

BAPTIST TRUMPET

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"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Galatians 4:4-5)

Baptist Trumpet, State Missions & Trumpet Printing wish you a

MERRY

Christmas

AND HAPPY NEW YEAR



Moving the Conversation Forward

By Allan Eakin, Associate Editor

Over the last several months, conversations about renewing the vitality and interest in our associated work have grown in number and frequency. That is encouraging.

The response to the special insert, *Why Do We Associate* in the April 19 issue of the *Baptist Trumpet*, has been positive. So much so that the *Baptist Trumpet* chose to produce a booklet containing those six articles and make it available to anyone who desires to receive a copy free of charge. The *Baptist Trumpet* followed up the April 19 insert with an Associational Involvement Survey

for BMA pastors to complete. This survey asked pastors to provide input concerning their involvement in the associated work, the participation of the church they serve in the associated work and gave the opportunity to provide feedback about how to encourage greater participation in our associational work.

Amid the various conversations and the Associational Involvement Survey data, it became apparent that certain assumptions were made concerning understanding how our association of churches functions. While many pastors understand how the association functions, many members of BMA churches do not fully understand the relationship between the churches and the various levels of our association.

To that end, the *Baptist Trumpet* will publish several articles in upcoming issues to further the understanding of BMA Baptist Church members and thus further renew interest in our associational

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The Power of Association



No issue the next two weeks due to the Christmas & New Year's Holidays (next issue will be Jan. 10). The BMA of Arkansas & Trumpet Printing offices will be closed Dec. 21-Jan. 2.





CENTRAL BAPTIST COLLEGE PROFILE

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Sports News

By Erik Holth

Men's Basketball

• **Conway, Dec. 12** — Playing inside the friendly confines of A.R. Reddin Fieldhouse for the first time since Oct. 28, CBC hosted the Patriots of Baptist Bible College (BBC). CBC (9-3) trailed at halftime for only the third time this season, but put up 50 points in the second half to complete the season sweep of BBC (3-8) 87-82. **Deshawn Corprew** led the way in scoring with 17 points, while **Jonas Carlisle** and **Sage Borbon** both had 15 and **Devin Foster** chipped in with 13. **Christian White** and **Kyle Harding** were the co-leaders in rebounding with eight, while the Mustangs were able to dominate in the paint, outscoring the Patriots 46-34 in that area and also outscoring them 19-9 off the bench.

• **Little Rock, Dec. 15** — Playing for the final time in the 2023 calendar year, CBC headed a half hour down the road to Mims Gymnasium for a non-conference matchup with Philander Smith. CBC (9-4) trailed at halftime and nearly came back fully before falling to the Panthers (7-5) 93-78. **Sage Borbon**, **Kyle Harding** and **Jonas Carlisle** all posted double figures scoring for the Mustangs, while Carlisle led the way in rebounds and nearly tied a program single-game steals record and Harding led the way in assists. CBC struggled shooting, making only 38% of their shots, while going 5-33 from beyond the arc. The Mustangs were also dominated on the glass, getting out rebounded 47-29.

Women's Basketball

• **Conway, Dec. 12** — Returning home for the first time since Nov. 18, CBC hosted the Patriots of Baptist Bible College (BBC) at A.R. Reddin Fieldhouse. CBC (1-5) took the lead early and held it the rest of the way, racing to an 85-74 win over BBC (7-4). **Caroline Citty** led four Mustangs in double figures with 22 points, while **Olivia Lambriksen** added 15 to go with a team-best eight rebounds, **Tamara Christmas** chipped in with 14 and **Rhys Anderson** added 10. The Mustangs outshot BBC 50% to 35% from the field and outrebounded them 45-32.

Wrestling

• **Conway, Dec. 14** — Competing at home for the second time this season, CBC hosted a dual with the Eagles of Oklahoma Wesleyan. CBC dropped the dual 48-9, but were able to get a pair



Student Ministry Matters

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Looking to the New Year

These last few years have been full of ups and downs for all of us. Between the pandemic, unstable church attendance and crazy social and political issues, staying motivated and focused on our purpose as student ministry workers has been hard at times. We have had to navigate Zoom youth group, masks, social distancing, the return to normal services and the rise in the anxiety of our students. The only real constant in student ministry is change, but we have had a crazy time of it since 2020. With the New Year just around the corner, it is a great time to evaluate where you are and where your youth ministry is.

Since no two churches are alike, we shouldn't expect our student ministries to be cookie-cutter images of one another. In fact, your student ministry will adapt and change slightly every year as students enter and others graduate. Sometimes, those transitions happen at the normal times, the beginning and end of school years. However, course corrections may be necessary mid-year to get back on track.

The question remains, "How?" How do we evaluate our current situation and look into necessary changes?

• **Look at your mission.** Being an auxiliary of your church, your student ministry should reflect the mission and vision of the congregation as a whole. If your congregation doesn't have a specific mission or vision statement, know that a student ministry exists to help your students become more devoted followers of Jesus. Are you focused on that primary purpose or has your youth group become a social club? It is not an easy question to ask yourself, but it is an important one.

• **Look at your teaching.** Our lessons and sermons are of primary importance. Students receive a lot of information through YouTube and TikTok, but can they trust it? More often than not, the answer is no. As caring adults in the church, we need to give them a steady diet of the Word that their parents can build upon.

• **Look at your volunteer squad.** Are they on the same page when it comes to purpose and focus? If we don't intentionally discuss these issues with our volunteers, our ministry can be pulled in different directions. It is important to have leaders with different strengths and areas of emphasis, but your squad needs to move forward together.

• **Look at your own spiritual disciplines.** As the leader of your group, it is important to take a close look at how faithful you are in reading the Word, praying, sharing your faith, giving and worshipping. Our commitment, as leaders, is reflected in those God has put under our care. Whether you are a youth pastor or a Sunday School teacher, your students are looking at what is going on in your life and what you hold as important. Besides being an example, we minister out of these disciplines, and our goal is to minister out of the overflow.

The end of the year and the beginning of a new one is a great time to look back and make necessary changes in our ministries. Seek God's direction as you pray and commit yourself to helping your students become more devoted followers of Jesus.

of individual victories from **David Corretjer** and **Alejandro Mas**.

• **Bartlesville, Okla., Dec. 20** — Competing for the final time in the 2023 calendar year, CBC was on the mat at the 918 Open

hosted by Oklahoma Wesleyan. CBC had two individuals place, with **David Corretjer**, who went 4-0 on the day, winning at 125 pounds and **Yair Sanchez** placing fourth in that same class.



Year End Giving

This time of year is when many think about making a year-end contribution to Central Baptist College. Though receiving a tax deduction should not be the primary motivation for giving, it would be financially responsible to donate before Dec. 31 to enjoy a 2023 tax deduction.

Central Baptist College exists to **transform** lives through education that integrates Christian faith and academic excellence in a Christ-centered environment. With that in mind, every contribution made to CBC is a **"transformational gift"** because it is used to further the mission of the college. CBC has several programs designed with you in mind. One area is our **Gifts that Transform** program. Below are eight areas where you can designate your gift. Visit cbc.edu/transform for descriptions of the programs and services these funds support.

- Alumni Fund
- Athletic Fund
- CBC Fund
- Fine Arts Fund
- Friends of the Library Fund
- PACE Fund
- Scholarship Fund
- Student Life Fund

Please take a moment to consider these focus areas and the

impact your gift could have in the lives of the nearly 600 students who attend CBC. However you choose to give, please know how much we appreciate your continued financial support of Central Baptist College.

Legacy Leaders

Legacy Leaders is another giving program created to help CBC alumni and friends give back. The purpose is to recognize individuals who believe in the mission and future of CBC. Your contribution, whatever the amount, will have a big impact on the future of the college and the lives of our students. These are the giving levels for the Legacy Leader program:

- Pillar (\$10 per month)
- Tower (\$25 per month)
- Sustainer (\$50 per month)
- Leader (\$75 per month)
- Old Main (\$100 per month)
- 1952 (\$250 per month)

Many people also consider a memorial or honor gift this time of year. When you give this way, a note will be sent acknowledging that you have given a donation (without revealing the dollar amount of the gift) to the family of the person you want to remember or the person you want to honor.

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Be strong
AND COURAGEOUS
FOR I AM WITH YOU
Jeshua 1:9

Be Strong and Courageous

2023 is about to end, with the opportunity of a new year before us. What will your church do with the challenge to live courageously the principles and truths of God's Word? Courage can be defined in many ways, but one definition by W. Phillip Keller is "the willingness to obey God regardless of personal cost." That describes an unwavering obedience without compromise or hesitation. It is driven by fearing God more than fearing what man may think or do to you. Today's world's philosophy promotes self-development while the Scriptures teach self-denial. We are called to offer our lives as living sacrifices.

Spiritual growth and discipleship are summed up multiple times in the Scriptures by passing truth to the next leader, the next generation and the next believer. Jesus led by example in teaching and being with the 12 disciples. Paul poured into young men like Timothy and Titus. We have the example of Moses and Joshua. Psalm 78:3-4 talks about the things "Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done."

In Deuteronomy 31, Moses tells Joshua to be strong and courageous; he had nothing to fear because God would go with him. In Joshua 1:6, God tells Joshua, "Be strong and courageous." Joshua challenges the people with the same cry of courage, and they even respond to his challenge in verse 18 by restating it back to him, "Above all, be strong and courageous." Moses' leadership mantle had fallen on Joshua, and he was ready to do what God said and willing to put his life on the line for that obedience. Joshua believed what God said, and his faith led him to follow Him, believing He

meant what He said.

• **Let's begin this journey of courage by praying dangerous prayers.** In *21 Dangerous Prayers*, author Gary Rohrmayer wrote, "Any encounter with a Holy God can be dangerous — not in a life-threatening way, but in a way that can be life-altering and soul-shaping. All too often, we pray safe prayers — God bless me, God help me, God protect me, God heal me and God provide for me. Dangerous prayers are risky and life-stretching. Dangerous prayers come out of a spirit of brokenness. Dangerous prayers are filled with boldness and daring faith." What courageously dangerous prayers do you need to pray? Maybe Psalm 139:23-24 or Psalm 85:6-7?

• **Make sure you lead courageously.** Henry Blackaby stated, "Courage is the confidence that God is with you and will not forsake you." Joshua was a man who knew what it was like to lose the vote in a business meeting, 10-2, and go against the prevailing consensus. God is more interested in your obedience to His commands than your pedigree, preferences or origins. You must lead with biblical convictions, even if that requires standing alone. Be courageous, but also be caring by empathizing with those struggling, realizing they are not ready to give up what they are clinging to so tightly.

• **Lead courageously by pursuing those who are far from God, just like Jesus did.** Courage will require not depending on what others are doing but instead choosing to do what God has called you to do. Have the courage to love like Jesus loved and to love what He loved. Be moved with compassion for those who are not following Him. Following Christ requires seeking His face and following His lead courageously. Godly courage is following Him in the midst of

Reports — from the Churches

Barney, Enola added one by baptism; Reagan Shearer, pastor.

Cross Roads, Warren gained two by statement; Sidney McGraw, pastor.

First, Damascus received two by letter; Daniel Williams, pastor.

Old Hickory, Hattiesville reports one by baptism and two by letter; Blake Martin, pastor.

Worden, Bald Knob welcomed on by statement; Tony Crocker, pastor.

your fears. J.D. Greear said, "God does not call the brave; He makes brave the called!" Paul stated that he was in prison for the advance of the gospel.

• **Have the courage not to become enamored or fixated on "bigger is better" but, instead, courageously disciple others.** Discipleship is messy, hard and time-consuming, but well worth it. If you are not discipling, have the courage to repent. Begin leading your church by demonstrating what discipleship looks like. Remember, the speed of the leader is the speed of the team. Your success in discipleship does not depend on your history or heredity but rather upon your present obedience to the heavenly Father. Even if you were never disciplined by others, refuse to use that as an excuse and begin discipling now.

• **Courageously remind yourself and others of God's faithfulness.** In Joshua 1:5, God reminded Joshua that Moses' accomplishments were because of His presence. God promised to walk with Joshua the same way He walked with Moses. That is the same promise He is making to you in Matt. 28:20. No power can defeat the God who guides you. We tend to quickly forget times when God's presence showed up powerfully in our lives. Do not be guilty of spiritual amnesia. Joshua remembered how they crossed the Red Sea on dry land, and, if you reexamine the path you have already traveled, you will see His presence and guidance.

Let our anthem for 2023 be Joshua 1:6, "Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them." God's promises are true. Let's have the courage to pray dangerous prayers, lead others courageously, love others outrageously, make disciples who make disciples and remember God's faithfulness through the years.

What is God's Word saying to you? Where is the Holy Spirit of God leading you? What actions of obedience do you need to obey courageously?

Just Thinking...

By Dr. Tom Mitchell

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What About the Christmas Tree?

I was just thinking about a topic that has been bantered about for years. Is it wrong for Christians to celebrate Christmas with Christmas Trees? All my life, I have heard this debate, and some adamantly oppose placing these ornament-bearing trees in the homes of believers. So, what about the Christmas Tree?

A Misconstruing of an Old Testament Passage

Some use Scripture to support their opposition to Christmas trees. They refer to Jer. 10:3-5 (NIV) — "For the practices of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good."

The assertion is that this refers to the pagan practice of adorning trees. However, that is not what it speaks of at all. For many centuries, the custom of the Israelites was to worship the poles made from the trunks of trees. It may have referred to the ornate Asherah Poles, which skilled craftsmen sculpted as they formed a goddess to be worshiped. After the sculpting was completed, others (silversmiths and goldsmiths) would overlay the wooden form with the precious and costly silver and gold. Once completed, the pole no longer resembled a tree at all.

The Symbolism of the Evergreen Tree

While Christmas trees are often artificial in our modern era, most still look like evergreen trees. There was a reason that the evergreen tree was chosen to be brought into homes. Much symbolism relating to Jesus Christ is applied to the nature and beauty of the evergreen.

The beautiful branches represent everlasting life provided by God with His gift to mankind when Jesus was born in a stable and placed in a feeding trough. As families decorate their trees with lights (originally candles), the truth is projected that Jesus is the Light of the World. He is also the Word of God, and His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light for our paths.

Atop most trees is a very special ornament. For some, it is an angel, reminding us that the Christ child was surrounded by the angelic host praising God for the young Child's birth. Others place a star atop their trees. The symbolism here reminds us that there are those who still seek Jesus. The Magi followed a star until they finally came to where the Lord Jesus was, even some two years after His birth.

Beneath the Christmas tree are usually gifts. These are to remind us of the inexpressible Gift of God to us in His Son, Jesus Christ. However, our giving is an admonition from God's Word, and Paul expressed it during his ministry — "In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35).

The Tree is Symbolic; Not to be Worshiped

In Jeremiah 10, the trees were cut and sculpted into poles to enable the worship of idols — false gods. That is not the purpose of the Christmas

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Merry Christmas from the Lifeword Staff

Lifeword Around the World

By Heather Harrison

God is working through Lifeword all over the world. We are thrilled to share a few updates with you. As you read each one, will you join us in prayer?

• **In Africa** — Nacoulma reports from Burkina Faso that they've been using an app called WhatsApp to share daily biblical content. Despite terrorism, as many villages have been invaded by the army, the Lord has brought numerous people to Himself.

In Ghana, torrential rains have washed away properties and displaced families in the northern

corridor. Lifeword Partner Amos Bangarigumu also reports that the Mampruli language programming is changing the lives of many of the Mamprusi people.

Nigerian Partner Joseph Eniwo and others are building a studio in their church building where they can record more shows.

• **In Asia** — Joe Costa reports that amidst the volatile political and social climate in Lebanon, God continues to work through their efforts. This is obvious through the numeric growth with 16,100 followers on Instagram, 30,600 on TikTok and 41,600 on Facebook. Their hope is to reach people online, then engage with them offline. They have an engagement team of four people who disciple 35 young men and women and lead three Bible studies.

Lifeword Team Member Kishan reports that they have witnessed a spiritual harvest of 250 new believers and 41 baptisms in Nepal. They are seeing the number of house churches and small groups multiply.

In the Philippines, Pete Etabag shares that they have three new radio stations to install on new islands. He is also teaching classes at the BMA Bible College on how to be a media missionary.

• **In Europe** — Lifeword Partner Bogdan Bilav reports that the recordings are going well for the various languages they serve: Romanian, Hungarian, French and Gypsy.

• **In the Americas** — Carlos Panameno, a church planter and taxi driver in El Salvador, is a new Lifeword team member who has started a new show — The Right and Straight Road. Valmori Zelaya reports 1,500 online listeners to his show from various countries.

In Honduras, Luis Gonzalez shares that they are expanding the outreach to the Miskito people and the Garifuna people.

Even though the socio-political situation in Nicaragua is volatile,

with the government closing over 200 "religious" schools and shutting down all communications that are not state-run, Lifeword team members have seen 12 students come to know Christ through their school ministry.

Lifeword partners in Panama, Ronald and Carolina, are starting new social media programming for young Panamanians.

New content is going out daily from the US through Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Podcasts and blogs. The English Facebook page recently surpassed 1 million followers, with more than 25 million unique visits this year. Lifeword.org is in the top 15% of all worldwide websites. The new discipleship portal, Follow, is in the final stages and plans to launch before the end of the year. Lifeword Sunday was a success, and many churches are faithfully partnering with Lifeword in the mission to "Share Jesus. Make Disciples. Everywhere."

This is just an overview of the spiritual harvest taking place across the globe. We praise God for all He has done this year, His invitation to be a part of His work and for our faithful Lifeword partners.

Please pray for team members in Burkina Faso to be able to plant new churches with those who have been displaced, for God to provide for the needs of food and clothing in Ghana, for the community radio station in Nigeria to reach more in their community and for new churches and revival across the country and for the church in Paraguay and as pastor Nino takes the leadership, for the volatility of Panama (the country has been in political lockdown for the past 15 days, leaving citizens without much food or fuel and employment for many). Also pray for the upcoming launch of "Follow" and that God will continue to send out workers into His field and that He would reap a spiritual harvest for His glory. Thank you for joining us in prayer!

By Executive Editor
Jeff Herring



Journey
with
Jeff

Merry Christmas

My favorite thing about this time of year is the time spent with family, and we recently scheduled a "family night." We enjoyed a time together over dinner and then went to a local escape room. We enjoy doing escape rooms

as a family, but more importantly, we get to spend time together. In case you are wondering, we did escape with 41 seconds to spare!



Thank You

As we close out this year, thank you for faithfully supporting this ministry. We could not continue this ministry without your prayers and financial support. I also thank Associate Editor Allan Eakin for his faithful service to this ministry. Thanks also goes to Editor Emeritus Diane Spriggs, as she is also a devoted contributor each week to ensure the paper continues to go out. Please keep these faithful servants and their families in your prayers as they enjoy time with their families during this holiday season.

Be Intentional

I pray you and your family will enjoy quality time together over the next few weeks. I encourage you to be intentional about including a time to slow down and reflect on the truth that Jesus came to Earth to live a perfect life, died on the cross to pay for my sins and yours and rose again to provide hope for an eternity in Heaven for all who will put their faith in Him. It is so easy to get caught up in the "hustle and bustle" of Christmas that we miss the opportunity to be a witness to those around us about the real reason we can celebrate and have true joy in our lives every day, not just at Christmas.

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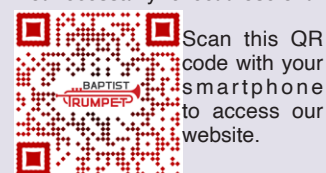
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CBC

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To give online, visit cbc.edu/give. If you prefer to donate by check, please make your check payable to Central Baptist College and include the name of the fund you wish to support on the memo line. Checks may be mailed to Central Baptist College, 1501 College Avenue, Conway, Ark. 72034. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Peggy Pillow at ppillow@cbc.edu or (501) 205-8834.

Merry Christmas

I, along with the administration, faculty and staff, wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Offices Closed for Christmas And New Year Holidays

The CBC campus will be closed Monday, Dec. 25 through Monday, Jan. 1, for the Christmas and New Year holidays. Normal business hours will resume Tuesday, Jan. 2.



Tony Randol Bittle, 58 of Jonesboro, passed away December 12. He was a deacon at Fairview Baptist Church.

Spotlight On Missions

Send offerings to BMA Missions

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Brandon & Brittney Lingle • Thailand

Say Hello to John Brooks Lingle! Little man made his arrival on Dec. 16 around 9:40 p.m. (Bangkok time). I'll refrain from going into the whole birthing story, but the short version is that Brittney is incredibly strong, and God answers prayers and is with His people. We are rejoicing that baby and mommy are both doing well and are healthy. Thank you, Lord!

John means "God is gracious," and oh, how gracious He was to give us another son. We chose the middle name "Brooks" because that is Brittney's maiden name, and after the famous Puritan Thomas Brooks. It was a sweet time of reflection as we wrote his name on the paperwork. December is not only the time we started dating but also when we joined our names 'Brooks and Lingle' in marriage.

Right now, as I sit in the hospital room to write this, I look up and can see baby John and mommy both sleeping peacefully. I can't help but think of sitting in a room like this one a year ago, having hospital workers walk in for me to sign papers and say, "Congrats!" Most of them did not know that our baby had just passed away. I would smile even though it was hard and painful. But now, how much joy, peace and relief I have seeing Brittney embrace our newborn son. Nursery workers have to work extra hard to take John away from her. The Lord takes away and gives. Blessed be His name! Thank you, Jesus.

• **First Christmas in Village** — Lord willing, we will be relocating seven hours east of Bangkok in about four months to start a new church with our friend, Jay and his family. Family and friends in that village had many questions about Christmas and had never seen anyone celebrate it. After preparing and planning, Jay decided to take his family there and host the first Christmas celebration. He shared with them the meaning of Christmas and why it's good news and should be celebrated. Some who heard the story for the first time were interested, while others mocked the message, but listened. Lord willing, we will be going to this area sometime next month and start looking at housing options.

• **Merry Christmas** — Our prayer for you and your family is that Christ is honored and adored as you celebrate Christmas. Oh, how worthy He is! For those of you who are suffering this Christmas — there is hope in Christ. He is our only hope in life and death. Much love to you and your family!

Please join us in praying for Brittney as she continues to recover and starts the process of sleepless nights and as we start preparing and planning to relocate and start a new church.

We praise God for baby John's good health, the natural delivery that Brittney prayed for, and, most of all, for Jesus humbling Himself and being born to die. Oh, may God help our hearts to feel the reality of what has been accomplished by our precious Savior. File: Spotlight Strong



Michael & Laura Beth Strong • Minneapolis, Minn.

We just experienced another "boring" month of small beginnings in foundation laying. I want to share some highlights with you:

• **God is allowing spiritual warfare.** We had another bout with COVID, and this kept us from working in the fields the way we would prefer to be working. We also saw a continued absence of core team members who have played a significant role in the church plant formation and work. And the weight of not being available to minister to my family or our church due to taking on additional hours of work created issues and strains in both places.

With the absence of people stepping up to fill the void, there is a noticeable difference in the church and home. Laura and I have been leaning on Jesus to take care of everything, provide help we are still waiting on and help us be content as we wait and live in the weakness allowed in this season. We are still alive, working and waiting, knowing what little we are able to do is what God calls us to do at this time. We are trusting in Christ to be enough.

• **God is opening doors and spreading the gospel.** God has also been opening new doors to take the gospel to new places. I was asked a while back to come and lead the Kansas and Western Missouri Association's Missions Rally. Dan McGee, who heads up the association, allowed me to seek God on the theme for the event. I sought God in prayer for several weeks and arrived at "We Are Unshamed of the Gospel." I shared what is going on in Minnesota and preached a sermon with the same title and message from Rom. 1:14-17.

At the gym I'm working in part time, the door has been opened to share the gospel. This week, I gave a man who is "spiritual, but without a religion," a Bible when he asked for one he could understand. I am also discipling a young man I worked with who said I was at the gym because he "prayed for me to come and disciple him." Each day I work, I try to show the light of Christ to everyone there, whether they are my co-workers, boss or a member of the gym.

• **God is showing me things are happening as they should.** Isaiah continues to step up and become the leader we saw God is making him. He led the church while I had COVID with only a couple



hours' notice and when I was out of town. He has also been leading me through a book he really wanted to turn into a group for the church in the future. It has been a joy to watch him grow and flourish and hear about how God is using him at Teen Challenge in his internship.

We even made some progress on some of the home repairs that drove me to pick up extra work, and our vans are now both running. We are thankful to God for all the help and provision He has given.

• **God is helping us enjoy our boring lives.** There isn't much that is glorious about our lives to those who live out in the world. We don't take vacations or go on exotic trips. We don't usually get away for a weekend or even go to concerts or events. We work to protect and strengthen our marriage, to be parents who know and love their kids each day and help our kids have daily habits and routines that will allow them to live disciplined lives as adults, to be present and prepared for our jobs in the church and to keep our promises to those who count on us.

I spend a lot of time studying in the hours no one is awake, praying when I am by myself, planning and prioritizing and a lot of time saying I can't do things due to other obligations. I also spend a lot of time listening to people at regular, pre-arranged times. I have habits of hygiene, physical health, mental health and spiritual health that I work to guard and protect. To some, it is boring. To me, it has proven to be a gift that provides life. God has used it to help us persevere and endure through hardships.

Despite feeling stretched, we have also been able to see God protect us and keep us together, growing deeper in love with those He has given us and more connected in our church and family with the few who desire to be connected.

We also continued working through the sermon series and teaching series, and Laura continues to lead the women through a book on church membership on Friday nights. We are focused on diligently finishing the things we start. We plod along week after week, and what we see is that God provides growth. He even does this in what many believe are boring, normal, non-exciting things.

Please pray for God to give our people a hunger to learn how to study, not just read, the Scriptures for themselves. Also pray they will learn how to move beyond self-feeding to feeding others.

God has given us a unique ministry. We serve in a hard part of a hard city. Overcoming the challenges of poverty, broken homes, incarceration, mental illness, physical illness and violent crime keeps some groups and individuals from coming to join us to serve here. I get that, but it doesn't have to keep us from reaching the people of North Minneapolis together. I need help. I need prayer support for the spiritual warfare that is ramping up again. I also need supplies and financial support to be free to evangelize the lost and disciple those who are coming to Christ.

As many of you know, I have picked up two additional jobs to
See STRONG, Page 6



The Epic Story of Truth: Part 2 (The Promised One, Crushed Serpent and New Creation)

In this series of articles, we're looking at prophecy, the return of Jesus, the Millennial Kingdom and God's continued plan for Israel in a different way. They aren't separate subjects but part of the complete narrative running from Genesis to the maps in our Bibles. We're hopping in the plane and gaining that 30,000 ft. view of Scripture — the big picture, and it is big. The story of truth told in Scripture is epic. It shows that there is so much more to Christianity than we make it, and we're also invited into this continuing epic tale.

Our journey through this epic story of truth started at creation, seeing how God created the world as we know it. He created us. Adam and Eve were in the Garden of God. They literally walked with Him in the cool of day. They interacted and intermingled with not only the plants and animals in God's Garden, but also celestial beings. One of those beings convinced them to disobey God, leading to them sinning. That sin separated the fellowship they had with God the Father, and they were kicked out of the garden. They, the world and even the deceiving celestial, Satan, were cursed. Yet there was a promise in the aftermath of the first humans' rebellion. God promised that the curse would be lifted, the earth would be made new and mankind would be restored to fellowship with Him. This New Creation would come at the defeat of Satan by a Promised One that would somehow uniquely be a "seed" of the woman. In that promise, God also hinted that Satan would, in some way and somehow, have an offspring.

The original Creation and New Creation bookends the recorded Word of God and its reality will

bookend this age. The foretelling of the Promised One and His defeat of Satan and its fulfillment bookends the Bible and the age, too. Sixty years after the ascension of Jesus, His disciple, John, who had been banished to a lonely island, was given a vision of how that promise written 1,500 years earlier and occurring nearly 4,000 years before would come to pass. John didn't write anything new in the Book of Revelation, but he capped off what prophets and even Jesus who came over those thousands of years had said.

In Revelation 19-22, we read of the Promised One, the crushing of the serpent and the New Creation. In Revelation 19, we read that, as a "seed" of Satan, the Antichrist surrounds God's people with armies from many nations, ready to remove them from the face of the earth, the heavens open and out steps the Promised One. Riding on a white horse is the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, one who is Faithful and True — the Promised One. With Him is the army of Heaven made up of faithful celestial beings and those who had committed to follow Him (the saved) in perfect, eternal bodies.

We know this Promised One is Jesus. In Revelation 19, the Apostle John tells how Jesus defeats the Antichrist, the False Prophet and the armies gathered against Jerusalem. It also tells how they are thrown into the lake of fire. The final "offspring of Satan" are crushed. The next chapter goes further and tells how the Promise One will call for an angel to bind Satan and throw him into the abyss. Later in the chapter, John reveals that Satan will eventually be thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the crushing of the serpent promised in Gen. 3:15.

STRONG

(Continued From Page 5)

make ends meet. I would like to eliminate at least one of those jobs to reinvest the time in my personal devotional life and the lives of my family and church to remain spiritually healthy. If you would like to assist with this, you can join us by partnering financially. We also need financial partners to help us add some help with administration and childcare needs since many of our people are not legally allowed to serve in children's ministry yet.

We have other needs that range from transportation to interpretation for Spanish speakers. We may not have people yet that have those gifts or assets, but financial support could give us options to serve in these new and growing ways until ministers join us or are raised up through discipleship.

You can send funds to assist through the church plant at Freedom Baptist Church, c/o Michael Strong, 1348 Sheridan Avenue North, Minneapolis, Minn. 55411.

Thanks for your prayers and partnership. It is making an eternal difference.

Though these events have not occurred, we know we can count on them to come to pass because God will bring all things to pass as He says. We can simply take God at His word, and He has already brought the first part of the Gen. 3:15 promise to pass. The serpent, Satan, did get a shot at the Promised One. Like the prophets Isaiah and Daniel said, the Promised One came as a suffering servant that would be cut off. The crucifixion of Jesus was Satan bruising His heel.

In the following chapters in Revelation, John shares that there will be a New Creation. The earth will be made new. It will be the Garden of Eden again — an Edenic earth.

Best of all, Revelation closes by telling us that, once again, God the Father will be on earth with His Creation. Like Adam and Eve, those who had been saved would be able to walk with God in the cool of day. *"No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever"* (Rev. 22:3-5 NIV).

This is an epic story. You can already see how you can be in this epic narrative. We can be in that army of Heaven and on earth for this New Creation. We can someday walk with God in the cool of day.

Thoughts from the Cleavers

By Dr. Tony Cleaver

Merry Christmas from Jerrie Sue and Tony at Hallelujah House in Ding Dong 2023!

A few random thoughts that are interesting to us about our time now:

- Jerrie Sue now lives with an octogenarian since Tony's birthday.
- We are only now writing the correct date of 2023 on our checks.
- Our children chide us for writing checks.
- Correspondence regarding Medicare part A, B... XYZ is required but not interesting reading.
- Someone who is illiterate and oblivious to English thinks up the names for new drugs.
- Information regarding burial plans comes without our request to our email.
- Cryogenic interment is an idea whose time has not yet come for us.
- Our friends are getting as old as we are.
- We must find younger and stronger friends to serve as our pallbearers.

• We should have gotten married earlier; we would be on the 60th not 59th anniversary.

• Our marriage is so much fun — we have not yet run out of things to talk about.

• We have fun with our missteps, mishearing, and misplacing things.

• The receipt from Walmart from Jan. 8 refuses to be located, even with great search.

• The right hand and slower lane is the best choice for driving.

• Don't ask if we remember you, just tell us your name!

• It is surprising how suddenly naps sneak up on you when you sit still. There are also other good things:

• God Most High continues to fulfill His purpose for us.

• Christianity is real.

• The Bible is true.

• Listening to God is better than telling Him our plans.

• The Decalogue (10 Commandments) is a wonderful guide and pathway to life.

• The Sermon on the Mount is highly personalized to our situation.

• Christian friends marvelously always surround us.

• If we could choose a family, we could not choose a better one than we have.

We wish for you all the good that peace brings to your family for the coming year of 2024!



DISTRICT CALENDAR

United Dist. WMA, Jan. 6, 10 a.m.; Denver Street, Greenwood.

Jonesboro Dist. Brotherhood, Jan. 9; Bethany, Jonesboro.

Southwest Dist. WMA, Jan. 9, 10 a.m.; First, Emerson.

Central Ark. Dist. WMA, Jan. 13, 10 a.m.; program by Valerie Fish; Oak Park; Little Rock.

Greenbrier Dist. Men's Fellowship, Jan. 20, 8 a.m.; Immanuel, Greenbrier.

Greenbrier Dist. WMA, Jan. 20, 10 a.m.; Bethlehem, Greenbrier.

Dive into the Epic Story yourself by reading Rev. 19-22.

— *Jake is a state missionary and would love to share about the work in Northwest Arkansas and encourage your church to stand firm. (standfirmministries.com)*

UPCOMING EVENTS

Christmas Concert, Dec. 24, 11 a.m.; featuring Dylan Brock; Center Grove, Cord.

CBC Homecoming, Jan. 12-13; Central Baptist College, Conway.

World Missions Sunday, Feb. 25.

CBC Gala, March 1; featuring Dr. Jack Graham; Antioch, Conway.

BMA of America Annual Mtg., April 16-18, 2024; Chateau on the Lake, Branson.

SOAR 2024, July 3-5; Live! By Loews Convention Center; Arlington, Texas.

Student Ministry Workers Retreat; Sept. 14; Central Baptist College; Conway.

BMA of Arkansas Mtg., Nov. 7-8; Central Baptist College, Conway.



BMA OF ARKANSAS
STATE MISSIONS

Missionaries

Juan Carlos Posadas, Misión Creciendo en Cristo, NLR; (501) 712-8752
 Ruben Isturiz, Misión Ebenezer, West Little Rock; (501) 707-5388
 Johnny Shew, Faith Chapel, Flippin; (870) 421-1984
 Bryan Clay, Faith Journey, Benton; (501) 522-0079
 Roberto Marcelletti, Misión Gracia Soberana, NW Ark.; (936) 202-7988
 Jake McCandless, Epic Life, Pea Ridge; (501) 472-9079
 Michael Hight, El Faro #2 Hispanic Mission, Cabot/Jacksonville; (501) 326-0198

MICHAEL HIGHT, HISPANIC COORDINATOR; (501) 326-0198
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PAUL WHITE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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The Greatest Gift Ever Given

Vicki and I celebrated our first Christmas as a family way back in 1969. We didn't have much, but that did not seem to matter as we had each other. Going to the woods and cutting just a small limb from a pine tree, we brought it home and decorated it with red berries, popcorn on a string, lots and lots of stringy icicles, a few bulbs and hand-picked pinecones. Of course, there were no phones with cameras, and oh, how I regret not having taken a picture of our masterpiece. We were 18, in love and blessed beyond measure. We exchanged precious but very common gifts. We had most things a person would want for Christmas, except the main thing, and that was Jesus.

We were not attending church. Moving forward a couple of years and having become parents, we realized something was missing. While holding my baby boy, I knew I owed it to my children to bring them up in church. I rededicated my life, Vicki was gloriously saved and only then did we learn the real meaning of Christmas. Yes, the traditions of gift-giving, fellowship-ping and food have always been a part of our Christmases. But we know that God, through His great love, gave us Heaven's best, His Son, and that by believing we might become joint heirs with Him. This wonderful gift of Christmas can become yours, too, if you let Him come into your heart.

As I write this, I am looking at our 54th tree. While our trees have increased in size, they are no longer the center of attention in our home. Merry Christmas.

From Our Missionaries

Misión Creciendo en Cristo (Growing in Christ), North Little Rock:

Juan Carlos Posadas writes, "The Christmas carols have aroused enthusiasm in several brothers and sisters in the church — we have 13 children and 9 adults. Saturday night, we visited three homes, sang Christmas carols, read the Word of God and prayed for the family in each of them. We started our tour at Yajaira's house, her sons Marco and David were there, and her husband, Joel, whom we had not had the opportunity to meet. Yajaira has been in poor health, so it was a good opportunity to show her our love. Then we went to Karina's house. She welcomed us with her two daughters, Kimberly and Emily. It had been a couple of months since we had seen them at church, and it was a pleasant reunion. We ended up at the house of our brothers, Oscar and Emelda, tired, but satisfied with the duty accomplished — the adoration of God and the communion with the church. Oscar and Emelda were waiting for us with tostadas, bread and hot drinks that we usually have at Christmas time.

"At our Sunday gathering, we studied Mary's visit to her relative, Elizabeth, sang Christmas carols and prayed. As usually happens in winter, attendance increases. On this occasion, we had the highest

attendance in history at a normal service, without celebrating a special occasion. We had 89 people!

"On Sunday afternoon, a group of 17 of us went to support the outreach that Michael Hight did with his church planting team at a mobile home park in Cabot. We enjoyed knocking on doors, sharing the message of salvation and inviting people to the party with trampolines, piñatas and other activities in their community.

"We also invite you to a Bible study that will begin on the first Monday of 2024. We thank God for the work he is carrying out in North Little Rock."

Ebenezer, West Little Rock: Ruben Isturiz writes, "It has been a busy but rewarding week at Ebenezer. Last Saturday, we had our Christmas celebration. From decorating, coordinating the food, preparing the program and message, we were filled with a lot of pre-event activity. We started at 7 p.m. and finished at 10 p.m. My family and I arrived back home at midnight.

"The attendance exceeded 50. We wanted to get to 60, but several could not make it. The interesting thing is that we had many visitors who were entering a Baptist church for the first time. We talked about the chronology of Christmas. Many liked how the events happened year after year from the annunciation

to the death of Herod. The visitors were amazed to understand and know what the Bible says about the birth of Jesus Christ. We presented the gospel to them and after the service we had several games that kept us joyful and awake. Pray that the Word of God that was sown for the first time in the hearts of the visitors will bear fruit in their time.

"In the coming weeks, our attendance will most likely decrease. Several families have already informed me that they will be traveling. Pray that God will bring them back home safely.

"Thank you, brothers and sisters, for your support. Keep praying for us. God be glorified!"

Faith Chapel, Flippin: Johnny Shew writes, "We had a great week at Faith Chapel! We had several families out and still had a really good number for Sunday morning worship. Once again, our returning visitors are bringing new visitors. I love it when that happens!

"We had a Christmas fellowship on Saturday, and it was so much fun. The little gray house, as we call it, where we have those sorts of things, was full and overflowing to the tables on the patio! The kids got to run and play together, and they decorated Christmas cookies. It was a wonderful time of fellowship. We had lots of good food and desserts, and we also got to celebrate my mom's 89th birthday with her. What a great day!

"There's not much new to report on the new building. We are still waiting for drywall, but we sure will appreciate that new fellowship hall when it is complete. The gray house is getting smaller each time we use it.

"We thank you for your support and prayers! They both mean so much to us, and they allow us to do this work that God has called us to. On days like last Saturday, it doesn't seem like work though. We are truly blessed, and we thank Him for you all!"

Faith Journey, Benton: Bryan Clay writes, "We had a busy week at the mission! I started the week helping Paul White get a van from a fellow church that graciously donated it to BMA State Missions. We had a great visit on our road trip!

"One of the nursing facilities we serve put together a Christmas card to share with friends and families to let them know that they appreciate them for their loving support and are praying for them daily. These prayer warriors are so eager to show God's love to others. It is such a blessing to be able to be a part of this ministry with them.

"On Friday, I was asked to come speak with a local middle school at their monthly Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) meeting. I was able to share my testimony with approximately 50-60 students. It is always a great time to be able to share how Christ can change your life if you ask Him into your heart and follow Him.

"During this busy Christmas season, don't forget that sharing Christ's love with others is the greatest gift we can give."

Misión Gracia Soberana (Sovereign Grace), NWA: Roberto Marcelletti writes, "I am so excited to inform you about the work that God is doing in Northwest Arkansas, in the cities of Pea Ridge, Springdale and Rogers through our ministry. We began the discipleship work with two new families who have received the transforming grace of our Lord. To hear a woman say her greatest longing now that she is in Christ — giving her husband his place as the head and pastor of her family — is something incredible in these times when she used to be super feminist. It's something only God can do.

"Also on Sunday, we held our Christmas service and my wife, Patty did a wonderful job rehearsing for one month with the Generation of Grace, which is our children's ministry, who sang in the Christmas program and also prepared a choir with the women of the church. It was a great blessing, and we had the service with the most people since we started — 45 people and 11 people visited us."

Epic Life, Pea Ridge: Jake McCandless writes, "If these reports had titles, the title this week would be, 'Family, Miracles and Chex Mix.' I've operated in ministry as if it was impossible to reach family and closest friends, but through the model of ministry we're using in Pea Ridge, we're seeing family reached, a family that has been prayed over for years.

"This week, we invited both our Woodbridge and Garfield Connection Groups to meet together. One of the leaders reached out to their nephew and invited him since the meeting was closer to the nephew's home. Not only did he come, but his daughter called and asked if her new boyfriend could come. We've been praying for this family for years. We've also been

TREE

(Continued From Page 3)

tree, nor should people intend to do so. Christmas trees are symbols, like steeples on church buildings, and so are those beautifully decorated trees. They are there not to cause people to worship them but to remind those around us to worship the Son of God who died on the cross, rose from the tomb and promised to come for those who place their trust in Him.

Karen and I wish each of you a Merry Christmas. May the Prince of Peace rule and reign in your hearts at this very special time of the year.



Ronnie Johnson is available for pulpit supply as the Lord leads within a driving range of Stuttgart, preferably on Sunday mornings. He has been pastoring churches for 21 years. Contact him at (870) 659-7774 or his wife, Barbara at (870) 659-7274.

County Line Baptist Church in Marvell is seeking a full-time pastor. Inquiries may be made to Tommie Shackelford at (870) 338-2873.

Meadowside Baptist Church in Pittsburg, Kan. is seeking a bi-vocational pastor. Contact Greg Hardister at (620) 704-6860.

Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church in Mineola, Tex. is seeking a full-time pastor. Resumes may be sent to Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, 5848 S. State Hwy. 37, Mineola, Tex. 75773 or mpmbc.mineola@gmail.com.

praying for healing of what seemed to be obvious throat cancer. As he pulled up in the driveway for Bible study, he received a call from his doctor — it was not cancer. We celebrated that miracle in our Bible study. It's one of several we've seen while praying for one another.

"We had a 'Chex on Your Neighbor Party,' too. Each family brought a part to mix together in a Christmas Chex Mix. Then we filled containers for everyone to take and talk to their neighbors. It was a fun way to push each other to get out in their neighborhood. The week wrapped up with a visitor at our Preview Night!"

El Faro #2 Hispanic Mission, Cabot/Jacksonville: Michael Hight writes, "Yesterday was an absolute blessing. We adopted a small trailer park to make contacts and share the gospel. With great help from South City, Creciendo en Cristo and El Faro, we were able to bless a lot of people. We shared Christ with a wide variety of people and began building important relationships. Please keep praying for us! Merry Christmas to you all."



MOVING (Continued From Page 1)

work. The goal is more cooperation at various levels to advance the kingdom of God through the Baptist Missionary Association.

Certain foundational principles exist concerning the relationship of a local BMA church to the Baptist Missionary Association as a whole:

• **The local church is the foundation of everything.** A local church plants another church, not associations. The local church is the governing agency, not the association.

• **The local church is God's plan A to reach the world with the gospel, and there is no plan B.** Before ascending back to the Father, Jesus told the early church, *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"* (Acts 1:8).

The Holy Spirit would empower them to influence their community (Jerusalem), the surrounding region (Judaea), regions beyond (Samaria) and, ultimately, the world (uttermost part of the earth). How could one congregation do that? History teaches that persecution thrust many Jerusalem believers into other areas of Europe and Asia. The Bible reveals a cooperative effort to establish churches in these same areas. Paul's multiple missionary journeys focused on church planting and strengthening existing churches.

preparations. Mary was attracted to Jesus' presence.

Martha was quick to her feet. Mary was quick to Jesus' feet.

Mary chose the better thing.

So, are you ready to enjoy a "Mary" Christmas? Are you submissive and obedient to God's will for your life? Do you believe in His promises? His power? His purpose for your life? Do you ponder on Him?

Do you live a life of freedom and faithfulness, being ever aware of all that Christ has done for you?

Do you have a **(M) Mind Molded** by the words and ways of God?

Do you have an **(A) Anointed** spirit that worships Him with **attitudes** and **actions**?

Do you have a **(R) Responsive** heart that listens and obeys what you have been shown in His Word?

Do you have a **(Y) Yielded** life that chooses to sit at His feet?

Scripture — Luke 1:37; Luke 8:1-3; Luke 10:38-42

— *These articles are shared via the National WMA web page blog that can be accessed at nationalwma.org/blogs.*

The Bible also indicates that Paul encouraged different congregations to work together. One such situation was the collection of funds to assist a struggling Jerusalem church at one point.

Recognizing the biblical basis for working together, early BMA leaders encouraged churches to reach their community, work together with other churches in their area (local association) to spread the gospel, cooperate on a state level to establish larger ministries and unite on a national/international level to impact the world. The model was not necessarily original with BMA leaders, but was ideal for associational Baptists.

What does the average BMA church look like? The average BMA church looks like the majority (59%) of churches nationwide. They average about 60 worshippers on Sunday morning, have limited resources, are led by one pastor who is most often bi-vocational and church programs are led by volunteers (worshipleader.com/leadership/worship-in-the-average-church-in-america).

The average BMA church cannot impact the entire world alone, but by working together with other churches, it can be an instrument of change in a dark world through the power of God. The average BMA church may not be able to help finance every department on every level of our associated work, but the average BMA church can and should support some ministries. The average BMA church may not be able to give hundreds of dollars a month to Missions, Baptist Publishing House, Central Baptist College or the *Baptist Trumpet*, but most can give a few dollars each month. Consistent giving of any amount makes a huge difference to associated ministries.

While participation at any level of our associated work (local, state or national) is not required, that participation will undoubtedly benefit a congregation and neighboring congregations. Participation involves attendance at meetings, prayer for one another, conversations with each other, cooperative work and giving.

In Arkansas, there are 16 local associations. The number of churches in each association and the ministries they support vary. Some are very active local associations. For example, several local associations sponsor summer camps. A couple of associations sponsor the Association of Baptist Students (ABS) college ministries at Southern Arkansas University and the University of Arkansas. The Central Arkansas Association supports El Faro Bautista Iglesia in Little Rock.

**MOVING
with Ministers
and Staff**
To view previous listings
from this column, visit
our website at
www.baptisttrumpet.com.

Franklin Street Baptist Church in Farmerville, La. is seeking a bi-vocational pastor. Resumes may be sent to Danny Eddy, 2511 Cedar Creek Drive, Ruston, La. 71270.

While these are a few that come to mind, others do a magnificent job of cooperating with other churches in their area to sponsor various other ministries. A church may choose which local association in which it wants to participate. A church may choose its level of participation. A church may determine what level of financial participation it wants to have. However, participation and giving will expand the reach of a participating church and will enhance its ministry.

On the state level, the BMA of Arkansas has four departments — Arkansas State Missions, the *Baptist Trumpet*, Central Baptist College and the Arkansas State Youth Department (Student Ministry Matters). Beginning with the Jan. 10 issue, we will feature articles about each of these ministries that will share where they are located, their ministry structure, financial needs and ways to get involved in supporting these ministries of your association. Other states or regions have similar ministries.

Here again, a church may choose to participate in the state association, the level of financial support and its level of involvement. However, participation and giving will expand the reach of a participating church even further.

On a national level, the BMA of America has seven departments — BMA Global (Missions), Lifeword, BMA Seminary, Baptist Publishing House, Daniel Springs Encampment, Moral Action Agency and BMA Financial Services — along with several sponsored ministries. The reach of some of these ministries is primarily North America, while the reach of others is worldwide. The local church may choose its participation level and level of financial support.

Over the next few weeks, pastors are encouraged to talk to church members about these articles. BMA church members are asked to seek God's guidance in supporting some or all the ministries and discuss that prompting with their pastor. We will make these articles available to the public on our website (baptisttrumpet.com). Let's keep the conversation moving forward.

A "Mary" Christmas

By Judy Wallace

By now, you are probably in the throes of the season. There are emptied tubs waiting to be taken back to the attic. The fake green needles and glitter that adorn the floor await your attention, and a pile of unwrapped presents stares back at you when you stare at them!

Things were much different during the time of Christ. Though His birth basically went unnoticed by the world, angels announced it, shepherds rejoiced in it, God-fearing kings eventually came to worship and offer Him gifts and three different women named Mary had their lives turned around by Jesus' birth, life and death. Let's look at each to see what it takes to have a "Mary" Christmas.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

I don't think we realize what Mary went through to be obedient to God. She was, after all, engaged to be married! In those days, a betrothal was as binding as a marriage, and here she was pregnant. It wasn't just shame and ridicule she would have to endure, but if the Old Testament law was to be followed, she should be stoned. Then there was also her confused, wounded, heartsick fiancée whose trust in her would have been shattered.

How did she submit and obey?

• **She believed in God's promise.** A Messiah had been promised from the beginning of creation and throughout the history of the Jewish nation. The teachings of the prophets assured His people a Deliverer would come.

• **She believed in God's power.** She knew He was the Creator of all and had all power to do what He willed. Even though she was a virgin, she knew of the birth miracle that was true of Abraham and Sarah and that "nothing is impossible for God."

• **She believed in God's purpose.** Mary knew if God purposed it, He would perform it. So, instead of being self-willed and stubborn, she submitted and obeyed. What a glorious blessing she would have missed if she hadn't!

Mary Magdalene

We hear her name and think

"harlot," but the Bible never says that about her. Instead, she was a woman that had not one, two, three, four, five or six but seven demons! Totally bound, chained and tormented by these evil oppressors, her life was not her own. But then Jesus saved her, forgave her, released her and **she lived free.** Mary Magdalene never forgot what she had been and what she was now because of what Jesus had done for her. That's why **she lived faithfully.** She was with Christ as He ministered to others. She was with Christ when He suffered on the cross. She was with Christ when it came time to anoint His body. She was the first to be with Christ after His glorious resurrection. Her life was centered on the Lord Jesus Christ because of what He had done for her.

Mary, the Sister of Martha

When you hear the story of Mary and Martha, do any of you feel like Martha got the raw end of the deal? I confess I'm a natural-born "Martha." For me to be a "Mary," it takes intentionality, discipline and dedication. I can see myself delegating assignments, letting Mary know if she would just come and help, we would finish more quickly, then both of us could enjoy His teaching!

But even then, Martha was more concerned about how her house looked, while Mary was more concerned about how her heart looked. You see, Mary had a **molded mind** — totally attuned to Jesus and always drawn more and more to His teachings. Mary also had an Anointing spirit and humble Attitude. Whenever we see her in Scripture, she is sitting at the feet of Jesus — learning, worshipping. Mary also had a Responsive heart. She didn't just listen to what Jesus said, Mary Yielded to it. She chose to sit at His feet. She chose to listen to His Word whenever and wherever she could. She chose to be teachable and trusting.

Martha was diligent in her duties. Mary was diligent in her devotion.

Martha was distracted by the