

Volume IV, Issue 12 \ December 2011

# PERSPECTIVE

THE MONTHLY JOURNAL OF MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH



**CELEBRATE THE INCARNATION**  
**GOD CAME DOWN**



850 Mt. Vernon Hwy. NW \ Sandy Springs, GA 30327  
Phone: 404.255.3133 \ Fax: 404.255.3166  
info@mvbchurch.org \ www.mvbchurch.org



**Aaron Menikoff**  
Senior Pastor  
aaronmenikoff@mvbchurch.org



**David Carnes**  
Associate Pastor/Corporate Worship  
davidcarnes@mvbchurch.org



**Jacob Hall**  
Pastoral Assistant/Youth  
jacobhall@mvbchurch.org



**Chip Cofer**  
Recreation Minister  
chipcofer@mvbchurch.org



**Anne Russo**  
Financial Assistant  
annerusso@mvbchurch.org



**Bryan Pillsbury**  
Associate Pastor/Missions  
bryanpillsbury@mvbchurch.org



**Brad Thayer**  
Assistant Pastor/Administration  
bradthayer@mvbchurch.org



**Doug Young**  
Family Ministry Coordinator  
dougyoung@mvbchurch.org



**Priscilla Barry**  
Administrative Assistant  
priscillabarry@mvbchurch.org



**Bert Neal**  
Administrative Assistant  
bertneal@mvbchurch.org

## STAFF > SERMON SCHEDULE

- December 4**    **A Kingdom of Power**  
*John 6:16-24*
- December 11**    **A Kingdom of Life**  
*John 6:25-59*
- December 18**    **A Kingdom of Faith**  
*John 6:60-71*
- December 25**    **The Christmas Sermon**  
*Matthew 1*

## > FIGHTER VERSE

<sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.

John 10:27-30 (ESV)

## INSIDE THIS EDITION >

### The Very Words of God

A brief article on why we are switching to the English Standard Version (ESV).  
by Bryan Pillsbury

page 1

### The Bookshelf:

#### Radical by David Platt

A book review on living a radical gospel-centered life.  
by Scott Sullivan

page 2

### Celebrate the Incarnation: God Came Down

An article on the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus.  
by Aaron Menikoff

page 4

Use the QR reader on your mobile >  
device to sign up to receive each  
issue of *Perspective* by email.





# THE VERY WORDS OF GOD

by Bryan Pillsbury



**THE ELDERS WANT TO INFORM** you about an upcoming change to the pew Bibles. We believe that is for the spiritual good of the church that the endorsed version of the Bible for the preaching and public Scripture reading be the English Standard Version (ESV). At the beginning of 2012, we will change the pew Bibles to the ESV and preaching and public reading will be from the ESV as well. In addition, one hundred paperback editions will be distributed throughout the classrooms to use for Sunday School, small groups, etc. Let me explain why this is necessary.

Fundamentally, how do we know that the words that we read in our English Bibles are really God's words? This is where the type of translation comes into the picture. Biblical accuracy to the original texts—in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek—and readability are two fundamental characteristics of a good translation. We believe that both are found in the ESV. As it says in the preface, "The ESV is an essentially literal translation that seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer. As such, its emphasis is on 'word-for-word' correspondence, at the same time taking into account differences of grammar, syntax, and idiom between current literary English and the original languages. Thus, it seeks to be transparent to the original text, letting the reader see as directly as possible the structure and meaning of the original."

That "word-for-word" style of translation is an important distinction. Translations generally fall in a continuum from a word-for-word translation (essentially literal) to a thought-for-thought translation (dynamic equivalence). Literal translations attempt to be true to the actual word meanings using normal English syntax, while the thought-for-thought translations seek to capture the essence of the meaning of a sentence or paragraph and express it in a way that modern man would understand. (More literal translations would be the King James Version [KJV, 1611] or the New American Standard Bible [NASB, 1963]. The Living Bible [1971] or the Good News Bible are a more popular thought-for-thought versions dominated by the dynamic equivalency philosophy of translation.)

In 1984, the most popular Bible of recent times was published - the New International Version (NIV). The translation philosophy of the NIV was a balance of word-for-word and dynamic equivalency, placing readability as a high priority. Most conservative evangelicals considered the NIV to be a reasonably accurate Bible translation. However, some felt that NIV translators took too many liberties, so they, in good conscience, could not preach from it nor recommend it for their congregations. So for years, their only translation options were the KJV, NKJV, or the NASB. They were challenged to sacrifice readability for word-for-word accuracy.

Within the first three years of this new millennium, three new word-for-word translations were published - the English Standard Version (ESV), the New English Translation (NET) and the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB). So now there are more choices available for biblical accuracy and readability.

Our decision, however, to switch is not based on preference, nor the fact that there are more options available. *It's based on the fact that Zondervan Publishing has made revisions to the NIV 1984 that ultimately undermine the authority of Scripture.* Let me explain. In 2005, they published the Today's New International Version (TNIV) which was met with much consternation among conservative evangelicals because it had over 3,600 specific revisions related to gender-neutral words, for example changing the text of "his" to "their." In some cases, these revisions were unnecessary because the context clearly indicates that the masculine noun had a gender-neutral meaning, such as "man" for "humankind." Another, more problematic revision is in changing a verb in 1 Timothy 2:12. The NIV 1984 states that a woman shall not "have authority over a man" while the TNIV and NIV 2011 says a woman shall not "assume authority over a man." (NIV 2011 removed the TNIV's footnote that says "or have" is a translation option.) The implication of "assume" is that a woman has the authority, or is free, to exercise the authority over a man, as long as she does not wrongfully "assume" or usurp it. This may seem subtle, but it is hugely important. It is a point of contention in an ongoing debate among evangelicals concerning the proper role in church leadership and in the marriage relationship, a debate that hinges on the authority of Scripture. These revisions are a blanket attempt to neutralize gender, which in many cases, not only changes the meaning of the text but sometimes undermines conservative ecclesiastical theology of the church. This is a serious issue.

However, the issue gets more problematic and pragmatic. Most people who have been using the NIV 1984 could just ignore the revisions of the TNIV. That was a good option until Zondervan stopped publishing the 1984 version and now only publishes the 2011 version. One of the problems is that many unsuspecting Christians will buy the NIV 2011 thinking that it is a good translation because of its trusted reputation that has stood solid since 1984. People who acquire the NIV 2011 may likely be unaware of the changes or subtle influences denigrating the conservative theology of the church. This action forces evangelicals who have been satisfied with the NIV 1984 to either accept the gender-neutral language or change to another more accurate word-for-word translation.

In light of these issues surrounding the NIV, the Elders believe it is necessary to switch to the ESV. As those responsible for protecting the sheep and rightly dividing the Word of Truth, we take great care and responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of every member whom God providentially entrusts to our leadership. The liberal influences that are subtly taking root in the new NIV translation are very troublesome. We are very concerned over the gender-neutral revisions of the new NIV translation, and we have been forced for the sake of our church to oppose the endorsement of it. And our prayer is that we might be a church that brings our great God extreme pleasure by protecting the integrity of His Word and cherishing it as our bread of life. By God's grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit, may each of you do your best to "present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). ■



# The Bookshelf

## Radical by David Platt

Reviewed by Scott Sullivan

DESPITE BEING LABELED “THE YOUNGEST megachurch pastor in history,” David Platt—Pastor of the Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama—is a quiet, unassuming, and truly humble young man. I know this not from reading his first book, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith From the American Dream*, but because I’ve known David Platt since we were children. Our parents were friends before we were. We took annual camping trips together, and my sister and I took piano lessons from his mom for eight years. We were groomsmen in each other’s weddings, and I was a pallbearer at his father’s funeral. So in early 2010, when he let me know that he was getting his first book published, I jumped at the chance to get an advance copy. I read it cover-to-cover in about two days. When I was asked recently to write a review for the book, I was hesitant because of my personal connection to David, but because I know his heart and his purpose for writing the book and because I think it is a book that can truly impact the world, I want to offer my thoughts and wholehearted endorsement of it.

Success, in the modern American church culture, tends to be defined by the size of the crowds, the budget, and the buildings. Bigger is better, they say. Confronted with the reality that Jesus actually rejected the things that our church culture says are important, Platt begins *Radical* with the proposal that we have a choice “to continue with business as usual in the Christian life and in the church as a whole, enjoying success based on the standards defined by the culture around us. Or we can take an honest look at the Jesus of the Bible and dare to ask what the consequences might be if we really believed him and really obeyed him” (3). Platt demonstrates that Jesus actually calls the church to give up, sacrifice, and leave behind the things that this world and that we, by nature, value so much in order to proclaim His name and the gospel to the nations.

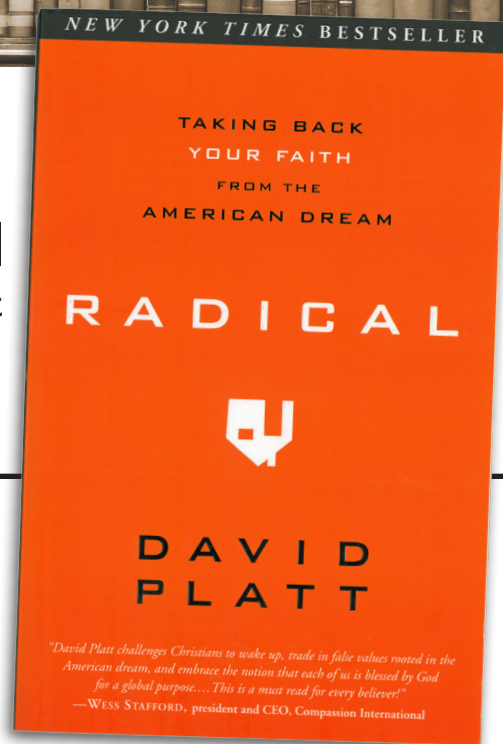
In the following pages, Platt gives us glimpses into people whose hearts and lives are sold out in radical devotion to Christ. Sometimes those people do crazy, counter-cultural things like living below their income so they can give away more for the causes in the kingdom of God that stir their hearts and minds. Sometimes they actually sell it all and move. Sometimes they reorient their lives so that their values, energy, and time all work to-

ward the kingdom, rather than creating conflicting values in their day-to-day lives. But it takes courage to step out of the rat race and choose a new

path. Platt writes, “I could not help but think that somewhere along the way we had missed what is radical about our faith and replaced it with what is comfortable. We were settling for a Christianity that revolves around catering to ourselves when the central message of Christianity is actually about abandoning ourselves” (7).

Abandoning ourselves is easier said than done. There are costs to follow Christ the way he demands to be followed. Indeed, as Platt illustrates through Scripture, Jesus often tried to talk people out of following him! But the rewards for those who do follow him are an indescribable treasure. Platt put it this way: “When we abandon the trinkets of this world and respond to the radical invitation of Jesus, we discover the infinite treasure of knowing him” (18). Platt admits that he has more questions than he has answers, but invites readers to join him in this journey, to risk our dreams for the sake of the over 1 billion people who have never even heard the gospel. And that is just in the first chapter!

In the second chapter, Platt relates a personal experience teaching in an underground house church in Asia, which had to meet in secret, yet were satisfied simply with studying and learning the Bible. He points out how their worship gatherings are so vastly different than ours. They don’t have all the amenities and luxuries of our churches. “God’s Word is enough for millions of believers” he noted, “who gather in house churches just like this one...But is his Word enough for us” (26)? It is Platt’s conviction that if we will truly understand the gospel, then we too can find satisfaction in God’s Word alone. This conviction lays the foundation for understanding and appreciating what the gospel really is and challenging the reader to explore how much of our understanding of the gospel is “American” and how much is biblical (28).





In chapter 3, Platt takes on the dangerous assumption in the “American Dream” that our greatest asset is our own ability. “In the gospel, God confronts us with our utter inability to accomplish anything of value apart from him” (46). Painting a picture of New Testament church growth in the book of Acts, Platt contrasts our dependence on programs and systems and their dependence on God. Ours is a culture that makes much of ourselves. The gospel makes much of God. In this chapter, Platt also lays one of the primary blocks of the foundation of the book through the example of George Muller who founded an orphan ministry that cared for over 10,000 orphans in the late 1800’s. Muller lived in such a way that it would be evident to all who looked at his life that God is indeed faithful to provide for his people. Platt said, “He risked his life trusting in the greatness of God, and in the end his life made much of the glory of God” (55).

Platt builds on this foundation in chapter 4, challenging the reader to consider how our dependence on God affects our relationships with others. In particular, he focuses on the Great Commission and the need to take the gospel to all nations. Platt, without reservation, states, “Jesus commands us to go. He has created each of us to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, and I propose that anything less than radical devotion to this purpose is unbiblical Christianity” (64). The job of getting the gospel to all nations is not for a select few who have been “called,” but for all of us. We cannot assign the obligations of Christianity to a few, while keeping the privileges of Christianity for ourselves (73). We are all called to impact the world for Jesus Christ.

How this is to be accomplished is laid out in the next chapter. With a simple analysis of Jesus’ relationship with the twelve disciples and his final instructions to them, Platt concludes that making disciples is the means by which we will impact the world. Jesus’ revolution did not revolve around the multitudes of people who followed him, but rather around twelve men who he taught to think, love, teach, and serve as he did. “Disciple making is not a call for others to come to us to hear the gospel but a command for us to go to others to share the gospel. A command for us to be gospel-living, gospel-speaking people at every moment and in every context where we find ourselves” (96).

With a firm foundation of God’s purpose for our lives having been laid, Platt spends chapter 6 building a theological case against the pursuit of wealth from Old and New Testament teachings. It is here that our pursuit of the “American Dream” comes into conflict with the condition of the world and its desperate need for the gospel:

*Suddenly I began to realize that if I have been commanded to make disciples of all nations, and if poverty is rampant in the world to which God has called me, then I cannot ignore these realities. Anyone wanting to proclaim the glory of Christ to the ends of the earth must consider not only how to declare the gospel verbally but also how to demonstrate the gospel visibly in a world where so many are urgently hungry. If I am going to address urgent spiritual need by sharing the gospel of Christ or building up the body of Christ around the world, then I cannot overlook dire physical need in the process (108-109).*

Platt clarifies that caring for the poor is not the basis of our salvation but is certainly evidence of it. He also states that wealth, in and of itself, is not a bad thing, but it can be an obstacle in our faith. It does seem radical to operate under the idea that God has given us excess not so that we could have more, but that maybe we could give more. The main idea of the book is no more clearly stated than when Platt writes, “The point is not simply to meet a temporary need or change a startling statistic; the point is to exalt the glory of Christ as we express the gospel of Christ through the radical generosity of our lives” (135).

The urgency of this radical commitment is unpacked in chapter 7, where Platt demonstrates from the book of Romans God’s plan to transform the world through His church was no “Plan B.” We, the church, are God’s plan to take the gospel to the nations. From Romans, he shows that all people have knowledge of God, reject God, are guilty before God, and are condemned for rejecting God. The good news, though, is that God has made a way of salvation for the lost, which comes only through faith in Christ. As a result, Christ commands the church to make the gospel known to all people. That is the mission.

If the first four chapters lay out the “why,” the next four chapters describe the “how” of radical living. In short, the promise that the reward for our willingness to take great risks for Christ is a reward that can never be offered in this world. The key to taking back our faith from the American dream is “realizing—and believing—that this world is not your home.” He continues, “If you and I ever hope to free our lives from worldly thinking, worldly pleasures, worldly dreams, worldly ideals, worldly values, worldly ambitions, and worldly acclaim, then we must focus our lives on another world” (179). Dying is gaining, Paul said, and Platt builds upon this to challenge the church to radical living.

So, where do we start? Platt does not leave readers with simple platitudes but provides a starting point dubbed, “The Radical Experiment.” He passionately desires for readers to act on what they have learned in the previous 180 pages. He gives five things you and I can do to begin to take our faith back from the “American Dream.” This includes (1) praying for the entire world, (2) reading through the entire Word in one year, (3) sacrificing your money for a specific purpose, (4) spending a portion of time in another context (missions), and (5) committing your life to a local church. It is a challenge, and it is nearly impossible to read this book and not be motivated to take on this challenge.

This book is incredibly challenging, and I would encourage everyone to read it. Platt is absolutely right that we get caught up in the comforts of our surroundings and lifestyle while neglecting the needs of the billions of people who have never heard the name of Jesus. Mount Vernon Baptist Church is located in the middle of one of the most affluent areas of Atlanta, Georgia, and this book could hit hard for many of our members. But the book is not aimed at only the affluent; it is aimed at all of us. It is to remind and challenge us to make every dollar and every moment count, to reassess our priorities and our focus. We’ve been commanded to go and make disciples, both locally and around the world. And sadly, in today’s church culture, that timeless, biblical command is considered “radical.” ■



**CELEBRATE THE INCARNATION**  
GOD CAME DOWN



**EVERY DECEMBER, CHRISTIANS CELEBRATE** the birth of Christ. This event is central to the Christian faith because it teaches us that Jesus Christ, the eternal and divine Son of God, became human for the salvation of sinners just like us. We call this event the “incarnation,” which is an English word derived from the Latin “becoming in-flesh.” It is a word to signify that the Son of God became truly human, really human, and in so doing, made our salvation possible.

Christmas is a beautiful time of year. The decorations and the music and the food and the gifts communicate love and joy and happiness and bounty. But there is nothing more beautiful than the miracle we celebrate. Paul wrote to Timothy of Jesus Christ, “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory” (1 Timothy 3:16). This mystery begins with the incarnation, “He was manifested in the flesh.” God came down. In the words of the great hymn writer, James Montgomery:

*Shepherds in the field abiding,  
Watching o’er their flocks by night;  
God with man is now residing,  
Yonder shines the infant-light:  
Come and worship, come and worship  
Worship Christ, the new-born King.*

We learn through the incarnation that Jesus Christ is both God and man. But this is a great mystery, one that deserves thoughtful attention from anyone who would call himself a Christian. We know after all that no mere man can save us. We know as well that God can’t stop being God. So what happened the day baby Jesus was born? How could a newborn turn the world upside down?

If Christmas is special to you because of trees and holly, gifts and cider, then you may not be interested in what you are about to read. But if you know what it is like for your heart to skip a beat at the thought that God came for you, that Jesus is Immanuel, “God with us,” that the Christmas Story is not a DVD to be archived but a reality to be embraced; then read on with the hope that as you are reminded of what Christmas means, your heart will sing for joy.

### **The Humanity of Jesus Christ**

From the incarnation, we learn that Jesus is truly human. It will not do to think of him as Superman, as if he came from another planet but was shielded from experiencing the icy cold of a Winter breeze, the sweltering heat of a Summer day, or the sharp point of a wooden spear (unless, of course, Kryptonite was nearby). As John Dagg, a nineteenth-century pastor, put it:

It was a real body that bore the weight of the cross, and was afterwards nailed to it. It was a real body that was pierced by the spear; and real blood and water issued from the wound. It was a real body that was embalmed with spices and laid in the tomb; and afterwards rose from the dead. This body was human. It had the appearance and organs common to human bodies; was sustained by food,

was subject to hunger and weariness, and needed the rest of sleep, like the bodies of other men.

If you are anything like me, there is something comforting about seeing real-life heroes fail. I know it doesn’t seem particularly godly to think such a thing, but who hasn’t been comforted by the fact that, every once in a while, the best point guard will still miss a free-throw, the best quarterback will toss an interception, the best politician will forget his talking points, and the best dancer will miss a step? Those mishaps, as infrequent as they may be, serve to remind us that we are all human. It was the poet, Alexander Pope, who wrote, “To err is human, to forgive divine.” For a moment, those heroes somehow seem more real; and we think, if only for an instant, that we can relate to them.

But the incarnation teaches that Jesus Christ can relate to us! “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). The humanity of Jesus Christ is a daily reminder that he was tempted to cut others down with his tongue, look lustfully at a woman, bend the truth to make himself look good, and squirrel away a little extra food for himself. Those temptations were real, not fake. And Jesus never gave in to them, not even once. He lived every day in a human body, empowered by the Holy Spirit, never giving in to the power of the devil and the desires of the flesh.

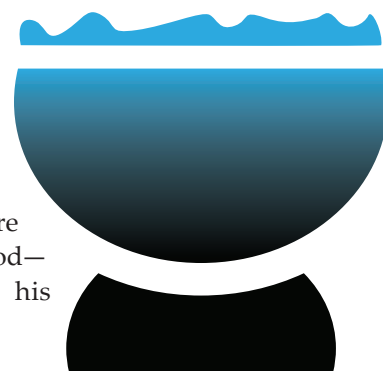
You might ask, “How could Jesus have truly been human if he never gave into temptation?” Because being sinful is not at the heart of what it means to be human. Was Adam *truly* human before he sinned? Of course he was. Will we be *truly* human in heaven, when sin is no more? Of course we will! In Jesus’ perfect life, we catch a glimpse of what true humanity is—and it is a glorious sight.

Christmas reminds us that Jesus was truly human. He lived like us, loved like us, felt like us, and ultimately suffered like us. The Bible says more. He lived *for* us, loved *for* us, felt *for* us, and ultimately suffered *for* us. This is what Paul means when he wrote that the Lord Jesus Christ, “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

This is the great irony of Christmas. If you truly want to celebrate Christmas this year, the best thing you can do is give and give and give. Try to experience what it must have been like to abandon all the glory of heaven for the dinginess of a manger. Can you even imagine? God came down.

### **The Divinity of Jesus Christ**

It is easy to be confused at this point. If we say that Jesus was truly human, must we therefore conclude that he is no longer God—at least for the duration of his earthly ministry? No!



In John 1:14, the Evangelist wrote, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” To say the “Word became flesh” is *not* to say that Jesus ceased to be God. It means that the Word [the divine Son of God] came to have human characteristics that he did not possess beforehand. The incarnation teaches us that in the *one* person of Jesus Christ there are now two natures: a human nature and a divine nature. Jesus is the God-man!

When Paul wrote that Jesus became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9) he does not mean that Christ gave up his divinity. Rather, Paul means that Christ *gave up* the trappings that usually accompany such an exalted state: glory, praise, honor, worship, and respect. Elsewhere Paul writes that Jesus “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:6-7). To understand this, picture a Ferrari (or a nice car of your choice) covered in mud. It is still a Ferrari, but its beauty is obscured. So it was with Christ. Though still God, his beauty was hidden by the humanity in which he now shared.

The evidence in the New Testament that Jesus is God is overwhelming. Jesus is described as God (John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; 1 Timothy 5:21). He shares the attributes of his heavenly Father. He is eternal as the Father is eternal (John 8:58). He is unchangeable as the Father is unchangeable (Hebrews 13:8). He knows everything as does his Father (Revelation 2:23) And when Jesus’ knowledge was limited (Matthew 24:36), it wasn’t because he was *unable* to know; but because he *chose* to submit himself to his Father’s will. Jesus is powerful as the Father is powerful. This is evident in the miracles Jesus performed and the profession of faith his disciples made about him (Philippians 4:13). Jesus is worthy of worship as the Father is worthy of worship (John 9:38; Acts 7:59).

Jesus is God. It’s why the nations exalt him. It’s why the angels bow before him. It’s why the sun is dim when standing beside him. He is the Giver of Life, the Ancient of Days, and the Bright Morning Star. To rightly celebrate Christmas is to revel in Christ. It is to put a stake in the ground and say, “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” It is to refuse to allow the glory of God to be obscured any more. It is to praise the Maker who became as one who is made.

*Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature,  
Son of God and Son of Man!  
Thee will I cherish, thee will I honor,  
Thou, my soul’s glory, joy, and crown.*

## The Christmas Mystery

The fact that Jesus could be both God and man is ultimately beyond our comprehension. In his humanity he is really human,



To rightly  
celebrate Christmas  
is to revel in Christ.

and in his divinity he is really God. One is left simply to marvel at such a miracle. Some have wondered if the angels themselves were so taken aback by the thought that the Son of God would appear in flesh that they had to be commanded to worship the baby. “And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him” (Hebrews 1:6). But we know the angels willingly, happily, gloriously praised the baby as God himself: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:14)

When we say that Jesus is both God *and* man, we are not saying that he had a human body and a divine mind (think Dr. Spock). If only his body was human, he wouldn’t have been truly human. And when we say that Jesus is both God *and* man, we are not saying that Christ somehow had a split personality (think Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde). And when we say that Jesus is both God *and* man we are not saying that he was somehow less than human and somehow less than divine (think Frankenstein).

For thousands of years, Christians have believed what the Bible teaches to be true, that Jesus Christ is God. It was in Chalcedon, in the year 451, that believers put pen to paper answering the question, “Is Jesus both God and man?” It’s what they had been celebrating for centuries, but to those who would deny this glorious truth, the church responded that Jesus Christ is one person with two natures, a human nature and a divine nature. He is:

born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has been handed down to us.

It remains a mystery that Jesus is both man and God. But the incarnation is a good mystery. Only in Christianity does God come to us. Only in Christianity, does God humble himself with us. Only in Christianity does God die for us. Now, all that remains is for us to celebrate the incarnation.

## Celebrate the Incarnation

This Christmas, in the midst of shopping and singing, cooking and resting, unwrapping and eating, consider how important Christ’s incarnation is (or should be!) to you.



Jesus can empathize with your weakness. Like a mother who knows the pain of her child, Jesus has compassion for you. Like a soldier equipped to go into battle, Jesus is equipped to defend you. It is good to know that somebody understands. Too many people go through life refusing to share the extent of their struggles. Still, Jesus knows. But it's not just that he knows; he is able to help. His empathy goes beyond merely understanding our feelings; he can actually provide spiritual power to help us overcome the trials we face.

Jesus can remove our guilt. In fact, the Bible even says that Jesus *had to be* made like us so that he could die for us (Hebrews 2:14-16). Our sin separates us from God. He is too holy to embrace us and too righteous to welcome us into his family. For us to share in fellowship with God, for us to be called his friends, our sin had to be taken away from us—our guilt had to be removed.

How is this possible?

It is hard, after all, to underestimate the devastation of sin. There are some holes simply too deep to escape. There are some relationships too fractured to repair. There are some wounds too severe to heal. There are some debts too large to pay. How many Americans have lost their homes because the price of the mortgage was simply more than they could pay? So it is with sin. We have offended a holy God. We deserve his wrath. Our sin has stained our soul. Like a criminal who deserves to hear the jury cry, "Guilty!" we deserve the sentence of eternal death and judgment. There was nothing we could do to change the verdict. We couldn't plead, "not-guilty" for there was too much evidence against us. We couldn't hire an attorney, because the Judge would never be convinced. The case was closed, our doom was sure.

But then God came down.

The incarnation teaches us that there is One who can take our place. Because Jesus was human, he could really die. And because he was divine, he could really bear God's wrath for us and for everyone who would ever repent and believe.

Don't pass over that last paragraph. Pause. Re-read it. Take it in. Once we were alienated from God. Our sin left us without any hope. We needed to be able to stand before God and hear him declare us "not-guilty." For that to happen, someone needed to stand in our place. Someone needed to represent us. It had to be someone with all the necessary credentials. Jesus had such credentials; he was one of us. But that's not all. Our Savior had to be God. How could a mere mortal take not just my place, but the place of countless sinners? How could a mere mortal bear the full penalty not just of my sins, but the sins of untold millions? It had to be God. On the cross, Jesus bore the penalty for our sins. "But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

God came down. Celebrate the incarnation because it made salvation possible. Worship the Lord. As Graham Kendrick wrote:

*Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity  
In perfect harmony, the Man who is God;  
Lord of eternity dwells in humanity,  
Kneels in humility, and washes our feet.*

*Father's pure radiance, perfect in innocence,  
Yet learns obedience to death on a cross;  
Suffering to give us life, conquering through sacrifice,  
And as they crucify, prays, "Father forgive."*

Merry Christmas. ■

~Aaron Menikoff

Gather with the women of Mount Vernon to...

# Treasure Christ

THE PERFECT GIFT

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2011

6:30 - 9:00 PM

FELLOWSHIP HALL

TICKETS:  
\$15

# December 2011

4 ▶ 9:15 am Knowing MVB: Session 1 ▶ 10:30 am Lord's Supper ▶ 12:15 pm Knowing MVB: Sessions 2-4 ▶ 6:00 pm Children's Christmas Musical	5	6	7 ▶ 6:30 pm "Happy Birthday, Jesus!" Party	8 ▶ 6:30 pm Treasuring Christ: The Perfect Gift	9 ▶ 6:30 pm Christmas Feast	10	3
11 ▶ 6:00 pm Christmas at Mount Vernon ▶ 8:00 pm Christmas at Mount Vernon Reception	12	13	14 ▶ 6:15 pm Carols & Cocoa	15	16	17	
18	19 ▶ 12:00 pm RW&A Luncheon	20	21 No Evening Activities	22	23 Church Office Closed	24 Christmas Eve ▶ 5:00 pm Christmas Eve Service	
25 Christmas Day No Evening Service	26 Church Office Closed	27	28 No Evening Activities Ukraine Mission Trip ▶	29	30	31 New Year's Eve	



## EVENTS ◀ ▶ BIRTHDAYS

### Churchwide ▼

**December 4 10:30 am Lord's Supper**

We encourage members to examine their hearts and relationships with one another in preparation for this celebration of Christ's death and resurrection.

**December 11 6:00 pm A Classic Christmas at Mount Vernon**  
(See ad to the bottom-right.)

**December 11 8:00 pm Christmas at Mount Vernon Reception**  
There will be a reception immediately following Christmas at Mount Vernon, where there will be refreshments.

**December 14 6:15 pm Carols & Cocoa**  
Join us after Wednesday night dinner for a time of hot cocoa and music as we sing Christmas carols around the piano.

**December 24 5:00 pm Christmas Eve Service**  
We will be having our annual candlelight service of lessons and carols to reflect on the birth of Christ.

### New Members ▼

**December 4 9:15 am Knowing MVBC: Session 1**  
**12:15 pm Knowing MVBC: Sessions 2-4**

This is a 4-part course introducing you to life at Mount Vernon. It covers our commitments, beliefs, leadership, and ways to be involved. Lunch is provided. This class is a requirement for membership.

### Children ▼

**December 4 6:00 pm Children's Christmas Musical**  
The Children's ministry will be presenting the story of Christ's birth and His reason for coming to earth based on Scripture.

**December 7 6:30 pm "Happy Birthday, Jesus!" Party**  
The preschool will be celebrating Christmas with their annual "Happy Birthday, Jesus!" Party. There will be hands-on activities that require that each child have at least one parent with them.

### Adults ▼

**December 19 12:00 pm RW&A Luncheon**  
Everyone 50 and older is invited to the monthly RW&A luncheon. Bring a covered dish.

### Women ▼

**December 8 6:30 pm Treasuring Christ: The Perfect Gift**  
The women's ministry of Mount Vernon cordially invites women of MVBC and their guests to take part in their Christmas gathering, which will include a Christmas program, dinner, and workshops that will benefit three Christian ministries. (See ad on page 7.)

### Youth ▼

**December 9 6:30 pm Christmas Feast**  
The fourth annual Christmas Feast is a time-honored tradition with hot cider, hot chocolate, and a gift exchange. Bring a gently used or new winter coat and/or a pair of cleats.

- |                    |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1 Betti Hankey     | 17 Jim Clayton      |
| 2 Ginger Bradshaw  | Richard Lawson      |
| Marvin Dawkins     | 19 Henry Dolive     |
| Laurie Wharton     | 21 Ambra Groslimond |
| 3 Alison Lawson    | George Holden       |
| 5 Bob Cranfill     | 22 Don Thurman      |
| Kaki Henderson     | 23 Smith Swilley    |
| 8 Gene Scott       | 25 William Dennis   |
| Susan Sexton       | 26 Natalie Chapman  |
| 9 William Shaw     | 29 Celton Marler    |
| 10 Morris Bradshaw | David Metry         |
| Cheryl Coen        | 30 Bob Becknell     |
| Ken Henson         | Alice Hare          |
| 11 Fredda Coleman  | Sylvia Hennessy     |
| 12 Karna Case      | 31 Betsy Montemayor |
| 16 Lloyd Koenig    | Gary Stillwagon     |
| Melissa Larkin     |                     |



*Come worship with  
the Mount Vernon Choir  
to the sounds of Christmas  
from Bach to Shaw to Sharp,  
featuring orchestra, harp,  
and handbells.*



850 Mount Vernon Highway NW  
Sandy Springs, GA 30327