



Cornerstone United Methodist Church

1411 Rim Road Fayetteville North Carolina 28311 868-5686

December 2002



I have mixed feelings about sharing the Christmas story with people these days. I love the account from Luke's Gospel (you know, the angels, shepherds, stable, swaddling clothes – and just what the heck *are* swaddling clothes!?). My ambiguity, however, comes from the fact that people have heard the story so many times that it becomes like a familiar song we sing without listening to the words.

When we hear the Christmas story we don't hear it the same way that the first Christians heard it or even the way the people in the story experienced it. The story is really about very ordinary people in very ordinary settings who experienced something truly extraordinary.

Yet over the years, layer upon layer of gilded tradition have coated this story so that we do not actually hear the Word of God anymore. Instead we hear a type of "greeting card" version of the account of the Nativity. Let me offer this example of what I mean: When a priceless piece of antique furniture has been repeatedly covered with varnish and shellac in an attempt to make it more beautiful the opposite actually occurs. Eventually the true beauty of the wood and the craftsmanship of the original furniture-maker becomes invisible. This is what has happened to the startling, amazing account of God coming to us as a human baby.

If we want to receive the full impact of the Christmas story we need to take some stripping solution to the varnish with which we have coated the Nativity account. So I offer this colloquial paraphrase of the story to help peel away the glaze that obscures our view of the first Christmas. It is not intended to irreverent or sacrilegious. Instead I want you to hear what is really miraculous and extraordinary about the birth of Jesus Christ:

In 2003, George II issued an executive order that a census should be taken of everybody in the USA for the purpose of getting the tax rolls straight. (This was the first census like it that took place when Mike Easley was the governor of North Carolina.)

Now everybody had to go back to their county seats to be registered. So Joe loaded up his pickup truck and left the town up in Pennsylvania where he'd been working and went down to Fayetteville, NC because that was his hometown. He went there to register with Mary, his fiancé who, by the way, was already pregnant.

While they were there, Mary went into labor, and she gave birth to her first little boy. She wrapped him in paper towels and placed him in Joe's cleaned-out toolbox. (They were staying in a maintenance shed since the Motel 6 didn't have any vacancies.)

And there were folks at the truck stop nearby, working the late shift. All of a sudden an angel of the Lord appeared in the truck stop, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were scared to death.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I came to tell you about
Continued on page 2



Girl Scouts

Our Cadette Girl Scout Troop is collecting supplies for Animal Haven. This is a local no-kill animal shelter that is always in need of a little help.

In the Fellowship Hall there is a round tub where you can help the girls help Animal Haven. They always need dog and cat food, bleach, and newspapers. They also always need volunteers, but you can't leave that in our bin. Call them and ask about opportunities to serve God's humblest creatures. You will find that you are the one that is blessed.

For more information on Girl Scouts, call Beth Wiggs at 867-4058 or email at bethwiggs@aol.com.



If Jesus was born today

By Steve Turner

If Jesus was born today it would be in a downtown motel marked by a helicopter's flashing bulb.

A traffic warden, working late, would be the first upon the scene.

Later, at the expense of a TV network, an eminent sociologist, the host of a chat show, and a controversial author would arrive with their good wishes - the

Continued on page 2

something great that has happened; really joyful news that is for everybody to hear! Today, right here in Fayetteville, a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah! The Lord! This is how you will know you've found him: You will find a baby wrapped in paper towels and lying in a toolbox."

Suddenly a whole swarm of angels appeared with the angel right there in the truck stop! They were praising God and saying, "Glory to God above everything, and on earth happiness and wholeness to everybody because God has demonstrated his love and care for them!"

When the angels had left the truck stop and gone into heaven, the truckers, waitresses and cooks said to one another, "Let's go to Fayetteville and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joe, and the baby, who was lying in the toolbox. When they had seen him, they couldn't keep their mouths shut, and told anybody that would listen what they had heard about this child. And all who heard it suspected the folks from the truck stop were nuts and yet still believed them when they listened to the story.

But Mary didn't say that much. She just stored up all these things and thought about them in her heart. The cooks and waitresses and truckers went back to the truck stop, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

You see, once we peel away the gauzy, halo-encrusted patina that surrounds the Nativity account we find that God reveals some wonderful things to us: God reveals a glimpse of what the coming Kingdom of Heaven is like. With the birth of Jesus the Kingdom of God began to break in on the world. God's values, God's order, started to be manifest in the world we live in. In this story God reveals that he uses ordinary people and ordinary, everyday situations to accomplish His purposes.

The Christmas story does not begin like a fairy tale: "Once upon a time..." It's not like Star Wars: "Long, long ago, in a galaxy far, far away." No, Luke begins the account by stating a specific time that everyone could identify. Folks could read it and say, "O yeah, I remember when that happened." We see that God gets his hands dirty in the mess of history. He entered time and space.

So many people think of God as so transcendent that he has no connection with our lives; that he's somewhere "out there." But the Good News is the God who is "out there" is so concerned and involved with his creation that he is also "right here and right now." The real world is God's place of business more than gaudy sanctuaries insulated from the realities we all face. The Christmas story tells us that God used historical events like a census and taxes to set the stage to carry out his plan. God is in control of history! Not Caesar, not Islamic terrorism, not Saddam. God is in control, and history is leading someplace. His plan cannot be thwarted by mere mortals or angels or demons.

But the most outrageous part of this story is that God chooses to identify with us! God didn't avoid the harsh realities of life. He didn't come as an aristocrat separated from the rest of humankind. God loves us so much that he came down at Christmas and entered into our broken, battered world. That is why we call him Emmanuel - "God with us!"

His mother had him alone, with only her betrothed to comfort her. It was an anonymous birth to an anonymous woman in an anonymous corner of a great world empire. He was born in a stable, a mere cave. His crib was a feed trough. He grew up working in the family business of a blue-collar laborer. He was God with dirt under his fingernails! He knew what it was to be lonely, to be betrayed and abandoned, to suffer physical pain like few of us will ever know. And because of all this Jesus is the perfect intercessor and representative of humanity before God the Father.

Continued on page 3

If Jesus Were Born Today

Cont. from page 1

whole occasion to be filmed as part of the 'Is This The Son Of God?' one-hour special.

Childhood would be a blur of photographs and speculation dwindling by his late teens into 'Where Is He Now?' features in Sunday magazines.

If Jesus was thirty today they wouldn't really care about the public ministry, they'd be too busy investigating His finances and trying to prove He had Church or Mafia connections.

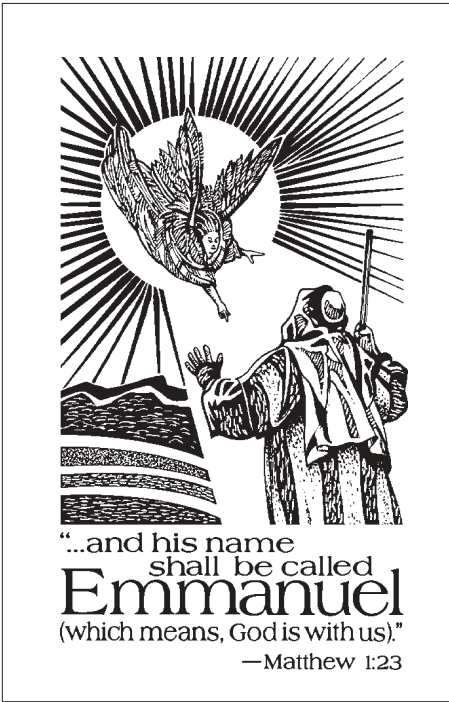
The miracles would be explained by an eminent and controversial magician, His claims to be God's Son recognized as excellent examples of Spoken English and immediately incorporated into the O-Level syllabus, His sinless perfection considered by moral philosophers as, OK, but a bit repressive.

If Jesus was thirty-one today He'd be the fly in everyone's ointment - the sort of controversial person who stands no chance of eminence. Communists would expel Him, capitalists would exploit Him or have Him smeared by people who know a thing or two about God. Doctors would accuse Him of quackery, soldiers would accuse Him of cowardice, theologians would take Him aside and try to persuade Him of His nonexistence.

If Jesus was thirty-two today we'd have to end it all. Heretic, fundamentalist, literalist, puritan, pacifist, nonconformist, we'd take Him away and quietly end the argument.

But the argument would rumble in the ground at the end of three days and would break out and walk around as though death was some bug, saying 'I am the resurrection and the life... No man cometh to the Father but by me'.

While the magicians researched new explanations and the semanticists wondered exactly what He meant by 'I' and 'No man' there would be those who stand around amused, asking for something called proof.



Parish Dictionary

- AMEN: The only part of a prayer that everyone knows.
- BULLETIN: 1) Air conditioning; 2) Your receipt for attending services.
- CHOIR: A group of people whose singing allows the rest of the congregation to lip-sync.
- HYMN, RECESSIONAL: The last song, often sung a little more quietly, since most of the people have already left.
- JONAH: The original “Jaws” story.
- MAGI: The most famous trio to attend a baby shower.
- PEW: A medieval torture device still found in most churches.
- PROCESSION: The ceremonial formation at the beginning of service, consisting of altar servers, the celebrant, and late parishioners looking for seats.
- RECESSIONAL: The ceremonial procession at the conclusion of service - led by parishioners trying to beat the crowd to the parking lot.
- TEN COMMANDMENTS: The most important Top Ten List NOT given by David Letterman.
- USHERS: The only people in the parish who don’t understand the seating capacity of a pew.

Nick’s G-Rated Humor Line

He knows what its like to experience the full range of human existence.

God chose ordinary people just like us as the principle agents of the Nativity. Not the religious leaders. Not the civic leaders. Just plain folks. Jesus’ first visitors and evangelists were a bunch of smelly shepherds! And shepherds are not the kind of folks you want wandering the maternity ward at one o’clock in the morning. They’re ordinary, they’re just “dead common.” Those shepherds had been confronted by an angelic visitation while they were at work watching their sheep. We have heard the story so many times that we think that shepherds must have seen angels everyday. That’s why, in the paraphrase, I made the shepherds cooks and waitresses and truckers. Nobody expects the heavenly host to show up at a truck stop! It is just too ordinary of a place for God to use to do something marvelous!

God takes ordinary people and ordinary situations and changes the world. He brings good news of his good will to humanity through the ordinary. He enters our lives through the ordinary. If we will be open to the Holy Spirit he can take our ordinary lives, our struggles and our joys and do something miraculous with them — something with eternal value.

There is something else I want you to recognize in this story: Almost everyone in Bethlehem was unaware what God was doing. The crowds that had come to Bethlehem for the census had no inkling that the infinite Son of God was asleep in their little town. Only a few shepherds came to see Him, and they left glorifying God. People still miss God’s actions in their lives. We are still consumed with our own petty anxieties, riches and pleasures that we miss God when he comes to us. We fail to realize that God often comes to us right in the middle of our routine.

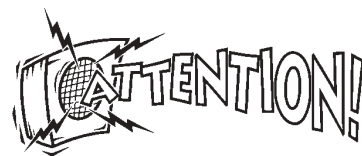
Most of us are look for the heavens to roll back if we are to have an encounter with God — and God wants to meet us as we’re washing dishes! We want to get worked up into some emotional state when God wants to surprise us in the middle of watching the evening news. We look for drama and pageantry, but God comes to us when we are taking out the trash.

Beloved, it is the presence of God that makes the Christmas story remarkable, not the “Christmas card glow” we ascribe to it in our minds. Bethlehem was not special because it was Bethlehem, but because God chose it as the place to invade his own creation! The manger was not special because it was a manger, but because God lay in it! The shepherds were not special because they were shepherds, but because they heeded the good news and went looking for the Messiah!

The Good News for us in the message of the Nativity is that our ordinary lives become something wonderful and miraculous when we open them to God’s unexpected presence.

So may God grant you all “an ordinary Christmas.”

Pastor Ben



Cornerstone Small Groups

Monday Women’s Bible Study	Joy Semrad	867-6786
Wednesday Night Bible Study	Jason Hicks	848-7358
CBS (Cornerstone Bible Study)	Ben Sharpe	868-5686
Promise Keepers Men’s Group	Ken Dye	864-5373
Friday Night Fellowship	John & Antonia Ban	860-3470
United Methodist Men	Steve Kublank	424-1757
On-The-Edge Senior High Youth	Brian & Christyn Hahn	480-0603
Hi-Voltage Junior High Youth	Mike & Sue Todd	425-6443
Kids Ministry/Sunday School	Debbie Hill	764-1094

Faith-Sharing Team Update

Douglas Dalton

It has been several months since I last wrote about our team. But I wanted to assure you that we have not been inactive, but rather working behind the scenes. Since I last wrote the following has taken place:

1. A member of our church has generously donated a computer for our use in the Coffeehouse. Mike Wiggs is configuring the computer for our use. I am recording and converting songs from regular CD's to the MP3 pro format to place on this computer and we will be using Music Match software. This way we will have available music to use as background for the Coffeehouse. The one thing we do not want is the Coffeehouse to be a loud place with no fellowship. Instead, we want the Coffeehouse to be a place of fellowship and relaxation, with music as background.

2. After talking with several different Coffeehouses, I learned that the best thing to do is just start our own. We should not emulate others since our community will dictate what we need to do. To this end, I propose that as soon as we obtain the computer and program it with the music, we go ahead and set a start date.

3. I am submitting a prayer request at this time, that God directs a member of our congregation to lead in the Coffeehouse and its operation. Please remember this in your prayers as well.

4. On October 19, I met with leaders of our church for a planning meeting. As a result of this effort I have decided that it is very important for us to focus on what we are as a Faith-Sharing team. The focus of our team is to enable ourselves and members of our church to share their faith in such a way as to bring people into a loving relationship with Jesus Christ, God our Father, and the Holy Spirit. Remembering this goal revitalizes us in our efforts to fulfill the Great Commission.

5. In light of my meeting on October 19, it has been decided that the most effective way we can reach members of our church, and teach them about Faith sharing, is to include our Faith sharing class as a component of the small groups. Each small group will work through this program with its group leader, utilizing the Faith-Sharing videotape, books, and New Testament Bibles.

6. As a result of the barbecue fund-raiser activity, \$300 was raised to purchase these Bibles. Rev. Sharpe has ordered them and they should arrive within the next few days. These Bibles will be used in the small group component of our classes and will be given out to members of our community who desire to share their faith, and/or learn more about Jesus Christ.

7. We raised \$138.41 at the car wash. (The total was \$155.41 after the car wash. However one person paid by check to Cornerstone UMC, with no designation for the car wash in the memo section. After turning the \$17 check over to the church to be cashed, it went into the general fund because it was not designated. By law there was no choice so this left a total of \$138.41 that the Faith-Sharing team could use.). This money is being used to purchase copies of *Faith-Sharing (Revised & Expanded) Dynamic Christian Witnessing by Invitation* by Eddie Fox and George Morris. These books have been ordered direct from the publisher.

We will discuss how to spend the remaining money at our next Faith-Sharing Team meeting. I have already purchased the Faith-Sharing videotape educational kit at my own expense.

8. I have also submitted a lengthy budget to the Finance Committee for its review. The projected budget includes such items as purchase of additional Bibles to give new members, confirmation graduates, etc.; purchase of special Bibles and books for the disabled community who want to participate in Bible study and support group's; and Coffeehouse related expenses.

For more information on Faith sharing, contact Doug Dalton.

Please Support Your Newsletter!

Cornerstone publishes a newsletter each and every month in order to get information out to our church family. And there is a lot of information to share with you! Stuff is happening at Cornerstone all the time.

In order to keep our information accurate, team leaders and people in charge of all our different activities need to let Beth Wiggs know what they are planning, when their groups are meeting or not, if special events are coming up... the list goes on. We can't share the information if we don't have it.

Our newsletter is also how we communicate with visitors. It gives them a picture of what Cornerstone is about.

Please support your newsletter. Contact Beth Wiggs at 867-4058 or bethwiggs@aol.com. Thanks!



RECREATIONAL HYMNS

- Canoeist: "Flow, River, Flow"
- Fisherman: "Shall We Gather At The River?"
- Golfer: "There Is A Green Hill Far Away"
- Paratrooper: "Now On Land And Sea Descending"
- Sailboater: "Deep River"
- Lifeguard: "Come To The Water"
- Baseball Batter: "Seek Ye First"
- Mountain Climber: "The Rock That Is Higher Than I"

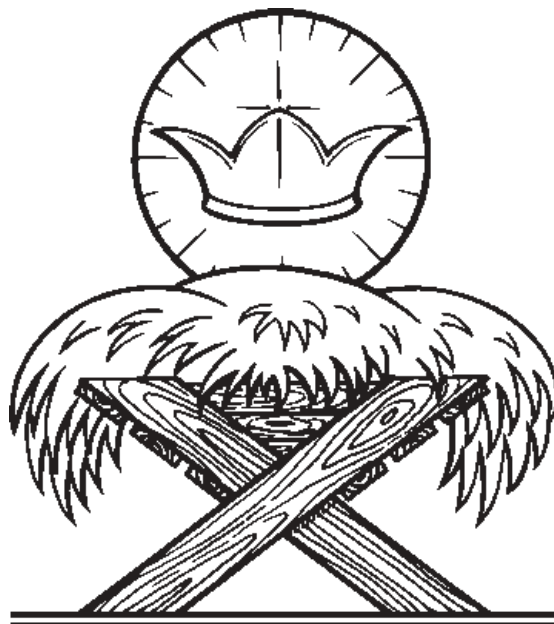
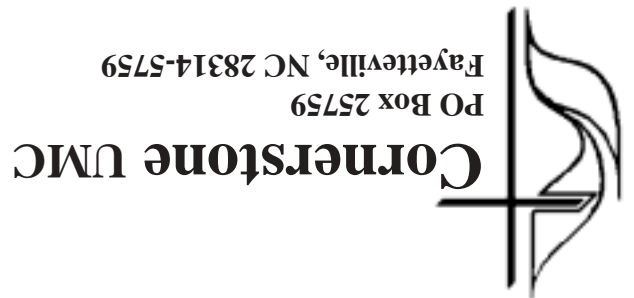
Nick's G-Rated Humor Line

December 2002 January 2003

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Cornerstone Pizza Sunday @ Two Brothers! 1st Sunday in Advent	2 Pastor's Day Off Women's Bible Study	3 Dollar Happy Meals & McDonalds Skibo Road 6:00	4 Noon Prayer Group/Bible Study 7:00/FW Friends 6:30 CBS 7:00	5 Promise Keepers 7:00 Choir 7:00 Cadette Girl Scouts 7:00	6 Friday Night Fellowship 7:00	7
8 Council Mtg 7:00	9 Pastor's Day Off Women's Bible Study	10	11 Noon Prayer Group/Bible Study 6:30/FW Friends 6:30 CBS 7:00	12 Promise Keepers 7:00 Choir 7:00 Cadette Girl Scouts 7:00	13 Friday Night Fellowship 7:00	14 Lisa's Brunch & Cookie Exchange 11:00am (Call 868-6991)
15  Family Christmas Program	16 Pastor's Day Off Women's Bible Study	17 Dollar Happy Meals & McDonalds Skibo Road 6:00	18 Noon Prayer Group/Bible Study 6:30/FW Friends 6:30 CBS 7:00	19 Promise Keepers 7:00	20 Friday Night Fellowship 7:00	21 Bob & Candace's Wedding 2:00pm
22	23 Pastor's Day Off	24 Christmas Eve Service 7:00	25 Christmas 	26	27 Friday Night Fellowship 7:00	28
29	30 Pastor's Day Off Women's Bible Study	31 New Year's Eve	1 New Year's Day	2 Promise Keepers 7:00 Choir 7:00 Cadette Girl Scouts 7:00	3 Friday Night Fellowship 7:00	4
5 Pizza Sunday @ Two Brothers!	6 Pastor's Day Off Women's Bible Study	7 Dollar Happy Meals & McDonalds Skibo Road 6:00	8 Noon Prayer Group/Bible Study 7:00/FW Friends 6:30	9 Promise Keepers 7:00 Choir 7:00 Cadette Girl Scouts 7:00	10 Friday Night Fellowship 7:00	11
12 Church Breakfast 8:30am Church Council Meeting 7:00	13 Pastor's Day Off Women's Bible Study	14 Dollar Happy Meals & McDonalds Skibo Road 6:00	15 Noon Prayer Group/Bible Study 7:00/FW Friends 6:30 CBS 8:00	16 Promise Keepers 7:00 Choir 7:00 Cadette Girl Scouts 7:00	17 Friday Night Fellowship 7:00	18

There's always something happening at Cornerstone!

You are... God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief Cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. *Ephesians 2:19-22*



For unto us a child is born,
to us a son is given ...

Isaiah 9:6