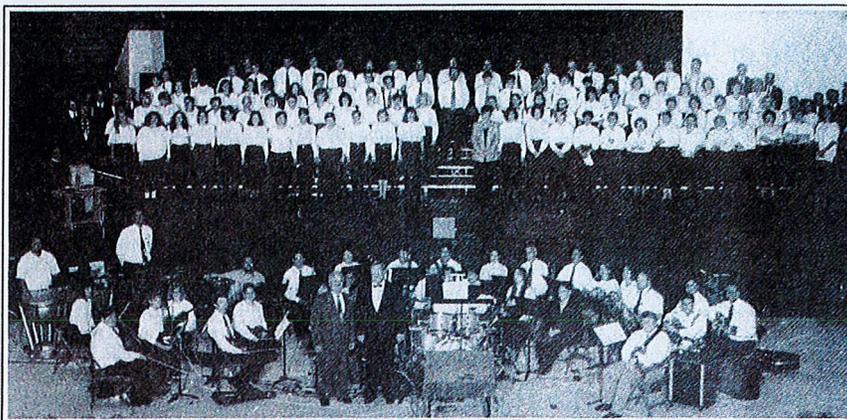
■ **The Women on Mission** group of Highland Park Church, Columbia, are collecting miscellaneous items to send to Nalerigu, Ghana.



THE WOMAN'S MISSIONARY UNION of Meridian Church, Crossville, found a new way to raise money for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. Four members who are hairdressers set up a 'beauty shop' at the church and cut hair one day. When they were finished they had done 25 haircuts and raised \$402. In photo at left, **Sheila Danley** gives **Dustin Henry** his first haircut. Below are the four hairdressers. From left, **Penny Blaylock**, **Sheila Sulton**, **Jan Sulton**, and **Sheila Danley**.



THE MISSIONS DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL of Shelby Association met recently. From left are **Joy Sims**, associational missions secretary; **Jim Burton**, SBC Brotherhood Commission; **Bobbie Estes**, volunteers; **Ken Weathersby**, Tennessee Baptist Convention Black Church Extension; **Bobbye Clark**, WMU; **Chris McNairy**, multi-family housing; **Lawrence Hudson**, black church development; **Fred Trexler**, director; **Tim Cox**, church and community ministries; and **David Condit**, prison ministries.



THE MUSIC MINISTRY of First Church, Martin, recently presented the musical 'Good News.' A combined choir of 110 with a 28-piece orchestra presented the musical at Skyhawk Fieldhouse on the University of Tennessee, Martin, campus. The Church Choir, Senior High Choir, College ensemble, Servant Singers, and Charter, a young adult ensemble combined with about 40 adults who had sung the musical in the late 1960s. Those who returned for the performances came from Utah, South Carolina, Michigan, Texas, and Florida. In addition, 15 banner bearers and hosts of people aided in the presentation. Special guests included **Phil and Ruth Ann Jewitt**, minister of music and youth in the late '60s and **Dr. and Mrs. Bill Bates**, who was pastor at the time. The presentation was directed by **Elwood D. Doss Jr.**, minister of music. **Pastor Roger Oldham** narrated.

churches

■ The adult choir and youth of **First Church, Sharon**, will hold the musical, "Room in the Inn," Dec. 21-22. Performances will be at 7 p.m. each night.

the schools

■ The School of Education of **Belmont University**, Nashville, has been accredited under the new performance-oriented standards of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, which is responsible for professional accreditation of teacher education.



LEAWOOD CHURCH, Memphis, observed its 50th 'Jubilee' anniversary in November. The weekend included a reunion concert of the 'Lord's Witness' youth choir and a fellowship on Saturday night. Sunday's service featured a major worship celebration which included all four former pastors speaking. More than 1,700 people were present for the service. Present Pastor **Tommy M. Vinson**, far right, greeted former pastors, from left, **Tom Brandon**, 1946-48; **R.J. Sedberry**, 1948-51; **T.T. Crabtree**, 1951-55; and **Pastor Emeritus Jerry L. Glisson**, 1956-91.

Live Wisely money management seminars set for 1997

Archer Thorpe of the TBC Church Leadership Group will lead six Live Wisely seminars in January and February. All conferences are 6:30-8:30 p.m., local time.

Jan. 9 — Bluegrass Church, Hendersonville

Jan. 14 — Broadmoor Church, Memphis

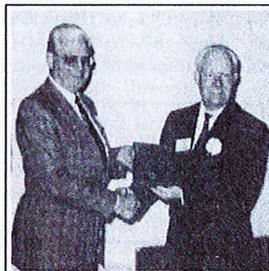
Jan. 16 — Calvary Church, Jackson

Jan. 23 — Red Bank Church, Chattanooga

Feb. 4 — First Church, Powell

Feb. 6 — Colonial Heights Church, Kingsport

For more information, call Thorpe at (615) 371-2018. ■



UNION CHURCH, Wartburg, celebrated its 150th anniversary recently with an evening of food, worship, and fellowship. Presenting a plaque to **Pastor Mark Caldwell**, right, is **Bill Bargiol**, director of missions for Big Emory Association.

Otis Mullins dies

R. Otis Mullins, 84, died Nov. 26 in Kingsport.

Mullins served as pastor of the following churches:

First Church, Celina; Fort Robinson and Oak Grove churches in Kingsport when they were mission churches; Oak Glen Church, Fall Branch, and Skyline Church, Johnson City. Mullins also served churches in Georgia and South Carolina.

He is survived by his wife, **Ruth Stratton Mullins**; two children, **Judy Cline** and **Roy Mullins**; and three grandchildren. ■

Wolfe to leave Mobile pastorate

Baptist Press

MOBILE, Ala. — Fred Wolfe, a former chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, is leaving the pastorate to launch a ministry for local churches, pastors, and staff members.

Wolfe, 59, pastor of Cottage Hill Church since 1972, will leave the 7,800-member congregation Jan. 31 to begin "Barnabas, a Ministry of Encouragement."

In his new ministry, to be based in Mobile, Wolfe said he will conduct three weekend conferences per month, focusing on "encouraging and equipping," including a Saturday night service, a full Sunday schedule, and a Monday morning meeting with pastors invited from the surrounding area. The ministry will have a newsletter and monthly tape.

In a letter to his members, Wolfe wrote, "I am not resigning as your pastor because I am tired, burned out, discouraged, or disheartened. I am not under pressure from anyone or anything. I am being led by God to a new ministry." ■

Annuity Board plans organizational changes

Baptist Press

DALLAS — Organizational changes, effective Jan. 1 at the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention have been announced by the agency's president, Paul W. Powell. The new organization will use functional titles rather than the current officer structure, with the title of "executive officer" replacing current "service head" attribution at the five highest levels below the president and executive vice president officer positions.

In a memo to employees, Powell cited the approaching retirements of the three senior officers — president, chief operating officer, and treasurer — as a primary factor in the changes.

"These actions," Powell wrote, "are intended to provide for adequate training time for those in new or changed roles and to allow what will undoubtedly be some further fine-

tuning to the organization well in advance of the naming of a new president and a new chief operating officer."

Powell and W. Gordon Hobgood Jr., the board's executive vice president and COO, initiated discussion of succession with trustees of the Annuity Board last February. Hobgood will be 65 years old in August 1997, while Powell will turn 65 in December 1998. Harold D. Richardson, the board's treasurer, will be 65 in November 1999. A presidential search committee was named in November by board chairman Richard C. Scott.

In his memo to employees, Powell said, "With the retirement of three of our executive officers in the next 18 to 36-plus months, efforts have been under way for some time to properly plan for the extended and very important period of transition."

The new organization abandons traditional officer titles

except as they may be required by charter and/or bylaws, in favor of functional titles. Below the executive officers in the chart will come managing directors, and beneath those titles will be regional directors, section heads, and department heads. Several persons receiving new titles were previously senior vice presidents and vice presidents.

Hobgood said, "We expect our participants to see these changes as largely transparent. We expect the participants to be better served over time, but the immediate effects outside the employee family will be very limited. In the long run, these steps will lead to more effectiveness and more efficiency in operations." ■

Richardson will move to a new role as executive officer for endowment, facilities, and support administration. In his new job, to include the relief ministry, Richardson will report directly to the president and give more time to endowment fund development.

Richardson will be succeeded as treasurer by William C. Lee, a certified public accountant and former banker who is service head over administrative services. Lee will carry the title of executive officer for financial and corporate services.

Frank G. Schwall, currently service head for church member services, will become executive officer for public and denominational relations reporting directly to the president. ■



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Welcome Messiah

By Ron Galyon

Focal Passage — Matthew 1:17-23

I love the Christmas time of the year. I enjoy the decorations (my tree is up the day after Thanksgiving), the parties, and the food. I especially enjoy the events at the church with all the wonderful Christmas music. I enjoy giving presents and I enjoy receiving presents.

As Christmas approaches someone will probably ask you, "Are you ready for Christmas?" Most of the time when this question is asked, it is regarding your Christmas shopping. Allow me to ask you this question and then stop for a moment and think, "Are you ready for Christmas?"

There are a few essential elements that must be in place for us to be ready for Christmas. The story of the birth of Jesus in Matthew can help us realize the things that really matter in getting ready for Christmas.

Matthew reveals to us a very delicate situation in the ancient world. Joseph and Mary were officially engaged to be married. The ancient engagement was a legal relationship. Mary and Joseph were called husband and wife, although they did not live together. This ancient engagement had to be broken through divorce.

During their engagement time Joseph discovered Mary was pregnant. The engagement time did not allow for a sexual relationship to take place. Mary was pregnant and Joseph knew he was not the father. Joseph believed Mary had been unfaithful to him and was emotionally crushed by the thought Mary had been unfaithful.

Joseph began to explore his options. He could continue with the marriage and be humiliated by marrying someone having another person's child, he could be condemned as a sinner if he allowed people to believe the child was his, or he could have Mary condemned or put away.

Joseph, like many of us, was not ready for Christmas. It required the appearance of an angel in a dream to prepare Joseph for the first Christmas. The same principles apply to preparing us for this Christmas.

To be ready for Christmas you must be ready for Jesus. Joseph is attempting to decide what to do with Mary. This was probably the most tragic moment in his life to this point. The angel came to help get Joseph ready for Christmas by getting him ready for Jesus.

In Matthew 1:21 the angel informed Joseph that Mary's child would be a son and that his name would be Jesus. Jesus is a Greek name that is equivalent to the Hebrew name of Joshua. Both of these names mean "God saves." The angel also pointed out this would be a special Jesus because he would "save his people from their sins."

We are not ready for Christmas until we are ready to become broken over our sins and realize that our only hope is Jesus.

To be ready for Christmas we must be ready for Immanuel. Joseph was further instructed that the child was to be called Immanuel. Immanuel means "God with us."

Notice the bookends that Matthew put around the telling of his story of Jesus. In chapter 1 we are told Jesus will be called Immanuel. In the last chapter Jesus made the promise to his followers, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." To be ready for Christmas we must be ready for God to be with us.

So many people celebrate Christmas, but so few are ready for Jesus or Immanuel. ■ — Ron Galyon is pastor of First Church, Pulaski.

Wise men and Herod

By Michael Smith

Focal Passage — Matthew 2:1-12, 16

Jesus was born as the rightful king of all people, Jews and Gentiles. Matthew's account of the wise men and Herod underscores the claim and tells of opposite reactions to it.

The wise men and Jesus — (vv. 1-11)

The Magi most likely were religious teachers and possibly astrologers. While we do not know their land of origin, it is safe to assume they were persons of stature. Their studies led them to expect a new king of the Jews to be born and to watch for a star announcing his birth. When such a star appeared in the sky, they came to Jerusalem and began to inquire where they might find him. The wise men announced their desire to worship the one born to be king of the Jews.

Family Bible Lesson

King Herod the Great reacted swiftly. Herod had not been born a king. An Idumean by birth, he had risen to his post by serving Rome. He maintained his power by suppressing or eliminating all rivals. Even his own family was not safe from danger. For example, over the years Herod executed or had murdered his favorite wife, his brother-in-law, and several of his sons because he feared they were plotting to take his throne. Given his history, it is clear Herod wanted to find and destroy his recently born rival.

Drawing on Micah 5:2 and II Samuel 5:2, the priests and teachers of the law told Herod the Christ, or Messiah, would be born in Bethlehem. Now that he knew the location, Herod questioned the Magi about the exact time of the baby's birth. He needed one last piece of information to find and destroy the child: the baby's precise location. He ordered the Magi to pro-

cure it for him, covering his murderous intentions with a lie, claiming his only desire was to join them in worshipping the new king.

The Magi went to Bethlehem and found Jesus. They worshiped him joyfully and gave him rich gifts. Warned by God, the wise men did not return to Herod. Instead they slipped out of Judea, thwarting Herod's scheme to use them to harm the child.

King Herod and Jesus — (v. 16)

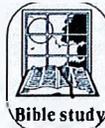
Sometime later Herod realized the Magi had outwitted him. Driven by rage and fear, he ordered that all infant boys two years old and under in Bethlehem and its vicinity be killed. Herod chose the age range in order to ensure his rival's death. That numerous other children would die did not concern him. His command was carried out with ruthless efficiency.

Once again, though, Herod's primary intention was foiled. Joseph, warned by an angel of the Lord in a dream, had already fled to Egypt. There Jesus and his family lived until King Herod's death. Only then did they return to Israel and make a home in Nazareth.

Three themes emerge in the account and flow throughout Matthew's Gospel. First, many people, including even Gentiles such as the wise men, will respond positively to Jesus and worship him as the Christ. Second, others, especially those caught up in their own interests, will oppose Jesus, even to the point of attempting to kill him. Their opposition will culminate with Jesus' death. Finally, God will frustrate the opponents of Jesus and validate his status as the rightful king of all people. ■ — Michael Smith is pastor of Second Church, Memphis.



Bible study
for December 22



Bible study

Savior for everyone

By Thom Tapp

Focal Passage — Luke 2:7-20

For Christmas we take a detour into Luke. Luke 2:19 tells us Mary "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." Perhaps Mary pondered some of these things — Mary's Baby: A baby cries in a manger, a star shines where he lies. His mother holds him to herself, as tears well in her eyes. "Is this the tiny Lamb of God, this helpless little child? Could he be the savior, so tender and so mild? Is that the shadow of a nail, upon my baby's hand? Did he come to give himself, Lord help me understand. Is that the shadow of a thorn, upon his little brow? Will my baby be the one, must he leave me now?" Angels came to visit me, they told me I was blessed. But as I ponder all these things, I find myself distressed. The God of love has chosen me, to love his precious Son, and I will give him all my love, until his will be done.

The Birth of Jesus (vv. 1-7). A decree compelled all to return to their family homeland for a tax to be collected. This act served to fulfill prophecy found in Micah 5:2. Mary then gave birth to the Christ child in a feeding trough called a "manger." The swaddling clothes were strips of cloth wrapped around the child.

Explore the Bible Lesson

The announcement to the shepherds (vv. 8-14). The angels announced Jesus' birth to common folks. Luke tells us they were shepherds. The work of a shepherd was hard, dirty work. God announced the coming of the savior to those who were looked down on by the society of their day.

Verses 10-11 tell us the angels brought good news of great joy. Today the real joy of the Christmas season is the gift of salvation brought by the Christ child. Verse 12 gives the angel's instructions to the shepherds. In truth, these angels were the first evangelists to point men to the living Christ. The lesson we learn from this is to do the same in our day.

Response of the shepherds and others (vv. 15-20). The shepherds went to see for themselves right away. I can imagine how excited I would have been if angels had appeared to me. Hurriedly, they found Mary, Joseph, and the baby just as they angels had said. Verse 18 tells us the sense of awe the shepherds experienced. They stood in the presence of the physical fulfillment of prophecy. God's promised Messiah. The "Wonder" they experienced

was not puzzlement, but awe.

Even Mary was in awe. She knew of the prophecies about her son. Her people had talked about the one by whose stripes they would be healed. The prophets taught of one who would be rejected by his own. Her awe might have been tempered by solemnity over the prospect of Jesus' prophesied suffering and death. Whatever her thoughts, she was in the grip of something beyond her wildest imagination. Of all the women on earth, she had been chosen of God to be Jesus' mother. Although she was surely a devout person, it was not perfection which set Mary apart, it was God's grace which bestowed this gift of bearing the son of God upon Mary.

The birth of our savior points to a God who keeps his word. It tells of a God who loves mankind enough to experience human life first hand, and die in our place. That savior deserves no less than our total devotion at this time of year, and all year.

In verse 20 we read that the shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. This season, let's tell our world about our wonderful counselor. Happy birthday, Jesus. ■ — Thom Tapp is pastor of Oral Church, Lenoir City.

The Love of Christ, His Light, and laughter — at Christmas

Christmas greetings from the
Baptist and Reflector Staff and Baptist Center Staff!



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