

The Good News

Newsletter - December 2018

A publication of University Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, MS

The purpose of University Baptist Church is, through guidance of Holy Spirit, to assemble and worship God, to love and encourage one another, to proclaim the gospel of Christ, to minister to all people, and to live in peace. In a world where difficult issues remain, UBC is committed to its core values of being inclusive, inquisitive, and community minded.

Can You Imagine?

Have you ever really thought about Christmas? Most people just rush past the true meaning of Christmas without giving it any kind of thought at all. I've got to get this or I've gotta bake that. Mr. So and so loves this color and this flavor, is this going to be okay to wear to this party? Who's playing Santa, and did I get the right gluten free, wheat free, soy free, non sugar sugar cookies for little Timmy? I don't know about you, but that breaks my heart just a little more every time I think about it. I see so many families running past each other and stumbling over their fellow man just to get that last discounted toy, or that last picture with Santa.

There's a little church right up the street from my house. Each year they put on a live nativity scene. I always try to be there the first night. Watching the members become Mary and Joseph. Seeing the Angel rise up and speak to them. Can you just close your eyes, and imagine. Can you see Mary, so scared of what was going to happen. Not knowing the changes in her body, and fearing so much what her family or neighbors would think, not to mention Joseph. Poor guy. But each did exactly what they were supposed to do. It's okay to be scared sometimes, but always know that the Word of God will carry you through any challenge. Big or small, He knows what He's doing. Just look at the miracle that He made for the world in baby Jesus. The one and only true gift that we will ever need. I just wish that people would take that extra second and think about that one tiny little miracle that changed the world forever. The sweater, the shoes, the video game console, none of that really matters. The only thing that matters this and every holiday season, for that matter, for this and every day, the only gift that truly matters is the gift of Jesus.

Thank you Lord for all the many blessings that you give us. Those that are seen and those that are unseen. Thank you for lifting our hearts and for taking care of us each and every day. Father, I thank you for knowing exactly what I need without my having to ask. This and every holiday season please bless those around us more than you bless us. Thank you God for the one and only gift that we will always need, thank you for our Savior Jesus Christ. May we lift our eyes only to You. In Jesus name we pray – Amen!

Merry Christmas everyone, may the Lord bless you and keep you!

Luke Chapter 2 (A Christmas story that you will never forget)

Mary, Did You Know?

Mary, did you know

That your baby boy will one day walk on water?

Mary, did you know

That your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?

Did you know

That your baby boy has come to make you new?

This child that you've delivered

Will soon deliver you

Mary, did you know

That your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?

Mary, did you know

That your baby boy will calm a storm with His hand?

Did you know

That your baby boy has walked where angels trod?

And when you kiss your little baby

You've kissed the face of God

Mary, did you know?

The blind will see

The deaf will hear

And the dead will live again

The lame will leap

The dumb will speak

The praises of the Lamb

Mary, did you know

That your baby boy is Lord of all creation?

Mary, did you know

That your baby boy will one day rule the nations?

Did you know

That your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?

This sleeping child you're holding

Is the Great I Am

Oh Mary did you know?

Philippians 4:12 King James Version

12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

"I Trust you God", "Jesus, you got this", "Help me Lord", "Without you God", "Hold my hand", "Walk me through this"

How often have you said that? But do you believe it? Do you go about your daily business knowing that God's got it all in control?
Or do you fret, worry or doubt?

What is in your heart comes out of your mouth (Matt. 12:34), and what you keep in your mouth affects your heart. It is a vicious cycle.

What comes first? It really doesn't matter because they both affect each other and must be corrected in order for us to enjoy the life God

Intends for us to have. After all Jesus died so that we could live abundantly, free and spirit filled.

Stop saying and claiming the negative: "Nothing good ever happens to me", "I'm ready to give up", "I'll never amount to anything",
"I'll never win", "I'll never have anything worth anything". "I'm not smart enough", "I'm not pretty enough", "I'll never, never, never, never, ever, ever, ever.... Fill in the blank.

If you have considered yourself to be a person of low self-esteem, no confidence, cowardly, timid, shy, fearful, consider this your turning point.

Today is your day. Trust God, follow his word, be persistent. Luke 10:19— Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

God had already given you everything you need to achieve everything He has planned for you. Jeremiah 29:11.

Get rid of the negative and reflect on the only thing that matters:
Philippians 4:13 (KJV)

I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.

Vanzetta W.

What Should I Give This Christmas?

Every year, one of the most common questions around Christmas is, "What should I give?" We want to give something that people will appreciate and enjoy. Other questions may be deciding what to give the person who has everything, or the harder question of how to pay for presents.

- What is a gift? It's something you give someone else without asking anything in return. Many may feel guilty after receiving a gift and give one in return. This isn't a requirement at all. It's not supposed to be a competition. Are they going to get me a good present? Who spent the most money? Who's gift is more thoughtful? These aren't the questions we should be asking as Christians. We should be asking, "Does this person I'm giving a gift to feel loved? Do they see Jesus in me?" When deciding what to get or do for someone, think how you can glorify Christ with your gift. Give a gift out of Christian love, with sincerity in your heart, and it will.

- What kind of gift did God give us? He gave us His only Son to provide us a way to heaven, and grace to pardon us. He gave us love we could never earn, grace, and eternal life through Jesus Christ. He gave us a perfect gift of love. What more could people ask for from Him? People ask for money, big houses, fancy things, power, fame or influence, because they'd rather have their reward now than in heaven. We as Christians are to live humble lives, putting God and others first, and we'll be rewarded forever for our faithfulness.

- What gift did Jesus give us? He left His throne in heaven to be born of a virgin, live a humble life of servitude to God the Father and to all those He encountered. He gave His very life and suffered inhumanely to do so, so that we might have life through Him. What more could anyone ask for? Why do people ask Him for more than what He already gave? Someone who willingly gave you their life has already given you everything you need.

- What kind of gift should I give? You don't need to spend money. You don't need to shop all day or browse catalogs or rack your brain looking for the perfect gift. We are to give love. Sounds simple, doesn't it? It can be. Look around you. What do people need? What would Jesus give them? Not only did Jesus perform miracles, but He provided acts of service to others that most might find humiliating to perform. He washed other's feet. He fed crowds of hungry people. He visited the sick, and listened to people who really needed someone to talk to. Follow His example.

When I consider how much money to spend at Christmas, I remember the story of "The Little Drummer Boy." In this classic story, a young boy gets to meet baby Jesus. He wants to bring Him a gift to show his respect, but has nothing but his drum. So, what did he do? He played his drum as best he could for baby Jesus. He gave of his talent, and this is the kind of gift we can all give. Are you like me, and short on talent? Give the gift of time, attention, or a phone call. Serve others without asking for anything in return.

Write a letter to someone you haven't seen in a while. Be there for someone. Use your skills to create something – a poem, a story, a card, a picture or other work of art.

Maybe you need to offer forgiveness you've withheld. It could be as simple as a prayer for someone who doesn't even know you're

thinking of them. Let people know you love them. Be courteous and respectful, and not just at Christmas. Reach out to others in the way God enables you, especially ones who

may be lonely or depressed. The Christmas season is hard on many people who aren't in contact with family or loved ones, too. Look for a need, and fill it in a loving way. The wrapping doesn't need to be fancy, either. You don't need to top it with a bow. God's gift was wrapped tightly in swaddling clothes. We all have different abilities, personalities and even spiritual gifts. Use them to show love, and help to show what the first Christmas was really all about.

Not everyone is expecting a gift from you. Surprise them. Wouldn't it warm your heart to get a gift completely out of the blue? It could be a complement from someone you didn't know had ever noticed you. Being told by someone I barely knew that they could tell I was a Christian was one of the greatest gifts I ever got, and it wasn't even Christmas! If you receive a gift, it doesn't mean you have to pay them back, either. Enjoy it.

Appreciate it, and tell them you do. It's good to be shown love, too, and it can rekindle a tired soul. Everyone reacts to receiving a gift in different ways. Don't be offended if someone seems awkward receiving a gift. Maybe they might even be suspicious. Why did you give me this? Why would you do something so thoughtful for me? Place their concerns to rest by showing them love consistently throughout the year. How many times have we all seen a child open a new toy, only to spend the next two hours playing with the box and the paper, instead. They feel loved, even if they don't know what to do with your gift. Even as adults, we may not know how to react, but the important thing is that the love of God is shared with them. This world is consumed with buying and getting stuff, but we should see through that. Warm a heart or make someone smile. What makes you feel loved? Get to know someone, and you can learn what makes them feel the love of God. This is a great witnessing tool, and should always be the first step in sharing the gospel with them. What better gift could you give than leading someone to Jesus?

Philippians 2:3-5 tells us what mindset we should live in. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. This is only a guideline, and how we give the gift of love to others should come from our hearts and be guided by the Holy Spirit. Celebrate this Christmas by passing on the love, mercy and grace God gave us first. Give from the heart. Give the gift of love.

Pattern your gift ideas after God's example. His gift is eternal life, offered freely. Jesus gave us the gift of his life so we could save ours forever. That gift can't be bought with cash, credit, good looks, or works. Don't give expecting something in return. A gift isn't a trade, but is offered without strings or demands. You need only accept it. If you haven't already, will you receive the gift of life provided by God out of love? Jesus already paid for the gift. All you have to do is open your heart and trust in Him.

The Law Of The LORD Is Perfect

You may or may not know, but I have finally left Death Row after nearly eleven years. That time, combined with almost four years pretrial, has all been spent in solitary confinement. The damage to my mind and body from such an extended period in solitary may never be fully assessed but I am afraid it is more extensive than I realize. It is such a slow process of breakdown that most people can't see it happening. While I knew I was getting quirky in some ways, I always thought my mind escaped the solitary ordeal.

Mississippi State Penitentiary has a policy that forces men coming off of Death Row to transition through a lock-down building on the way to General Population regardless of the prisoners past behavior or accomplishments. I have known about this policy and have thought that it is unfair at best. Spending a year in lockdown after so many on Death Row seemed like a parting shot by the State. A stupid policy for sure.

Once I got to this transition building I can't tell you how thankful for this policy I became. There are so many people moving around without chains on, so much noise and so many different conversations, and the building is essentially prisoner ran, that my brain was screaming , "DANGER! DANGER! DANGER!" Every person was a threat, every sound triggering the fight or flight response, and with nowhere to go everything felt like it had to be handled with extreme fight for my life violence.

I am self aware enough to know that I wasn't in any danger and that every sound I heard wasn't the prelude to an attack. I couldn't do anything to get my mind to relax and process the truth of what was really going on. I had been in solitary confinement so long that the change was debilitating. I am great now but that first week was the most anxious, frightened, and potentially violent I have ever been. Had I been given what I though I deserved and immediately transferred from Death Row to General Population something bad would have happened to me. I honestly believe that I would have had a complete mental break. Because I am too full of Gods Spirit to act out aggressively the pressure would have been released in some way. Pop! Goes the mind.

This has me thinking about God's word. How many of His commandments and decrees did the Israelites understand? Do this, don't do that; Eat this – not that, wash your stuff this way, burn it in that way Jesus has given us our share of commandments to follow and through Paul, many more. We may not understand them, or in this day and age even agree with them, but we must obey them anyway because they are for out good.

The blessings and curses Moses lays out in Deuteronomy 28 and the choice of life and death in Deut 30:11-20 are just as relevant today as they were when they were spoken. Our hope is in the Lord and in His Word. If we pick and choose what to obey and what we disobey because we don't understand it, disagree with it, or think it isn't "modern", then we are in for a lot of trouble. Life and death, peace and anxiety.

As we prepare for Christmas and the New Year join me in committing to living Biblically. Search out the areas in your life that don't align with the Word and make the corrections. God doesn't give us suggestions on how to live the best life. He commands us to follow His Word for His glory in our living the best life.

I leave you with one of the greatest Psalms. Have a glorious year in Jesus.

- Roger Gillett

Psalm 19

1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
2 Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.
3 There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.
4 Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
In them he has set a tent for the sun,
5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.
6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.
7 The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
9 the fear of the Lord is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.
11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
12 Who can discern his errors?
Declare me innocent from hidden faults.
13 Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.
14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Dog Pen Church Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Help us to find courage in Your every whisper and in the ways of Your beloved Son. Have mercy on us for not always seeing beyond your power to a love we've barely begun to know. Help us to encourage others to have hope in You – the anchor our sour soul – so that we may all share in your legacy of love, which is the greatest treasure of all. Help us to see the pain clearly that our Lord allowed Himself to go through – the piercing by a sword, by nails, and by a crown of thorns – all to bring us spiritual peace with You.

We know that your greatness is evident in your awesome vastness and intimate nearness. We thank you for your constant care for our souls and for dressing us in your righteousness alone that we may be faultless to stand before the throne.

Protect us from temptation and search us to show us any any hidden resentments in our heart. Reveal to us the unwanted roots in us that are beneath the surface so that we may have zeal to follow you completely.

Be our main focus and uplift us and restore us where we have lost focus. Give us a fresh gift of the Holy Spirit to quicken our sluggish hearts and to help with our infirmities so that the very compassion of the Son of God may fall upon us and clothe us with zeal as with a garment, stirring our affections into a most vehement flame and filling our souls with heaven.

Give us the perseverance to never leave a duty till we have brought our hearts into the frame of the duty. Give us the perseverance to not leave confession of sin till our hearts are broken for sin. Give us the perseverance to not leave petitioning for grace until our hearts are quickened and enlivened in a hopeful expectation of more grace. Give us the perseverance to not leave rendering of thanks till our hearts are enlarged with the sense of the mercies which lie enjoyed and quickened in the return of praise.

We are grateful for your promise to never leave us, nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5) and we are thankful for your presence throughout each day.

In Jesus name, let the Church say “Amen!”

Justin U. – The Dog Pen Church