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# PERSPECTIVE

THE MONTHLY JOURNAL OF MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH

25 Lessons  
the Incarnation  
Teaches





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**STAFF > SERMON SCHEDULE**

- December 2 Home for the Homeless**  
*1 Peter 1:13-2:10*
- December 9 Function for the Dysfunctional**  
*1 Peter 2:11-3:7*
- December 16 Joy for the Afflicted**  
*1 Peter 3:8-4:19*
- December 23 The Christmas Sermon**  
*Matthew 2*
- December 30 Leadership for the Lost**  
*1 Peter 5:1-14*

**> FIGHTER VERSE**

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

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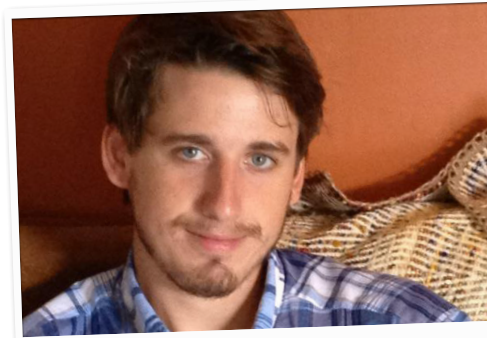
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**Knowing THE BODY** our newest members

*"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." - John 13:35*

The following adults were voted into membership at the Church in Conference on November 18. Please get to know and love them.



*John Anderson*  
 Atlanta, GA



*Aaron & Bethany Belt*  
 Kaley, Sabrina  
 Dunwoody, GA



*Vic Chester*  
 Atlanta, GA

**CG COVENANT GROUPS**

Mount Vernon Baptist Church exists to know, equip, and send one another for the worship and glory of God. Part of the way we fulfill this mission is by encouraging and committing to a culture of discipling at MVBC. One way we do this is through Covenant Groups, small groups for MVBC members. We are in the process of organizing Covenant Groups that will begin meeting in February 2013. If you are interested, please complete the registration form online at [www.mvbchurch.org/covenant-groups-2013](http://www.mvbchurch.org/covenant-groups-2013). Once you have indicated your interest, you will receive more information. The registration deadline is **Friday, January 15, 2013**. Below is a list of Frequently Ask Questions about Covenant Groups at MVBC.

*What are Covenant Groups?*

They are small groups for MVBC members. The purpose is to help us grow closer to God as we grow closer to one another. Each groups studies either a passage of Scripture, an MVBC sermon, or a Christian book. Emphasis is on conversation, accountability, and prayer.

*When do Covenant Groups meet?*

The day and time depends upon the group. However, most groups meet once or twice a month.

*Are Covenant Groups necessary?*

No. Making disciples is necessary. Disciples can be made through one-on-one conversations over coffee, by building a fence together in the backyard, or by deliberately gathering together in a home to discuss Scripture. Sharing life together is necessary. A Covenant Group is one way to share life.

*How is a Covenant Group different from Sunday School?*

The emphasis of Sunday School is teaching. Sunday School does provide opportunity for discussion, and even for fellowship, but the primary goal is to collectively dig deeper into Scripture. Covenant Groups are more discussion and application oriented, and the conversation is usually more personal.

*If I am in a Covenant Group, do I need to be at church as much?*

We encourage every member of MVBC to gather together for the Sunday morning service and for one evening service. Please prioritize those times when the whole church gathers.

*Can non-MVBC members join a Covenant Group?*

Covenant Groups are for members only. Members have promised to hold one another accountable. We believe it is best to have some groups to encourage this. However, non-members are welcome to every other meeting of the church and we also have Community Groups, which are open to everyone.

*How are leaders selected?*

Leaders are selected by the pastoral staff, under the oversight of the Elders. A few times a year, we offer training to equip Covenant Group leaders. If you are interested in serving as a Covenant Group leader, simply let a pastor know.

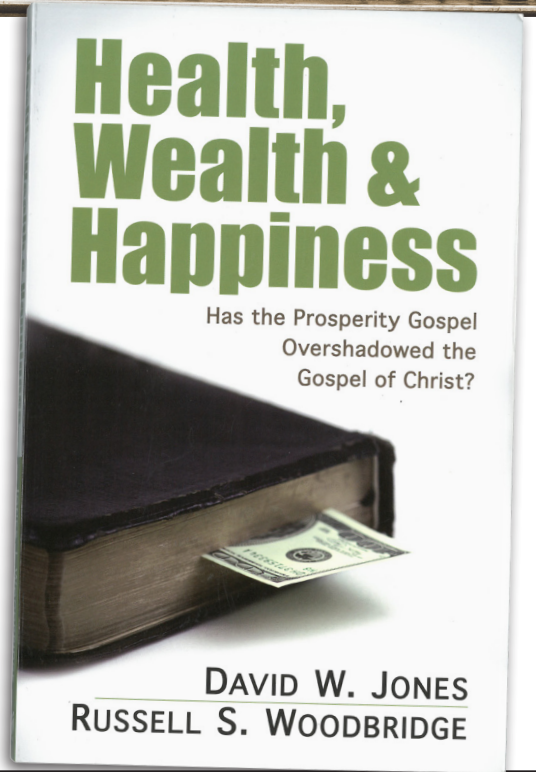
*What does a typical Covenant Group look like?*

There is no typical Covenant Group. However, there are a few basics. They usually lasts for 2-3 hours. There may be time to socialize. Groups spend about an hour in group study/discussion/prayer. Lastly, Groups may break into men and women's groups for about a half hour of conversation and prayer.



## Health, Wealth & Happiness by David W. Jones & Russell S. Woodbridge

Reviewed by Brad Thayer



**CHRISTMAS IS THE TIME OF** year when countless gifts are bought and exchanged for friends and loved ones as a way to show love and appreciation. We comb the newspaper on Thanksgiving for the best “Black Friday” deals, and we browse online for hours in hunt for the best “Cyber Monday” specials. It is the pursuit of the right gift for the right person.

With all this buying, however, there are bound to be people who prey on shoppers’ desires for a good deal through the selling of counterfeit products. It was reported that on Cyber Monday, 133 websites were seized after it was discovered that they were being used to sell counterfeit goods. Numerous manufacturers and economists warn people during Christmas to be aware of the phony and cheap knockoffs. The *Tampa Bay Times* reports that, according to the International AntiCounterfeiting Coalition, the selling and buying of counterfeit items costs the U.S. economy at least \$200 billion a year. Buying counterfeit products is a serious issue.

But it is not simply the counterfeit Ugg Boots that should concern us. There is a greater counterfeit product being marketed, sold, and bought by countless millions around the world, and it is costing them not simply their money, but their souls. The product I’m referring to is the “prosperity gospel.” It goes by many other names—“name it and claim it,” the “health and wealth gospel,” “word of faith movement,” and others. But as David Jones and Russell Woodbridge correctly write, “No matter what name is used, the teaching is the same. This egocentric gospel teaches that God wants believers to be materially prosperous in the here-and-now” (15).

In *Health, Wealth & Happiness: Has the Prosperity Gospel Overshadowed the Gospel of Christ?*, authors David W. Jones and Russell S. Woodbridge set out to inform readers of the prosperity gospel movement and to equip them to help those who have let it replace the gospel of Christ (20). They show how the prosperity gospel is a fatal message historically rooted in a humanistic philosophy and that it has significantly departed from the orthodox, evangelical faith and message.

The basic structure of the book is straightforward. Part One is a “Critique” of the prosperity gospel. The authors examine its “foundations” as found in the late 19th and early 20th century “New Thought Movement,” which they describe as a “quasi-Christian heresy” that teaches the “key to health and wealth acquisition is thinking, visualizing, and speaking the right words” (49). One author and book that you may be familiar with from this movement is the popular *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale.

After looking at its foundations, they examine the prosperity gospel’s history and key pillars of its teaching (50-80). First, its teaching is clearly standing in the New Thought philosophy but dressed up in biblical language. Second, there is no formal organization or denomination of the prosperity gospel movement, albeit it is found primarily in Pentecostal dominations and its well-known leaders publicly associate with one another. Third, every orthodox Christian doctrine that is absolutely central and essential to the right understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ—biblical understanding of faith,

the atonement, God, man, Scripture, and more—are woefully distorted.

Part Two is a “Correction” of the prosperity gospel. In this section, Jones and Woodbridge give “biblical teaching” on the topics at the core of the prosperity gospel and its followers’ obsession—suffering, wealth, poverty, and giving. Each chapter compares and contrasts the prosperity gospels’ teaching to biblical teaching. One common thread that runs through each of these topics is that the prosperity gospel has the “self” as the ultimate end—God wants *me* not to suffer, he wants *me* to be rich, and he wants *me* to give so that *I* might receive. Whereas the biblical teaching is a call to die to one’s self-centeredness and to accept suffering, to work and use one’s wealth, and to give for the glory of God and the good of others.

In the “Conclusion,” the authors offer some helpful, practical suggestions for ministering to others and common objections and replies to what they have laid out in the book. One of the most helpful sections are the five “self-diagnosis” questions to help readers discern if they believe any of the “foundational ideas upon which the prosperity gospel rests” (159-161).

Admittedly, this is a rather strange book to be reviewing during the Christmas season. I could have chosen something more seasonally appropriate, something less confrontational and critical, and something more uplifting. To which, I would encourage you to read Pastor Aaron’s cover article. Yet, I chose to review this book and would encourage you to read it because the topic demands our attention for three reasons.

*First, we are biblically mandated to call out false teachers for their disastrous and erroneous teaching.* Jesus warns us in the Sermon on the Mount to “beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits...Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits” (Mt. 7:15-20). Paul told the churches in Galatia that “if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). Jude’s words to first century churches are just as applicable to us today when he wrote to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

We have to be able to listen to a man or woman that says they speak for God by speaking from His word and discern if what they say is true or false. And where it is false, we say pointedly and unashamedly, “You are wrong. That is unbiblical. That is false, heretical teaching that should be silenced and ignored. We will have no part of it!”

*Second, our context demands we call out the false teachers and their followers of our day.* The reality is many prosperity teachers have vibrant, attractive personalities with a public stage that are leading masses away from the truth and to their eternal destruction. The names and their ministries are not unfamiliar—Kenneth Hagin Jr., Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Paul and Jan Crouch of TBN along with Jim and Tammy Faye Baker, and T. D.

Jakes. Two that reside in Atlanta with their national ministries are Creflo Dollar of World Changers Church International and Eddie Long of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church. Two of the most prominent “soft advocates” of the prosperity gospel are Joyce Meyer and Joel Osteen, who has the largest “evangelical” church in the America (if it can be called evangelical). For that reason, the authors devote a number of pages solely to Osteen’s teaching (72-80).

Remember, Jesus said that wolves come in sheep’s clothing, not wolves’ clothing. These are self-entitled “pastors” of “churches,” not “leaders” of “cults.” They don’t come with signs saying, “False Teaching Here!” Yet, these are the men and women to whom people listen and give their money. They are the men and women of our day and in our context that Paul warned us that whole masses of people would want to hear: “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). The problem that demands our attention is both with the teachers and followers of the prosperity gospel, the man and woman in your neighborhood or in your family.

*Third, our faith demands that our affections are set on the treasures of the true gospel.* The prosperity gospel is so attractive because it appeals to some of the most fundamental, felt-needs of our sinful nature. Who wants to suffer? Who wants to be poor? No one, at least if they are honest. Yet, health and wealth are the very desires that the prosperity gospel preys on. The “core of their message is material prosperity” (64). Thus, you can see how subtly alluring these teachers are with their use of biblical language and their example of personal success. Jones and Woodbridge report that “numerous prosperity teachers are millionaires and have extravagant tastes...Joyce Meyer’s ministry takes in roughly ninety-five million dollars per year, and her headquarters displays her wealth. Although Meyer’s ministry is only one example, it is undeniable that the prosperity gospel is big business. The amount of wealth being channeled into prosperity ministries has caught the attention of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee” (67). None of us are beyond being duped into believing this counterfeit gospel. Thus, we must guard our hearts and know our thoughts.

Yet, ultimately we believe by faith that our affections are to be set on the treasure and eternal reward that awaits us in Christ. Yes, God has blessed and wants to bless us. But it’s according to His terms and with His rewards. He has promised more than any false, prosperity teacher can ever deliver (and they never can) when Peter wrote, “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

This Christmas season, with all the “Christian talk,” make sure your hope is in the true, and not a counterfeit, gospel. ■

# 25 Lessons the Incarnation Teaches



**CHRISTMAS IS THE CELEBRATION OF** Christ's incarnation—his coming in the flesh. Do you know what that means and what it means for you? Here are 25 lessons from the incarnation of Christ. I pray that they serve you, your family, and our church as we rejoice in the birth of our Savior.

- 1. Only God can save a sinful humanity.** Had Jesus been merely a man, he would have been a fascinating figure and perhaps even a great leader, like Abraham Lincoln or Winston Churchill. But he would not have had the power to overcome sin and death. The incarnation teaches that God took on flesh. Jesus is fully man *and* fully God. He had to be fully man so he could die in our place. But Jesus had to be fully God so that his death would be effective for all who repent and believe.
- 2. It is possible to be human and without sin.** Jesus came into the world without shame or guilt. He was conceived in Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:35). Therefore, Jesus is holy and without sin. Jesus is what we are supposed to be—sinless. It is often said, "To err is human, to forgive divine." But Adam and Eve were human and, for a season, without sin. Moreover, Jesus was fully human and was without sin. Look at Jesus and you'll get a sense of what life in heaven will be like. There, we will be fully human and without sin.
- 3. We can marvel at the power of the Trinity.** God is incomprehensible. The Father sent the Son into the world. The Son was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Father, Son, and Spirit worked together for our salvation (1 Pet. 1:2). Every Christian has been called by the Father, sanctified by the Spirit, and purchased by the blood of the Son. What is more wonderful than this?
- 4. Jesus sympathizes with us in our weaknesses.** Jesus grew tired (John 4:6) and thirsty (John 19:28). Do you struggle getting out of the bed in the morning, getting through the day without back pain, or having a conversation with a migraine. Jesus understands. In his humanity, he knew weakness.
- 5. We can appreciate material things.** It should encourage us to know that Jesus, in the flesh, enjoyed the company of good friends, drank good wine, and ate broiled fish. This shows the value of appreciating the world that God has made. As fallen as it is, it is nonetheless God's world. It can be truly enjoyed by Christians (1 Tim. 4:4-5).
- 6. We can be patient to grow and learn.** Sometimes I wish I had a photographic memory. I'd like to have perfect recall after looking at the page of a book. I'd also like to have extraordinary analytical abilities. I want to be able to see a problem and address it from every side. I guess when it comes right down to it, I'd like to be part Superman and part nerd. But I can't read like that, and I can't think like that. Learning and understanding are laborious. So I'm comforted to know that Jesus did not leave his mother's womb diagramming sentences and speaking Aramaic. He had to grow and learn

like everybody else (Luke 2:52). Jesus and I have something in common!

- 7. Emotions are good.** Perhaps most people take this for granted, but sometimes I worry that, in the Christian world, we look down on emotions. After all, we are to be content in all circumstances, right? (1 Cor. 12:10; Phil. 4:11). So doesn't that mean that we need to be serious and unmoved, kind of like that farmer holding the pitchfork in the famous painting *American Gothic*? And yet Jesus was troubled (John 12:27), sorrowful (Matt. 26:38), celebratory (John 2:1-12), angry (John 2:13-17), amazed (Matt. 8:10), and tearful (Heb. 5:7). Jesus displayed glorious, colorful, HD emotions. Too many Christians and churches are flat and two dimensional.
- 8. It's not a sin (always) to be tempted.** Let's be honest. Sometimes it is a sin to be tempted. We can be tempted by our own, inner desires (James 1:13). So when you can't stop gawking at that Maserati with a V-8 engine and black paint, don't blame the car, point the finger at your own heart. Or, as William Shedd put it way back in 1888, "When, again, a man is solicited by the lust of gluttony to perform the external act of intemperate eating of food for the sake of the sensual pleasure of eating, he is not innocently but sinfully tempted." And yet we all face temptations that don't find their source in the human heart. Job was tempted by Satan to curse God. Every day we face disappointments and discouragements, large and small, that put pressure on our faith. The struggle those trials cause are not sinful. Jesus had them, too. He was tempted "in every respect" (Heb. 4:15).
- 9. An ordinary life can be extraordinary.** Jesus' brothers lived with him for years but for most of that time they never thought of him as anything other than a man (John 7:5). Sure, they hoped he'd be a leader, but they certainly didn't think he was the Lord. Jesus' incarnation shows just how beautiful an ordinary life can be. Now, don't get me wrong: Jesus was, most certainly, extraordinary. But you'd be wrong to think that you'd be able to pick him out of the crowd. And I don't assume that he was necessarily that guy who fills the room with his personality. He was an ordinary man who loved the Father. And when he spoke about the Father, people listened. We live in an age that values glitz and glamour. But just look at the incarnation and you'll realize that an ordinary life can be extraordinary.
- 10. Jesus is the standard for human living.** None of us is sinless. But if we want to know what we are supposed to

Jesus is fully man *and*  
fully God. He had to be  
fully man so he could die  
in our place.

be, we need look no further than the life of the carpenter from Nazareth. It will not do to say, “Well, of course he is sinless; he is God.” Jesus was truly human, yet was without sin—for his entire earthly life. Look to Jesus as a model for how you ought to live. You can do this without boiling down Christianity into a WWJD bracelet (if you don’t know what that is, good!).

11. **The Word of God is more important than you think.** It is significant that Jesus battled Satan with the Word of God. He lived, in the flesh, dependent upon the Bible. Jesus found in Scripture arrows he needed to defeat the Adversary (Matt. 4:1-11). If our incarnate Lord needed Scripture, what makes us think that we can go even a day without meditating upon his Word?
12. **Sanctification is a process.** Our get-rich-quick culture does not have the patience for the methodical, lengthy, and painful process of Christian sanctification. Yet we are told that Jesus “learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb. 5:8). Jesus devoted his entire earthly life to his holiness—and ours. Obviously Jesus didn’t need to root sin out of his life the way that we do. He didn’t have any sin! But he did learn how to follow his Father to greater and greater degrees as his life went on. Ed Welch recently wrote that Christians today, by and large, believe in victorious Christian living, a life that is “healthy, wealthy, prosperous, and sin-free.” But Jesus taught us that the earthly life of every believer would be one of growing closer to God—which is always a slow and painful process.

## Jesus’ incarnation shows just how beautiful an ordinary life can be.

13. **The Christian is under no obligation to sin, ever.** After teaching on sanctification, a young man came up to me and asked, “Is it possible, at least in principle, to be sin-free?” He asked a good question. We read so many commands to fight temptation that it seems criminal to say, “Good luck trying, but don’t expect success.” Sure, we won’t be sinless in this world. That’s a fact (1 John 1:8). But it is also true that with the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, we never have to sin. As a Christian, you never have to give in to temptation. Now, take the example of Jesus. We know that Jesus never sinned. Most people like to say that’s because he is God. And that is *partially* true. But we should be careful not to draw that conclusion too quickly. As you read through the Gospels you’ll find that Jesus fought sin the way any human must fight sin: by the power of the Word and the Spirit. This is why Wayne Grudem argues:

It seems appropriate to conclude that Jesus, met every temptation to sin, not by his divine power, but on the strength of his human nature alone (though, of course, it was not ‘alone’ because Jesus, in exercising the kind

of faith that humans should exercise, was perfectly depending on God the Father and the Holy Spirit at every moment). The moral strength of his divine nature was there as a sort of “backstop” that would have prevented him from sinning in any case.

We don’t have such a backstop, but we do have the Holy Spirit in us and, thus, we are under no obligation to sin at any time.

14. **Jesus could be obedient for us.** When I share the gospel, I think it is important to communicate that Jesus lived the life that we should have lived. I try to show that everywhere we fell short he succeeded. It is not enough for us to have a sacrifice to die for our sins. We need a *sinless* sacrifice for us. His obedience guarantees that he can be our representative. Paul wrote that, through the obedience of Christ, “many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19). In that sense, then, he obeyed for us. To do this, he had to be like us, he had to be fully man. Jesus may know what it is like to be tempted, but he doesn’t know what it is like to give in. He was obedient for us.
15. **We can rejoice in a Savior able to die in our place.** The author of Hebrews is clear that Jesus had to be “like his brothers in every respect” in order to be a fitting sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 2:16-18). In that sense, it is not just that Jesus needed to be a perfect sacrifice—he needed to be a human sacrifice. This is the bloody part of the gospel that too many Christians are loathe to talk about today. But we must talk about it. The incarnation made our salvation possible because we need God’s wrath removed from us. This required another man to take our place. This required his blood to be spilt. Instead of trying to share the gospel without making the death of Christ central, we should lovingly make it clear that we need the sacrifice of God’s one and only Son.
16. **We can rejoice in a Savior who is our mediator.** I recently asked a lawyer how many cases she was currently working on. Between 75 and 100, she said. My jaw dropped. She had so many cases she couldn’t be sure if she was off by 25. My guess is that many days she wishes she were omnipresent!  
As overwhelming as it must be to try to juggle a hundred cases, imagine if you are party to just one argument, and the plaintiff is God. What kind of case could the best lawyer make for you? “Aaron’s really a good guy when you get to know him, God...er, wait, I guess you do know him.” Case closed: I have no defense. So what hope do I have? I need a mediator who can take my case to God. A mediator God will listen to. A mediator who knows God and who knows me. In that case, I better find someone who is both divine (knows God) and human (knows me). I found him. Better yet, he found me. “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

17. **Every human being has dignity.** This is true because every human is made in the *imago dei*, the image of God. But this truth is gloriously affirmed by the willingness of the Son of God to assume human flesh. 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 a man” (Phil. 2:6-7). Moreover, from now and into eternity, Jesus will remain fully human. He promised, after all, to drink wine with his disciples in heaven (Matt. 26:29). The Spirit doesn’t drink. The Son of Man does. Clearly, Jesus did not consider his human body something to be discarded. One day every believer will have a glorified body. I don’t know what, exactly, this will be like. But I know it will be wonderful, and I know it means that there is something dignified about my body, even today.

18. **Jesus Christ is our brother.** We know from Romans 8:29 that Jesus is the brother of all believers. “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” But this is only possible if we share Christ’s humanity. Christ, of course, has always been the Son of God (John 1:14). But he came to earth to bear God’s royal image in the flesh (Col. 1:15-17). We should take comfort in knowing that we can now call God our Father. We can also rejoice at the thought that Jesus Christ is our brother.
19. **Christian doctrine is humbling.** Perhaps the most humbling doctrine is that of the Trinity. One God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But that’s not all. The second person of the Trinity, the Word, became flesh (John 1:14). God did not take a pill and become human—that would mean he is no longer God. Somehow, the Son took on human flesh in such a way that his divinity remained intact. Talk about that in your Philosophy 101 class! I can’t fully understand this; much less explain it. It is a humbling doctrine. I guess I shouldn’t be surprised that I can’t understand everything about God. He is, after all, God.
20. **Jesus Christ is our prophet.** Jesus has always been the Word (John 1:1), and he has always been at work making God known through words (1 Pet. 1:11). But in the flesh, Jesus came to speak in a definitive way. Sometimes my kids will get into an argument. Deana and I will be in the other room, listening. Sometimes with a smile—“they are so cute!” Sometimes with a frown—“really, those are our kids?” We like it when our kids work things out on their own. But more often than not, they need a word from Mom or Dad. And when that word comes, they know the argument is over. Jesus came to put a final end to every earthly argument. He came with words of life (Luke 13:33; John 6:63; Heb. 1:2). He came with better words than any man who had ever spoken. All the prophets of Old Testament history pointed forward to him. With the incarnation, their promises of a Great Day of Salvation are realized.
21. **Jesus Christ is our priest.** The Jews in the first century knew what it was like to go to a priest to have their sins forgiven. It was the job of the priest to make atonement for the people through the blood of an animal sacrifice. Those priests had pretty good job security. So long as their was sin in the world, there would be a need for sacrifices. Jesus changed all that. Just as he is the last prophet, he is the last priest. He did what all the previous priests could

never do. He offered a final, perfect sacrifice for all of God’s people (Heb. 7-8). All of the priests of Old Testament history pointed forward to him. With the incarnation, the writing was on the wall: the sacrificial system was coming to an end. A new priest has come.

22. **Jesus Christ is our king.** Jesus is king not only because he is God, but because he perfectly fulfills the Old Testament office of king. All things are subject to Christ, the king. He came to establish a kingdom over which he would reign forever and ever. This was a kingdom promised by the prophets (2 Sam 7) preached by Jesus (Mark 1:15) and secured by his death (Heb. 2:5-9). All of the kings of the Old Testament, from David to Solomon to Josiah are mere shadows of a sinless king, one worthy of our attention our affection and our obedience. With the incarnation, the king has come.

*Little baby Jesus, born in a stable bare;  
Little baby Jesus, lying in a manger there;  
Little baby Jesus, King to be,  
The Master of the earth, the sky and sea;  
Little baby Jesus, born in Bethlehem.*

23. **The Christian life is one of service.** It would be wrong to reflect upon the incarnation without seeing there an act of amazing service. At the point of the incarnation Christ emptied himself or, as the ESV puts it, “made himself nothing.” He gave up the regal courts of heaven for the dusty plains of earth. I have to admit that I have a hard time serving others. Where does one find the time to serve, to really serve? It is easy to serve when there is something in it for you. But Jesus took on human flesh with only the cross as payment.
24. **God loves us.** Why did God take on human flesh? Not because we loved him, but because he loved us (John 3:16; 1 John 4:19). I’m not sure there is a truth more spoken but less appreciated. God is most certainly committed to his justice. He will, he must punish sin. But God is also committed to my welfare. How do I know? Because he gave me Jesus, knowing full well that boy would grow up into a man and wind up dead on a cross. Let us, therefore, not limit our talk about the incarnation to a stable. Any proper Christian conversation must end with a tree. We worship a Savior who did more than enter the world; he endured the world, bloody and bruised, for the good of a sinner like me.

25. **Beware of trivializing Christmas.** Where does that leave us, then? With the danger of trivializing Christmas. Last night I put up a Christmas tree. A few lights were burnt out on the tree. A few more ornaments were broken. It seems no matter how nicely they get packed up they always return worse for the wear. I expect in a few days presents will start to appear under the tree, Christmas songs will dominate the airwaves, and eggnog, a personal favorite of mine, will make it to my fridge. But these rituals, steeped in human tradition, are far removed from the heart of the incarnation which is, ultimately, the gospel of Jesus Christ. ■

~ Aaron Menikoff

# December 2012

1	8	15	22	29
2 ▶ 10:30 am Lord's Supper ▶ 6:00 pm Celebrate the Child! Celebrate the Light!	7	14 ▶ 6:30 pm Youth Christmas Feast	21	28
3	6	13 ▶ 7:00 pm Hark! the Herald Angels Sing	20	27
4	5 ▶ 6:30 pm "Happy Birthday, Jesus!" Party	12	19 ▶ 6:15 pm Carols & Cocoa	26 No Wednesday Activities
5	4	11	18	25 Christmas Day
6	3	10	17 ▶ 12:00 pm RW&A Luncheon	24 Christmas Eve Church Office Closed ▶ 5:00 pm Christmas Eve Service
7	2	9 ▶ 7:00 pm Christmas at Mount Vernon & Reception	16	31 New Year's Eve
8	1	8	15	22
9	30 No Sunday School No Evening Service	23 No Evening Service	31 New Year's Eve	

## EVENTS ◀ BIRTHDAYS

### Churchwide ▼

December 2 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 9 7:00 pm Christmas at Mount Vernon

Please join us as the music and worship ministry presents this joyous celebration of Christ through a wide variety of music, from Bach to Shaw to Getty, with a clear presentation of the gospel. Childcare will be provided for children ages 5 and under. We will also have a reception immediately following the concert.

December 19 6:15 pm Carols & Cocoa

All are invited to attend our annual Carols & Cocoa—a great time of singing Christmas carols around the piano in the fellowship hall. This is in lieu of all Bible studies.

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.

### Children ▼

December 2 6:00 pm Celebrate the Light! Celebrate the Child!

All are invited to attend as the preschool and elementary children present "Celebrate the Child! Celebrate the Light!" There will be childcare for children age 3 and under.

December 5 6:30 pm "Happy Birthday, Jesus!" Party

The preschool will be celebrating Christmas with their annual party, open to children 2 years of age through Kindergarten. There will be hands-on activities that require that each child have at least one parent with them.

### Women ▼

December 13 7:00 pm Hark! the Herald Angels Sing

A catered meal, festive music, and warm fellowship will be highlighted by a great guest speaker—Eli Schmucker, wife of Matt Schmucker of Capitol Hill Baptist Church. Please plan to attend and invite a friend! Tickets cost \$15 for one or \$20 for you and a guest.

### Students ▼

December 14 6:30 pm Youth Christmas Feast

The fifth annual Christmas Feast is a time-honored tradition with hot cider, hot chocolate, and a gift exchange. We will be at the home of Bernie & Jocelyn Davis.

### Adult ▼

December 17 12:00 pm RW&A Luncheon

Everyone 50 and older is invited to the monthly RW&A luncheon. Bring a covered dish.

## Lottie Moon Christmas Offering



We are collecting donations for the annual Lottie Moon Christmas offering. All contributions designated to the Lottie Moon Christmas offering go directly to the work of international missionaries with the International Missions Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Designated Lottie Moon Offering envelopes are in the pew racks. For more information about the work of the International Mission Board, visit [www.imb.org](http://www.imb.org).



*Mount Vernon*

BAPTIST CHURCH

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