

# Faith & Family

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." — *Luke 2:14*



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# The greatest scandal of Christmas

By David Gasperson  
Guest columnist

Time was we were scandalized by the commercialization of Christmas. It's gone so far now, some people seem scandalized when anything religious is dragged into Christmas.

When we get right down to the matter of the birth of God's Son in a stable and the cradling of him in a manger, pretty much everyone would be scandalized — secular and faithful.

The stable is gritty and dirty. Animals everywhere. Manure on the floor. It's no place to talk religion.

But the incarnation of the divine transcends "religion" with its polished metals and woods and

carefully crafted words.

Theological discussions fit better in coffee shops and lecture halls, not stables. But we have to get right down into the mire of the animals to see what God is really up to in the world.

I chuckle at the memory of my five-year-old daughter years ago going around the house singing, "No way in a manger, no crib for a bed..." But that stable was only the beginning. Jesus would grow up in sawdust, hang out with fishermen and tax collectors, die on the city's garbage dump.

With a deep sigh we make peace with the fact of the Son of God submitting to humble birth and living among commoners. The Ascension makes it more palatable.

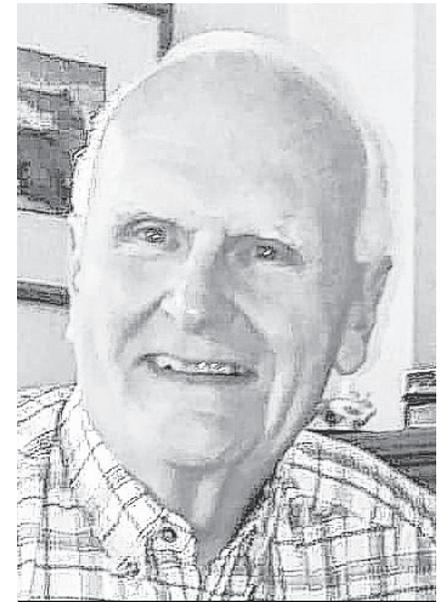
At least Jesus went back to heaven. At least when we see him again, he will be in splendor.

All that is true.

But then there's that nagging memory that the resurrected Jesus appeared to Thomas and the other ten disciples able to show the wounds still in his hands and side (John 20:27). That's when we realize — the humanness of Jesus was not temporary.

Incarnation was no temporary, short-term excursion Jesus could carry out and then return to heaven to talk about it for eons with the angels as the harshness of the experience dulled with the passing of millennia.

Incarnation is permanent. Henceforth, incarnation is an



David Gasperson

attribute of the eternal God. After that night in Bethlehem, a full description of God must always include "born of woman." There's the greatest scandal of Christmas.

*David Gasperson is pastor of Warsaw Baptist Church. His books are available at Amazon.com.*



# The fullness of time was come

By **Robert C. Oliver**  
Contributing columnist

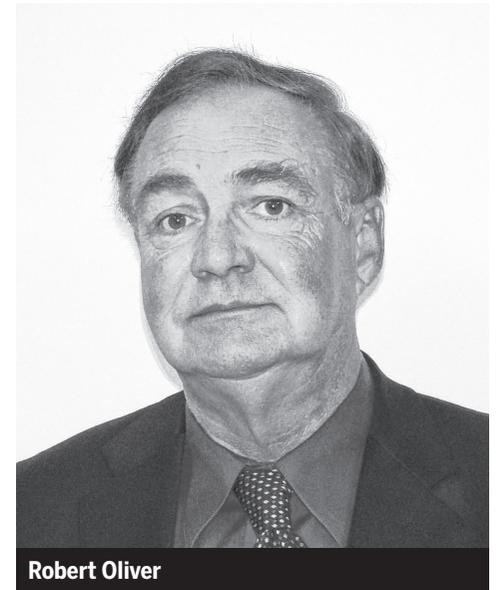
The upcoming holiday is one that man has developed to commemorate the birth of Christ. It is a simple fact that if anyone is to have a home in heaven in the end, Jesus Christ is all important in that process. Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Peter proclaimed, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Salvation in Christ is God's plan and thus the only plan that will succeed. The wise man said, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). This plan for the salvation of man through Jesus Christ was formulated by the Creator of man before the creation itself. Paul explained to the Ephesians this saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world..." (Eph. 1:3-4). Paul later stated that "...the mystery, which from

the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:9).

We might insert here that all that pertains to our salvation in Christ Jesus is important, and no single element more important than the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord. It was His death, the shedding of His blood that has paid the price for the sins of man. Peter wrote, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Pet. 1:18-19). We sometimes sing a song that says, "what can wash away my sins, nothing but the blood of Jesus". The Hebrew writer states, "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much

more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:11-14). The proof that all of this sacrificial shedding of the blood would actually do that which was claimed is seen in the Lord's resurrection from the tomb. The apostle Paul told the Roman brethren, "Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:3-4). Thus, this death of Christ on the cross was so significant to us as Christians that God did command that this be commemorated by way of the Lord's supper (I Cor. 11:23-26).

After the founding of the plan, during the developing of that salvation in Christ, the time came for the Christ to make an arrival in this physical world. God's plan was that the Savior would be born in the little town of Bethlehem Ephrataah (Micah. 5:2). He was to be born of the seed of David who was of the seed of Abraham (Rom. 1:3). And, He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14). According to Paul, "...when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). All the above mentioned prophesied requirements were met when the virgin Mary conceived by way of the Holy Spirit and give birth in the city of Bethlehem (Luke 1-2). The Savior had arrived. It was indeed a time to rejoice for those of the time who had been awaiting the coming of the Messiah. The angels proclaimed the great event



Robert Oliver

to the shepherds in the field saying, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). The scriptures record others who, when hearing of the birth and seeing the baby Jesus rejoiced and expressed their thanks to God for the arrival of their Savior. There were of course others who hearing of His arrival were angry and fearful rather than rejoicing and thankful. Herod, who did all he could to find and destroy Christ, would be a good example of that.

In this age in which we live, the birth of Christ is history. The proof is ample to convince any who will honestly examine it (John 20:30-31). We need not to look for the Savior to come, He already has. He came, was crucified and arose and ascended to heaven. He will come again (Acts 1:11). When He comes then, He will be coming, not as the Savior, but as the Judge (II Tim. 4:1; II Thess. 1:7-8). We are thankful Christ was born, now let us be sure to be prepared for His return.

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# A Savior for the world

By Rev. Dr. Kenneth E. Benton

Guest columnist

**A**t Christmas time each year, my wife and I visit my sister in Culpeper, Va. As we walk into her home, I always call out, "We are here from the East bearing gifts." Being from Eastern North Carolina, this is a true statement, and we do bring gifts.

My statement of course is a take off from those wise men visiting the Christ Child after a long trip from the East. Who were these travelers, why did they leave the comforts of home to visit a newly born child, and what was the outcome of their travels?

The scriptures in Matthew 2:1-12, refers to them as Wise Men or Magi. Legends and songs portray them as kings. However, if one looks closely at the culture of the time, we find they were neither wise men nor kings. These men were magicians and astrologists; men who served under a king, but who were not kings. They also gave consultations on what the stars predicted about the fate of humans and they interpreted dreams. The wise men in Matthew showed that they had to stop for directions in Jerusalem, and received their new path as directed by the evil King Herod the Great, but later failed to be a part of his treachery after a divine visitor told them in a dream of the King's murderous plot.

From the three gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, tradition

has held fast to the idea there were three Magi. Most nativity scenes are adorned with the three wise men.

There could have been more than three visitors, although the Bible list three gifts, it does give the exact number of Magi.

From Matthew, we find that these men traveled from the East. They had seen a great light or star and had traveled towards that light. They stopped in Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, probably thinking the birthing event would take place in a large city. Entering the city, they probably thought the area would be alive with excitement, and with plans being made for a coronation. However, Jerusalem was quiet and later troubled as King Herod heard from the Magi that a king had been born. After consulting with his priests and scribes, King Herod discovered that the prophet Micah, (Micah 5:2) had predicted that the new King, now a baby, would be born in Bethlehem. With this information, the wise men followed the newly appearing star to Bethlehem. The star stopped, and stayed in place over the Christ Child's birth place.

This light, and this star appear for the Magi to follow. What was the origin of this celestial occurrence? Some astronomers have theorized that this guiding light was a bright comet, a nova, the planet Uranus, or the alignment of Jupiter, Saturn, and the Earth. All of these are possibilities, but I think it was the Holy Spirit. As the clouds by day and the fire by night led the

Israelites through the desert, I believe this light was the Spirit of God announcing the birth of the Christ Child to the world and especially the gentiles.

What we call the first Christmas was a time of God's sovereignty displaying ITS power over both things animate and inanimate. Angels appeared with messages; a priest, Zacharias, was struck mute until the birth of his son, John. Angels spoke to Mary and Joseph; angels spoke to the shepherds, and later, divinely warned, in a dream, the wise men of Herod's treachery. This was a time of unprecedented happenings, and I believe God's supernatural hand brought forth the Holy Star, angelic messages, and the virgin birth of His Son.

The wise men traveled for two or three months on a trip approximately 900 miles long from the country of Persia, now Iran, to see the Christ Child. What motivated them to take such a journey? How did they know about the birth of a Savior, a King? To answer this, we have to turn time back to 597 B.C. On this date, Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian army, and the inhabitants of Judah were taken to Babylon to serve King Nebuchadnezzar. One of those taken was a young man named Daniel. While under the king of Babylon, Daniel was promoted into a high position after interpreting the King's dream. By honoring God and the King, Daniel was promoted to Chief Administrator over the wise men of Babylon. (Daniel 2:48) In Daniel 2:27, the wise men are



Ken Benton

described as astrologers, magicians, and soothsayers. As head of the wise men, Daniel's knowledge of biblical literature, Jewish traditions, and prophecies was embedded into the Babylonian culture. Most assuredly, the wise men of Matthew were much aware of Daniel and the Books of the Torah. In Numbers 24:17, the star is prophesied; Genesis 49:10 and Daniel 9 predict the coming of a King.

As the Rab-maj, Chief of the Magi, Daniel influenced the thoughts of the wise men of his day. These wise men of Daniel's time were probably from an old religious sect, the Zoroastrian, who believed in monotheism. These magi most likely heard from Daniel the prophecies of Balaam in the Book of Numbers, and how there would be the sign of a star and the birth of a King in Judah. It is no accident that them magi in Matthew 2 took note of the star in the west and took a Holy Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, and then moved on to Bethlehem.

Yes, the magi saw a light in the west, traveled to Bethlehem and gave gifts

*Continued from page 5*

to the Christ Child. How, then, can we apply this trip, the giving of gifts, and the many astronomical phenomenon to the present.

First, Genesis details how God created all things of the universe. I believe God not only creates, but also orders His creation. God is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, but He is Lord over all intervening time. The prophecy of an almost rogue prophet, Balaam, was carried over to Daniel who

told the magi of the sixth century what was forthcoming in Judah. The Magi in Matthew followed the prophecy and saw the Savior of the world, a newborn King. Centuries of ordering took place as God's creative hand inspired men to say, write, and to be spiritually led to bring God's reconciliation to mankind. The heavens and celestial bodies were also a part of God's plan. A light, Messianic star, and angels were put into place to call men to Christ.

In the course of these events, we see God's plan of redemption for all

people. This is the meaning of the Epiphany; God offering His Son to the gentile world. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul was called to bring the Word of God and to preach salvation to the gentiles. However, God chose to announce His son first to the lowly wise men, gentiles, long before Paul was commissioned. Before announcing Jesus as His Son to Israel, He called the lowest in Israel, the shepherds and then the magi, the gentiles, to be the first to worship King Jesus. The high and mighty and royalty were not the first to be directed to

the Savior. The least in the sight of mankind were the first to worship the Savior of the world. By design, the first shall be last and the last shall be first. Today, all mankind is still being called to Jesus. Both humble and mighty are sought to answer God's plan of salvation. Through the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, all mankind is today being called to know eternally the Savior of the whole world.

*Rev. Dr. Kenneth E. Benton is the pastor of West Clinton OFWB Church, Clinton.*

## Legitimacy of Christmas

By Gilbert Owens

Contributing columnist

Christmas has always been a holiday that most people look forward to. It is a time when everything seems special, people are nicer to each other and there really is a sense of joy in the air.

Have you ever wondered how Christmas came about? Have you asked yourself, why isn't the word Christmas in the bible? Is Christmas a legitimate holiday or is it one made up by capitalist to encourage people to spend lots of money on gifts, Christmas trees, house decorations and etc.

The most believed storyline says Christmas is the day to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. But the fact of the matter is that during the first 200 years of Christianity, there was strong opposition to recognizing the birthday of Jesus Christ. Many in the early church believed celebrating birthdays was a pagan custom and one that should not be done by Christians. The

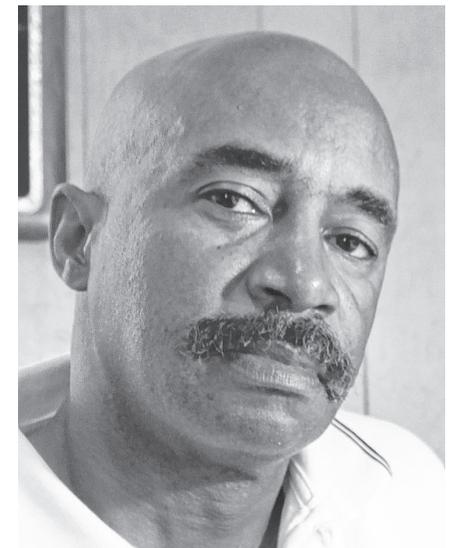
early church believed the only thing that should be celebrated was the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The bible provides no clues as to the actual date of Jesus birth. December 25th was first identified as the date of Jesus birth by Sextus Julius Africanus in the year 222. That date later became the unofficial date of Jesus birth. Africanus spent most of his life living at Emmaus in Palestine, where he served as an administrative official to Rome. His primary work was the study of genealogies and chronologies.

Christmas began to be widely accepted as a Christian Holiday in the 9th century but it did not attain the importance, among Christians, of either Good Friday or Easter. Today, none of the celebrations of Christmas have their origin in the bible. Christmas trees first appeared in 1605, as fir trees decorated with apples. It was in the 18th century when the practice of giving gifts for Christmas to family member became widely accepted.

To be perfectly clear, today, Christmas is a blend of religious and secular customs. Most people who celebrate Christmas have not accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The whole idea about Christmas creates an awesome opportunity for believers to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Although God has not commanded believers to celebrate Christmas, I earnestly believe it is God's permissive will for his believers to do so. In the book of Revelation, Jesus calls Himself the one who opens doors that no one can shut. The spiritual meaning of open doors means to create opportunities to minister.

Christmas is a legitimate holiday that gives parents an opportunity to present to their children the awesome person of Jesus Christ. Christmas is a legitimate holiday that gives us all an opportunity to use the giving of Christmas presents, as a way to explain the greatest gift ever given to mankind: Jesus Christ. Christmas trees are a reminder and opportunity for believers to share with non-believers that Jesus died on a cross



Gilbert Owens

for the forgiveness of their sins.

I believe it is apparent to everyone that during the Christmas Holidays, people are kinder to one another, families become closer, people speak to one another more, most people appear to be more happy and at peace. There seems to be something special in the air. Maybe, all of this is because, God Himself sees Christmas as a legitimate reason to celebrate the birth of His Son.

*Gilbert Owens is the minister at Kingdom of God Ministries.*

May your lives be filled with peace and love this Christmas...



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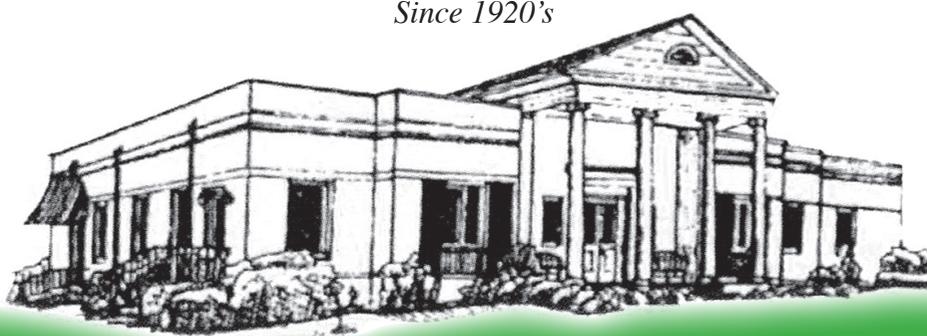


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# Faith and Christmas

From Red Hill Missionary Baptist Church

**C**hristmas is a season of excitement, joy, & happiness, Especially for children.

Youngsters eagerly wait all year to receive highly anticipated gifts, goodies and toys. That is, if they've been good girls and boys. Christmas is also often a child's first experience with faith or belief in someone or something. Hebrews 11:1 declares, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." What better illustration of faith than Christmas!

The substance of our hope is that God sent His only begotten Son to be born of a Virgin, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger and the evidence of what we can't see, is the offer of salvation from the death of sin, through the gift of eternal life for all who believe, in this Child. Imagine the pregnant virgin and her husband!

It certainly required great faith for both

Mary, the mother of Jesus and Joseph, His earthly father, to trust God and His plan for their lives. And faith in this Child! Emmanuel, God with us! Faith in this Child, Jesus Christ, that would change the world forever! Faith that spurred an insecure and jealous King Herod to launch a murderous campaign to kill countless babies in an attempt to assassinate the Lord of Lords.

Faith in a Child, brought star led, gift bearing wise men from far away to seek the new born King and worship Him. Faith in this Child, on whose shoulders governments would rest. Now, that's faith!

We promise our children, if they are good, respectful, and make good grades, throughout the year, they will be rewarded with their hearts desire on Christmas morning. Children believe their parents and do their best to fulfill what their parents ask of them, in order to receive their "reward." The glorious sight of watching children, so full of joy, unwrap their gifts is amazing!

God has made us an even better promise

in Romans 10:9-10. "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

The greatest gift ever given was not laid under a tree, but nailed to a Cross! Like the faith children have in their parents, children of God can and should have the same faith in Him. Faith that is as pure as the innocence of a child's heart. We believe it will happen, even though we can't see it, because our "Daddy" said it would, and we trust Him! Oh, how very faithful is our God! His faithfulness gives us hope His promises will manifest, even though we can't see them and have no idea how they will materialize, simply because God said He would bring it to pass! Faith that no matter what the circumstances look like, we believe, trust, and take God at His word. Even faith, that although we have not been or done our best, God still loves us and still offers us the "best gift" we could ever hope for ... Faith that we are made whole and cleansed from all our sins, guilt, & shame by the precious blood of the Lamb!

Christmas is without a doubt an unparalleled time of hope! The hope of receiving exactly what we want, even though we may not deserve it, and spending precious time with the people we love most! We pray this Christmas, your faith be ignited or rekindled like never before.

As we reach out in love and deed, we pray our faith will be visible to those who are lost & in need. We pray relationships be repaired and families restored. We pray minds be transformed. We pray for an abundance of wisdom, knowledge and discernment. We pray forgiveness finds its way into every heart and home. We pray the Gospel of Jesus Christ be preached and taught all over the world and every receptive spirit receive salvation, healing and deliverance.

We believe by faith that the love, joy, and peace of Christ will abound, this year and forever in each of us! We all have a measure of faith and you don't have to wait until Christmas to use it, you just have to believe! May your faith be full this Christmas and may you be faithful in the year to come and always! Merry Christmas!

*The pastor at Red Hill Missionary Baptist Church is the Rev. Ray Bolton.*

## A kitten For Christmas

By Chuck Yancey

Guest columnist

**A** few years ago the local news in Raleigh carried the story of a kitten who was stuck in a storm drain after the recent rains. It might have been washed into the drain by the speed of the water, or maybe it had run into the drain to get away from a predator.

A little boy was walking with his mother when he heard the cries of the kitten. He told his mother, and at first she did not believe him and they kept walking. But he was insistent, so she stopped and they listened closely. Then she heard the faint, panicked "meow" of the kitten. They looked around and could see nothing. They looked up at the trees and could see

nothing. Finally, the boy looked toward the curb, pointed to the drain opening, and said, "I think he's in there."

The mother knelt in front of the drain and saw the scared, wet kitten. She tried to gently coax it from the ledge where he was sitting, but he was having none of it. Then she reached in as far as she could, hoping to grab it, but the scared kitten managed a hiss and backed up.

"Call 911, Mom," the boy said.

Though it might not have been an emergency in the typical sense, she made the call. Resigned to the probability that it would not be significant in the world of emergency services, she told them about the kitten in the storm drain.

"We'll send help," said the operator.

Expecting maybe someone from animal control, within a minute she heard a siren in the distance. Soon a fire truck arrived. The firemen got out, pulled out ladders and rope, and went to work like it was the most serious thing they had ever done. The little boy looked on with anxiety for the kitten and admiration for the firemen.

Within a few minutes they were carrying a small curled up, very wet black kitten over to the boy and his mother where he was appropriately cooed over and petted. Animal control did take temporary possession of the kitten, but the family adopted it for Christmas.

Christmas is a reminder that God's love comes for us, even when we are hissing and in retreat. No one is beyond the reach of God's unlimited grace.



Chuck Yancey

# The meaning of Immanuel

By **Lester Rector**  
Guest columnist

It is often the case that during the Christmas holiday, we find ourselves being reminded of the “true meaning” of the season. Christmas, is all about Jesus! Enough said, right? Well, as much as this is true, I believe it is equally important to understand why this is true. In honesty, I am convinced that the whole Christmas season has much to do with one word, “Immanuel.” In the Hebrew language, the word Immanuel means, God is with us, a statement that first came out of the book of Isaiah concerning the birth of Christ, and then reiterated in Matthew chapter 1. If there is one aspect of the Christmas season that I believe we all must be reminded of, it’s this truth, God is with us.

Over the course of my 43 years of living, there is not a phrase that has been more relevant and consistent in my life, than God with me. At every turn, transition, desert, and mountain top, the Lord continues to prove the validity of that simple phrase. It is important to understand that just being reminded that He is Immanuel, is not enough. You see, at some point I have to mix my faith with this truth, so that it becomes not just something I know in my head, but a truth that I learn to live through walking with God by faith.

First Things First:

In the Scripture, we know Faith as it

is described in Hebrews 11:1, “now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (NIV).”

In my experience as a Spiritual Child of God, the understanding of “God with me” is always moving me towards greater confidence in the Lord. In fact, I am convinced that the same God who is with me, is also the God who goes before me and moves through me. But, without faith, it is impossible for me to gain the assurance needed to believe that He is Immanuel.

God with Me:

One of the most valuable truths to knowing the Lord as Immanuel, is this, “He will never fail you.” Please understand, this is a statement that can only be true if we are walking with God. I say this because to believe this statement, you have to have a track-record with God that proves it is true. I love how in Joshua 1:5, the

Lord tells Joshua He will not fail or abandon him, and then turns right around and proves it to him over and over again. Without the proof, Joshua, at the end of his life, would have never been able to deliver the rousing speech that brought the hearts of the Nation of Israel back to the Lord in Joshua 24, which ended with the famous declaration “as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD (24:15).” Yes, God is with me! But, like Joshua, God proves that statement when we choose to

walk with Him by faith.

God before Me:

The second aspect of Immanuel is God before us. Like Moses in Exodus 33 and Joshua in Joshua 1, the Lord’s commitment to us is that He will prepare a path for us to walk that will lead us into what He defines as the “Promise Land.” A side note, the Promise Land is simply the place in life where the promises of God become reality. As a campus Pastor, one of the most frequent conversation I have with students from the University of Mount Olive is on the “Will of God.” You see, everyone wants the “WILL” of God, but the aspect we all never consider is the route God will take us through to get to that Will. Often the route to the Will of God for our lives requires the death of our flesh, our perspective and our own plan. The confidence we have as Faith filled Children of God is that God does have a plan, and has already gone ahead of us to see that plan established. So, the great question is: What are we afraid of? Well, if you are like me, you are afraid of what you cannot control. The whole conversation of Faith is a risk, but like investing, you will always see a return when you learn how to invest your (measure of) Faith into what God has planned for you.

God through Me:

I like to call this aspect of Immanuel the “Pay Off.” You see, once I begin to realize that walking with God by



Lester Rector

faith produces spiritual confidence, then God can do anything He wants to do through me. Nothing is off limits, but all things are possible for the spiritual Son and Daughter who are willing to be led by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:14). The fun that exists in faith, is the opportunity to see God revealed in us and through us. There is nothing that solidifies spiritual confidence faster, then seeing the unseen God revealed when we choose to obey Him. The pay-off for all Spirit-Led believers is the fruit we bare as we walk with God through life. This fruit is the tangible reminder of why we celebrate Christmas, and why we know that not only is Jesus the reason for the season, but as Immanuel, He is the God who is with me, before me and through me.

*Lester Rector is the director of Campus Ministries at University of Mount Olive.*

# Cottle finds fulfillment, faith

By Rhonda Jessup  
Guest columnist

**M**OUNT OLIVE — It is a common rite of passage for all freshmen to have new and exciting experiences when entering college. However, for freshman Rachel Cottle, everything about college life is new — including being back in America. Feeling the call to become missionaries, Cottle's family moved to Cambodia in 2001 when she was just 10 months old.

Cottle said, "I grew up speaking English to my parents and Khmer to everyone else."

Living in several places around Cambodia, Cottle's family planted churches throughout the predominantly Buddhist country. They assisted at health clinics, on prayer walks, and even created a fitness center in Koh Kong as a way to connect with the community.

As she grew up, Cottle often accompanied her parents on journeys to nearby villages where they evangelized and taught about the importance of personal health. In her high school years, she was more personally involved and journeyed out to evangelize with the children.

"Being missionaries has always been part of my life," Cottle explained. "While my sisters and I didn't understand the concept of evangelizing at first, we did know that we were helping others and making a difference."

Being a light for the faith, Cottle was

impacted whenever she saw others come to know Christ.

"Asking Khmer people to convert is a big step," she expressed. "Seeing others love God enough to be willing to take that step gave me an appreciation for people, both those sharing and those receiving the Gospel."

Cottle's family moved back to the United States in 2018. They settled in Wilmington, NC. It was Cottle's senior year of high school, and everything was new and different. She was filled with emotional anxieties that made understanding God's plan for her life difficult.

"Moving back was a hard transition for me," she said. "I had panic attacks about school, and eating became a problem."

Everything began to turn around for the better when Cottle's older sister, Kailyn, told her about the University of Mount Olive.

"I attended a program at UMO called The Challenge, Discovering God's Call for Your Life," she said. "Designed for high school students, the program helped me meet professors and staff, who really cared about seeing me succeed."

Feeling a deep connection, Cottle enrolled at UMO in August 2019. Having interned at a missionary hospital in Cambodia, Cottle chose to major in the field of recreational therapy. Next semester she will complete her recreational therapy field training, and hopes to one day



UMO freshman Rachel Cottle is settling in this area after being overseas for a great deal of her life. Her family moved to Cambodia on a missionary trip in 2001 when she was just 10 months old.

work with local veterans. "I enjoy connecting with patients," she said.

As Cottle ponders becoming a missionary herself, she is finding the resources she needs at UMO to help her meet both the spiritual and physical needs of others. Beyond academics, Cottle participates in several faith-based activities on campus, including weekly chapel services, and she assists with the Original Free Will Baptist Church Dinner Program.

COURTESY PHOTOS | UMO

"UMO is truly preparing me for life after college," she noted. "The University has deeply impacted not only my future, but also my faith. During my time here, I have seen and felt God's daily presence in my life."

Cottle is the daughter of James and Lynette Cottle. She has two older sisters, Moriah and Kailyn, and a brother, Caleb.

# Coffee shop keeping hearts warm during holidays

By Dan Grubb  
Guest columnist

It is that time of year again. The family has gotten together for a Thanksgiving feast, the holiday chill is in the air and soon, stockings will be hung by the chimney with care. This holiday season, you are going to need two things — a way to stay warm and gifts for loved ones to show them your yuletide cheer. Sampson Community College has both!

Students from SCC's Academy of Continuing Excellence (ACE) has operated its Rise and Shine Coffee Shop for two years now and has been the subject of rave reviews. This year, the coffee shop is being operated in conjunction with the program's annual Christmas Store, where high quality gifts are made and sold by students enrolled in the program.

"The creation of these items is a great way for the College to integrate the ACE students' exploration of being creative, the need for the students to understand simple business

concepts and to learn to take pride in their creations," says Amanda Bradshaw, Dean of SCC's Workforce Development and Continuing Education programs. "The students love this time of the year and their excitement shows once you walk in the door to purchase one of their handmade items. All the funds collected from the sale of their goods goes directly back to the students and their classroom experiences."

The coffee stand is hosted by the students and is located in the Workforce Development hallway in the East building on campus. Money raised from coffee sales are used for ACE student activities fees so they can participate in campus activities.

Kim Testerman, who helps ACE students with the shop and the store, says she cannot think of a better way to celebrate the holiday season and the spirit of giving than through these two initiatives. "This is a chance for the students to learn what it's like to set up shop, interact and sell products and be able to meet and socialize with new people," Testerman says. "My hope is that this will benefit them when they enter further educational or



ACE's Coffee Shop and Christmas Store have everything you need this holiday season.

career paths in the future."

ACE assists students, at least 18 years of age, with intellectual disabilities in reading, writing, math and vocational skills. The goal for everyone is to create a smooth transition into post-secondary education or employment opportunities. No high school diploma or certificate is required.

A recent success story is Courtney Fennel who went through the program last year. For her, the ACE program was more than a school for learning. It was a path for success. While in the program, she successfully applied to and was hired by Wendy's restaurant in Clinton.

DAN GRUBB | SCC PHOTO

"This program is a transitional program," says Testerman. "We work on math and reading skills and eventually help these students transition to the workforce. These students improve socially and academically and that can be a great plus within the community."

The ACE program offers applications in reading, writing, math and vocational skills. There are no costs associated with the ACE Program. The Christmas Shop is open to the public. Those looking for some gift ideas or would like more information about the ACE program contact Testerman at [ktesterman@sampsoncc.edu](mailto:ktesterman@sampsoncc.edu).

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# What we believe

We believe in the Triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We believe that God is the Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of Heaven and Earth.

We believe that Jesus Christ, the Son, was God in flesh revealed and that He came into the world that the world through Him can be save from sin.

We Believe that the Holy Spirit reveals God to people and that those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.

We believe that the Holy Bible is the inspired word of God, that is the authority and inspiration for the faith and practice of the Christian life, and that every Christian has an individual responsibility to God to discover the meaning of the Scriptures for his or her own life.

We believe that spiritual regeneration must precede baptism, church membership, and commemoration of the Lord's Supper.

We believe that God created humankind in His own image and made of one blood all nations.

We believe that God is faithful and just to forgive all people who confess their sins and profess their faith in Jesus Christ and that regardless of creed or race, they become the children of God and Christian brothers.

We believe that as a local community of Christians, we are a part of Christ's Church which is universal in scope. Therefore, we believe that we should witness and work for Christ in fellowship with all children of God in an effort to oppose evil and extend the Kingdom of God throughout the world.

We believe that nothing can separate us from the love of God which in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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