

# Sabbath Recorder

*They didn't worship Jesus  
on the day he was born...*



*Look inside to see that you can  
celebrate Jesus' birth many ways...*

December 2021  
A Seventh Day Baptist Publication

# The Birth of Jesus

## Luke 2: 1-20

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.

After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

## Matthew 2: 1-2; 9-11

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him."

And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

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Seventh Day Baptists celebrate the birth of Jesus in many ways. For this issue we asked several pastors to tell how they and their congregations will be celebrating Christmas this year. It is especially important after a year of not being able to meet as usual. Thank you for sharing!

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# Sabbath Recorder

*A monthly journey into the mind and heart.*

December 2021

Patricia Cruzan, Editor

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## WHO ARE SEVENTH DAY BAPTISTS?

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If you've never read *The Sabbath Recorder* before, you might be wondering who Seventh Day Baptists are. Like other Baptists, we believe in:

- salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.
- the Bible as the inspired Word of God. The Bible is our authority for our faith and daily conduct.
- baptism of believers, by immersion, witnessing to our acceptance of Christ as Savior and Lord.
- freedom of thought under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- the congregational form of church government. Every church member has the right to participate in the decision-making process of the church.

## THE SEVENTH DAY

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God commanded that the seventh day (Saturday) be kept holy. Jesus agreed by keeping it as a day of worship. We observe the seventh day of the week (Saturday) as God's Holy Day as an act of loving obedience—not as a means of salvation. Salvation is the free gift of God through Jesus our Lord. It is the joy of the Sabbath that makes SDBs a people with a difference.

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Salemville, PA  
Pastor Andrew Camenga

## Some things are worth remembering

While Jesus does not command us to celebrate His birth every year and Scripture does not record the date of Jesus' birth, Jesus does call us to wait with the expectation of His return and to rejoice in the work of God. Each year, the German SDB Church has chosen to use the month of December as a time to remember the centuries of waiting for the Messiah to come and the celebrations God orchestrated when Jesus was born. These events help us remember that we join with generations of faithful believers who wait with expectation for the time when "Come, Lord Jesus!" shifts from anticipation to rejoicing.

In 2020, after meeting in person through the summer and early fall, a surge of COVID cases in our community led to our shifting back to virtual gathering for December and early January. In retrospect, those weeks were weeks of waiting with the expectation of regathering, weeks of sharing by Zoom what we were seeing God do and remembering what God had done. The experience is not one that we would like to repeat, but in a roundabout way, it was fit for the season.

The Lord willing, in 2021 we will return to a more typical approach to remembering and celebrating. We will sing more than we typically do. Individuals and groups will prepare additional music for the season. We'll decorate with more intention and more color.

We'll choose scriptures that speak of waiting for the promises of God and rejoicing when He acts. We'll revisit the faithful service and response of Elizabeth and Zacharias, the surprise for Mary and Joseph, the angelic announcement to the shepherds and their consequent marveling, the waiting of Simeon, and the thanksgiving of Anna. We'll touch on the events that happened in the ensuing years: the visit and gifts of the magi, the panic of Herod, the flight to Egypt, and the eventual settling in Nazareth. We'll remember how all of these events demonstrate that the promises of God are sure and that we can count on Him and live in hope—whether we join with those who live in the centuries of waiting or those who see first hand the next spectacular steps in the unfolding promises of God. And, we'll rejoice. SR

## And, we'll rejoice!

## How Do You Do This Thing?

How can you make things work when you're not necessarily all on the same page? I imagine it's something like marriage. As a married person, you're not always going to agree on all of the details. I remember as a young person hearing Janet Thorngate use the phrase "agree to disagree." These days I will say that and my wife responds with "I agree that you're disagreeable." She's a funny lady...and I can't say she's entirely wrong.

In our church, Christmas is something about which we're not all in absolute agreement. Some struggle with the roots of the holiday and cite verses like Deuteronomy 16:21. Others feel it is deeply important to honor the coming of the Messiah. Both are completely valid positions.

So how do you do this thing? Last year we celebrated Advent-themed worship services and a party with lots of food and a movie and caroling. This year we're focused on our 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration and we're working (as I write this!) on an original production entitled "Putting On the Play." It's going to be so much fun!

We don't all have to agree on everything. We all love Jesus and each other. In the end, that's what matters. [SR](#)

Pataskala Seventh Day Baptist Church  
Pataskala, Ohio  
Pastor Chuck Meathrell

Seventh Day Baptist Church of Shiloh  
Shiloh, New Jersey  
Assistant Pastor Tyler Chroniger

## Anticipation

The Shiloh Seventh Day Baptist Church is looking forward to a new season of celebration with great anticipation. We are anticipating some normality this year. Last year we were able to do Operation Christmas Child. This will continue again this year. We also will present our "White Christmas" gifts—this simply means we have collected money over the year to give away to those in need during the holiday season. All our Sabbath School classes participate in this. However, 2020 wasn't great for everything!

During the 2020 season we missed out on some of our traditions. God gave us a "break" from normal so that we might enjoy these traditions even more this year. We plan to celebrate the birth of Jesus with a children's program. Our choir is preparing to present a cantata. Our hope is to have a Christmas Eve service and a special Sabbath Morning worship service (Christmas Day falls on a Sabbath this year). As it stands today, we are just waiting with anticipation for this joyous season to start! [SR](#)

Seventh Day Baptist—"The Connecting Church"  
Milton, Wisconsin  
Associate Pastor Liz Green

## Music is Important

The Milton Church is enjoying a return to "normal" this year and celebrating many of our traditional celebrations. We will enjoy our "all music Sabbath" on the third Sabbath in December. We rejoice in the long heritage we have of making music together in hymns, ensembles, vocal and instrumental music; and reading the Christmas story together. Our Awana kids often join us in presenting a special number.

On Christmas Eve, we remember the birth of Jesus with a special candlelight service. This year, with Christmas Day falling on Sabbath, we plan a special video presentation so that families can enjoy worshipping on this special day, but do so on their own schedule in their homes. [SR](#)

## Christmas in Battle Creek

The Christmas season in Battle Creek has always been an important staple of our worship! The narrative of Christ coming as a baby so that one day we could have forgiveness of sin is never far from our thoughts. While the day of His birth is not important, the fact that He came certainly is. This is something that we never tire of reading about or celebrating!

Throughout December the preaching and music will revolve around the Christmas story as we look at the implications of the virgin birth and what it means for us today. I am always amazed and thankful for how Jesus came so that we could have forgiveness of sin and be made new! Our church will also be celebrating together on Christmas Eve with special music by our choir as well as partaking in candlelight communion together followed by our Sabbath service on Christmas Day. [SR](#)

Battle Creek Seventh Day Baptist Church  
Battle Creek, Michigan  
Pastor Tim Smothers

Lost Creek Seventh Day Baptist Church  
Lost Creek, West Virginia  
Pastor Johnmark Camenga

*We do these things  
not out of devotion to a day,  
but out of a desire to express  
our devotion to Jesus.*

Christmas in the Lost Creek Church is marked by a few events that would be familiar to many. As a means of focusing ourselves on the purpose of our celebration, we start an Advent sermon series on the Sabbath following Thanksgiving. These messages, though marked by the standard themes, seek to connect the season with the full life and ministry of Jesus, not just his birth. We seek to recognize our Christmas celebration as an extension of our daily, weekly, and yearly efforts to glorify the Savior and proclaim the Gospel. The greatest single point of focus for us through this celebration, then, is not even on his birth but on how his birth is a glimpse—a picture— of his promised return.

To that end, our annual Christmas season in Lost Creek is gently sprinkled with low-key events and celebrations. We often go Christmas caroling around town. We may have an evening when we watch a movie or build gingerbread houses as a church. Our weekly services overflow with the hymns of the season. Our sanctuary is decorated with traditional Christmas colors. Our congregation shares songs or scriptures. We may even have a small skit or play that highlights the love, joy, hope, and peace of the season by focusing on Jesus. We do these things not out of devotion to a day, but out of a desire to, ever more deeply, live out and express our devotion to Jesus. SR



*Christmas time is probably the time  
of year when people are friendliest, most  
generous, and most philanthropic.*

*And yet, at the same time,  
it is also one of the most  
controversial times of the year.*

## The Redemption of December 25

It is one of the times of year when a significant number of people are still likely to attend a church service. Yet, I've seen Christians who have been downright mean when someone offered them a Christmas present, returning the gift with an angry outburst of, "I don't celebrate Christmas." Just the offer of a greeting of "Merry Christmas" sometimes generates a range of emotions in different people.

Christmas is controversial. No question about it.

During the years that I served as pastor of the Miami Church, we were unapologetic about our annual celebrations of the birth of Christ, but we intentionally never used the word "Christmas" to refer to those celebrations. And there was even the occasional time when I would preach on a passage of Scripture connected to the birth of Christ, but I would do it at a different time of the year, not in December. Those were some of the ways that we sought to avoid the controversy.

In my opinion, many of the arguments, debates, and discussions which inevitably would resurface close to December 25 each year, were not constructive, not edifying, and not worthy of engagement. Many of the details surrounding the origin of Christmas are sketchy. Much of the information behind the reason for its practices are debatable. The vast majority of people anywhere, regardless of which side of the debate they are on, are simply unable to articulate a coherent litany of where Christmas came from, and why.

Here are some simple facts which are not debatable:

1. There is no human being who knows when Jesus Christ was born. And there is no record of the date of His birth.
2. There is no Biblical injunction that either commands the celebration of Christ's birth, or prohibits it.
3. It is permissible for any aspect of our Lord's life, ministry, character, teachings, etc. to be celebrated on any of the 365 or 366 days in any year.
4. It is permissible for me to preach on any passage of Scripture on any given day of the year. So, the birth of Christ is recorded in Scripture and is fair game for preaching at any time, including December 25.

5. No Seventh Day Baptist Conference or Church in the world has seen it fit to put a statement about Christmas in its Statement of Belief. That puts the matter, therefore, in the category of those issues which are guided by individual liberty of thought and freedom of conscience.

So, I don't care about Christmas. In fact, I am not sure what Christmas is. What I do care passionately about is that Jesus Christ was born into the world, and that gives me innumerable reasons to celebrate both His person and His birth. In fact, I ought to celebrate Him, including His birth, every single day of the year, including December 25. It is arguable that if I do less, I am robbing myself of priceless opportunities to exalt Christ.

Even if it is true that some bad people somewhere did some bad stuff on December 25 at some point in history, how redemptive am I if I say, "Because of the bad stuff that some bad people did on December 25 some time ago, I am not going to celebrate Christ on December 25." Does that sound like someone who desires to honor Christ every day? No, in my estimation, that sounds like someone who has allowed himself to be robbed of a glorious occasion to proclaim Christ.

If in fact, the enemy has stolen December 25 from us by doing some bad things on it in the past, it is full time for us as Christ followers to redeem December 25 by doing some good things on it, like celebrating Jesus Christ and like preaching the Gospel to those same people who are misguided about that day. It is full time for us to allow light to shine on the darkness of December 25, if there is such darkness. Why should pagans control or dictate what happens or does not happen on one of God's marvelous created days? Should it not be said of December 25, "This is the day the Lord has made, We will rejoice and be glad in it"? (Psalm 118:24)

I am all in favor of redeeming December 25. It is just as good a day as any, to shout,

*"Go tell it on the mountain,  
Jesus Christ is born. Hallelujah."* SR

# Christmas Past and Present

I still appreciate the December 2018 issue of the *Sabbath Recorder*, “Why Not Christmas.” The many different views of keeping or not keeping Christmas were actually my life’s story.

I was the only child of a poor struggling family. Christmas meant so much to all of us. I remember Mother baking many cakes with love to give as gifts to family and friends.

I remember the Christmas that Dad (the only breadwinner) was in the hospital. Christmas Eve, the church we attended brought me a brand NEW coat, as well as a big box of fruits and nuts for Mother and me to share as we faced Christmas alone.

When I got married, I started attending a church that taught Christmas was “pagan.” We learned about all the pagan trap-pings involved with Christmas. We looked for people to share our “pagan gospel” with each year. We would not allow our children to participate in any Christmas activities. (I have later asked for, and received, their forgiveness.) We literally threw Christ out with the bathwater, but we preached an “informed Pagan Gospel.”

Praise God—He has corrected me. We now use Christmas as a witness tool for Jesus, our Savior. In sermons, I’ve preached this approach many times.

I use Apostle Paul’s approach at Mars Hill this season of the year.

*Acts 22: 22 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: 24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.”*

So many people don’t know the God they are celebrating this time of year at Christmas. They seem interested when I share Him, the unknown God, with them.

Though it may be debatable about the date of Jesus’ birth, I do as Phillip did to the Ethiopian eunuch: I begin at the scripture where they are (in this case, the birth of Christ) and preach Jesus to them. SR

*Once again Christmas is a wonderful time of the year. What better gift to give than the birth and story of the life of Jesus.*



Union Station Seventh Day Baptist Church  
at Dunedin, Florida  
Pastor Michael Pearl

# Jesus Gives Life

During the Christmas season I try not to focus on cultural things that have nothing to do with Jesus. I have a difficult time believing that Jesus is concerned about collegiate football games or shopping in department stores. I don't fret over Christmas trees being delivered on time, and I politely decline to tell stories to children about a guy in a red suit who drives a magical sleigh with reindeer.

Oh? Am I treading on sacred ground here? I don't think so. Please don't expect me, as an SDB Pastor, to mix cultural traditions with faith. I enjoy our cultural traditions, but I don't preach about them; rather I preach about Jesus and his values and about how he humbled himself and came to this world to provide a new way for humanity to have a relationship with our heavenly Father. I preach the gospel message; the gospel message is about Jesus.

Jesus believed that he was the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament. When he began his ministry he said, *"The time has come."* *"The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"* (Mark 1:15) He constantly aroused the anger of the religious leaders of his day and at his trial they said, *"he claimed to be the Son of God,"* (John 19:7). He claimed a very close relationship with God, and he assumed a messianic title, *"the Son of Man,"* derived originally from the prophet Daniel in a dream. He told all who would listen that:

To know him was to know God.

To believe in him is to believe in God.

To receive him is to receive God.

To honor him is to honor God and to hate him is to hate God.

More than once, Jesus told a person in need, *"your sins are forgiven."* Jesus often spoke about giving life. He described himself as *"the bread of life."* He claimed to be the *"resurrection and the life."* He offered *"living water"* to a woman from Samaria and he promised eternal life to a rich young man...if the man would come and follow him. He called himself the Good Shepherd who will not only give his life for his sheep but who would also give life to the sheep. He declared that God had granted him authority over all people and that *"he gives life to whom he is pleased to give life to."* He said, *"I am the light of the world."*

For me and the members at Union Station SDB Church, Christmas is a time to focus on Jesus; it's a really good time to remember his birth. It's also a good time to greet your neighbor with a smile or to give a gift to someone in need; it's a good time to be a friend in deed not just in name. I look forward to our tradition at Union Station SDB Church of singing Christmas songs about the birth of Jesus. This year, as our church members gather to celebrate Christmas, don't expect a sermon from the pastor and don't expect to see a Christmas tree in the sanctuary. Rather, expect to use your God-given instrument, your voice, as you join with the others who are able to attend as we joyfully sing songs that praise the moment when Jesus miraculously arrived here on planet Earth in the little town of Bethlehem and the angels announced the wonderful arrival of our Lord, our Savior, Jesus. SR

Christmas  
is a time  
to focus on  
Jesus



## A Season of Opportunity

At Frontier Church–Carbon Valley, we try to see Christmas as a season of opportunity. Whether or not they recognize the true “reason for the season,” the weeks leading up to December 25 are a time when many people find themselves more open to the message of God sending His Son, in the form of a baby, to bring salvation to humanity. So we look for ways to share God’s love and His message in special and also practical ways.

Though we do not follow most of the liturgical church calendar, the season of Advent gives us opportunity to offer a series of messages geared toward communicating the Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love that Christ not only brought into our world through His birth, but also that He will bring completely when He returns. This year our Advent Series will focus on “Light in the Darkness,” with messages based on prophecies from Isaiah that acknowledge the darkness many in our world have been living in over the past couple of years. It is an opportunity for our members to invite those they have been ministering to throughout the year to “come and hear” about Emmanuel. We also love the tradition of a Christmas Eve candlelight service, and regularly partner with another church for this—another great opportunity for invitation.

Other opportunities where we have taken advantage of to show the love of Christ in more practical ways have included: hosting an open house overnight on Christmas Eve for emergency rescue workers who have to be on duty; partnering with our host church in collecting food and distributing Christmas food boxes to needy families; making and serving cookies and cocoa to the students at the school next door on their last day of finals before Christmas break. We would love to hear some of your ideas as well.

While it is easy to get caught up in grumbling about “chreasters” (the Urban Dictionary term for those who only show up at church on Christmas and Easter), we figure, “Why not take advantage of their willingness to come those days to share the gospel with them?” We pray that God will use this special season as an opportunity for all our churches to reach out with the greatest news in all of history. SR

Frontier Church  
Carbon Valley, Colorado  
Pastor Steve Osborn

Bell Seventh Day Baptist Church  
Salemville, Pennsylvania  
Pastor Darwin Steele

## Christmas 2021

COVID-19—what images come to your mind when you hear these words? For the Bell SDB Church it conjures images of empty seats, virtual services, and outdoor gatherings; the pain of those missed because they are in the hospital; and the time apart when our fellowship is so necessary for continued hope and healing. Now we are coming up to our second Christmas in this season of stress. What will that look like?

Christmas Eve has always been a special time and last year we had many false starts and then failed in many respects in trying to get together. It was missed—very much. Technology can do so much, but it cannot replace the love shared in the intimacy of a Christmas Eve service. But isn’t that the message of Christmas? Hope?

How do you celebrate “hope” when you are flat on your back, struggling to breathe, lungs full of fluid?

This year, the Bell Church is planning on bringing some normalcy back into our simple routine. Christmas Eve will be led by Bryan Baker with special music and readings from all those who can take part. This year, Christmas is on Sabbath and we likely will have just the single service Christmas Eve. This service will be planned to be done with Christmas carols, some down-home country music, soft lighting—all wonderful things to be sure. BUT we will most likely all be masked, and hand-sanitized, with the proper social distancing, if we can. Prayers will be centered on both thanksgiving for those who have survived and intercession for those still ill. Elbow bumps will replace handshakes and hugs; tears will be shed as we remember the struggles of this year and the courage of those who have lived through it and met the year with a courage that is Spirit-driven.

Christmas Day is not yet in our thoughts (we are still trying to get through Thanksgiving). However, our hearts are yearning for that celebration of the coming hope of the Birth of the Christ. We may be found on our knees at year’s end, but our faces will be focused upward and forward as we look forward to His return. COVID has indeed hit everyone hard, but we are reminded that Hope is real, it is here, and we will celebrate it within the Christmas season.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” (Isaiah 9:6-7 ESV)

## Merry Christmas!

SR

Agape Ministry Iglesia Bautista  
del Séptimo Día

San Sebastián, P.R.  
And Grupo Bautista del Séptimo Día  
San Juan, Puerto Rico, USA

Pastor Judith A. Houts  
Church Planter, Evangelist

## A Child King Has Been Born

### Isaiah 9:6

The year 2017 was a year without Christmas celebration in my island of Puerto Rico—a country that celebrates Christmas from November until one week (Las Octavitas) after the arrival of the Three Kings (Epiphany). Destruction and sadness were everywhere. Christmas music felt out of place. This, as many of you know, was due to the Hurricane Maria that hit our island and caused hundreds of deaths, blackouts, lack of food and water, and, of course, much destruction. Sadness, depression, and anxiety covered the hemisphere.

The local churches celebrated Christmas in a more compassionate way—by giving care packages or money to families in need.

The solidarity caused Christmas to be stronger and better the following years, in spite of the 6.4 earthquake that rocked the island on January 7, 2020. Puerto Rico was determined to build itself again and conquer depression and anxiety. This is better done by singing, celebrating, and helping each other.

Our Seventh Day Baptist Church here in San Sebastian never lost sight of what the Christmas season is about: “Jesus is the Reason for the Season.”

We were dealing with these disasters and getting back on our two feet when Coronavirus (COVID-19) put a complete and sudden stop to everything: family visits, shopping, churches were closed, and everyone was in lockdown. Depression and PTSD were back. But this time, when Christmas season came around in 2020, our church was determined to celebrate our Savior’s birth in spite of it all—and so we did!

Christmas during COVID Lockdown: I prepared a small program to be given via Zoom. I read a poem about Christmas and its meaning. Adrian Gonzalez had a solo and my husband, Joel Houts, had a sermon that helped heal our

souls. Joel and I prepared a sign on a big cardboard that read, “Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.” We went to some of our members’ houses and to some neighbors and lifted up the sign for them to read. It was therapeutic to see their smiles.

We are now in the vaccination phase of COVID (2021). All but one member is vaccinated. Everyone is back in church and the family ties are beginning to form again. Our first potluck will be on December 4. We will have our Christmas Cantata again. In the midst of all these events, we lost some families to other churches and others just lost their interest in coming back to gather as a family of God. Nevertheless, out of losing families and almost losing our praise band, two praise teams were formed. These two praise teams will be giving the Christmas Cantata this year. The theme for this year’s Christmas program is, “A Child King Has Been Born.” After, and between the praise teams’ participation, there will be a live manger. The three wise men will also be present and they will make their way into the manger with gifts for the child. This year, the congregation has a chance to also participate by bringing real gifts to the newborn King. These gifts will be then given to children and families in the community. The angel in the manger will be a child. Mary and Joseph will be played by our youth, and the three kings will be played by young adults and not-so-young adults.

Our Christmas tree is up and lit. We prepared it early this year to tell others that our hearts will always be giving thanks to our King Jesus. The Christmas tree will be covered with white envelopes that contain money that the members and others donate for the celebration of The Three Kings in our community on January 6. The Three Kings again will walk our streets, and again will give candies and bring hope to our children. SR

Jesus was born, he grew up, he died, he resurrected, he is sitting  
at the right hand of the Father, and soon he will come back,  
not as a child King, but as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.  
Halleluiah. He lives!

# joy to the world!

Riverside Seventh Day Baptist Church  
Riverside, California  
Pastor Gabriel Bejjani

We need joy this season more than ever. We have experienced tremendous amount of stress due to many factors but especially the COVID-19 pandemic. The negative effects were in our health, economy, spiritual, mental, social, and personal relationships. Can we find joy? I believe that the Scriptures give us details about the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ which today will help us to renew our faith and joy.

In the Gospel of Luke chapter 1, we read about Mary and her visit to her cousin Elizabeth. She wanted to check if Elizabeth was pregnant. The Holy Spirit spoke through her to Mary, “the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill His promises to her” (Luke 1:44-45). The word *joy* appears in chapter 2 of Luke when the angel told the shepherds who were terrified that he has good news which will bring great joy to all. The wise men were overjoyed to hear the good news of the birth of Jesus Christ. How can this joy be ours today ?

The Magi visit to the baby Jesus teaches us what we need to do in order to live in that joy now. “On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” (Mathew 2:11). There are some actions that are required to bring Joy: worship and giving.

Bow down and worship is what was said of the Magi. When we bow down we are acknowledging our Lord and Savior and honoring Him. Worship elevates us from the troubles of this world to surrender to our Lord and Savior, trusting in Him. We realize that He is able to deliver us from our circumstances. The spiritual highlight of my daily walk is that communion with my Lord. It is so uplifting to come together as believers weekly to worship our God. Giving of our means and ourselves to the Lord brings joy that is beyond description. Give and experience the blessings that are yours as you think of others. Do not allow yourself to live in constant misery. Selfishness robs us of experiencing the real joy. Be thankful for what you have. I go to sleep thanking the Lord, wake up and live the whole day thanking Him. The most important part of the joy factor is faith. Mary was blessed for believing that God would fulfill His promises to her. (Luke 1:45) So let us believe, worship, and give—and you will have the Joy. <sup>[SR]</sup>

# Celebrating the Gift of God

I know there are many ways to celebrate the Christmas season. At a young age, I learned the Christmas season does not need to be celebrated only in December! The point is that we celebrate Christmas! A time when we reflect on the best gift ever given...Emanuel! Celebrate CHRIST-mas!

Since being called as pastor of the White Cloud SDB Church, I have tried to focus on that very special gift given by GOD Almighty—His son, Jesus—throughout the entire year. However, during the Christmas Season when people's hearts are reflecting on this special gift intensely, there is a glorious opportunity to focus people's hearts not just on being thankful for the birth of Jesus, but encouraging others to be like Jesus.

Like most things, this takes planning. I start in early October with a meeting with my wife, Sarah. My family started a tradition during the Christmas Season when the kids were young where Sarah read a short story and gave some sort of candy that would help our children remember the story and the powerful message of grace, compassion, and giving. When we came to White Cloud, Sarah and I wanted to share this tradition, not just with our children, but with our church family. Sarah and I decided that each Sabbath in December, Sarah would read a short story to the church family and present the congregation with a gift to remind them of the story—just as we did with our own children. The story and gift were an introduction to the message for Sabbath.

Our first year doing this, Sarah read her favorite story, *A Christmas Family*. This story tells of a family where they have lost the true meaning of Christmas and the mother and father help encourage their children to remember giving and compassion. This family takes on the challenge of providing wrapped presents for a family of six whose father was injured and accumulated massive medical bills. The story tells of how this family pulls together to accomplish this task anonymously with humor and unselfish love. Their final act of kindness comes with a red envelope holding a message and money. The gift that went with this story was a chocolate coin. After the reading, Kashya and Keith, our children, passed out a chocolate coin to each person in attendance. As the years have gone on, the church family looks forward to December to hear the stories read each Sabbath and the gift they receive to go along with the story.

In 2019, a community service was held at the White Cloud Methodist Church on December 23. This event focused on "The Gift Of Christ." Sarah read a story, *The Gold Wrapping Paper*. I won't give the story away, but the kids passed out small golden boxes filled with Hershey Kisses & Hugs. We have taken our family tradition, shared it with our church family, and now with our community. Sarah and I never dreamed that this short, intimate moment we shared as a family would encourage, motivate, and spread the Gift of God to our community. It is amazing to see just how God uses us in ways to reach others!

Link to the story: *The Christmas Family*

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/friend/1997/12/christmas-family?lang=eng>

Link to the story: *The Gold Wrapping Paper*

<https://www.townepark.com/the-gold-wrapping-paper-a-story-of-forgiveness-and-thanks/>

SR

Seventh Day Baptist Church of White Cloud  
White Cloud, Michigan  
Pastor JR Shick with wife, Sarah

It's nearly that time of year again. The time when we, as Christians begin to prepare to celebrate the birth of our savior, Jesus. It happens to be my personal favorite time of year. Yes, there are the celebrations and traditions with family and friends and a seemingly increased sense of community, where a lot of people show more compassion and generosity. Those are wonderful things and certainly important. For me, though, that is not the focus. Rather, along with all those things, there is an increase in opportunity to share Christ with others. In other words, in my mind, how we prepare and how we celebrate the birth of Jesus matters. It matters how we celebrate as individuals, families, friends and as churches.


Now, there is certainly a variety of ways in which individuals and churches celebrate and prepare to celebrate this special and sacred time of year. Here in Coudersport, PA, at the First Seventh Day Baptist Church of Hebron, we love this time of year and all that it represents to those who believe in Jesus. We also celebrate in the opportunity to share the story of Jesus with unbelievers or those who perhaps haven't heard of Him.

On the Sabbath after Thanksgiving, we will be beginning our preparation and celebration of the birth of Christ. On that Sabbath, we will begin Advent by lighting the candle of Hope and having a message to accompany that theme. Each Sabbath leading into Christmas we will light another candle and the themes will be Joy, Peace, Love, and the last one, this year on Christmas, we will light the center and largest candle that will represent Christ. Along with the lighting of Advent candles and sermons reflecting each theme, there are other things we will be doing as a church.

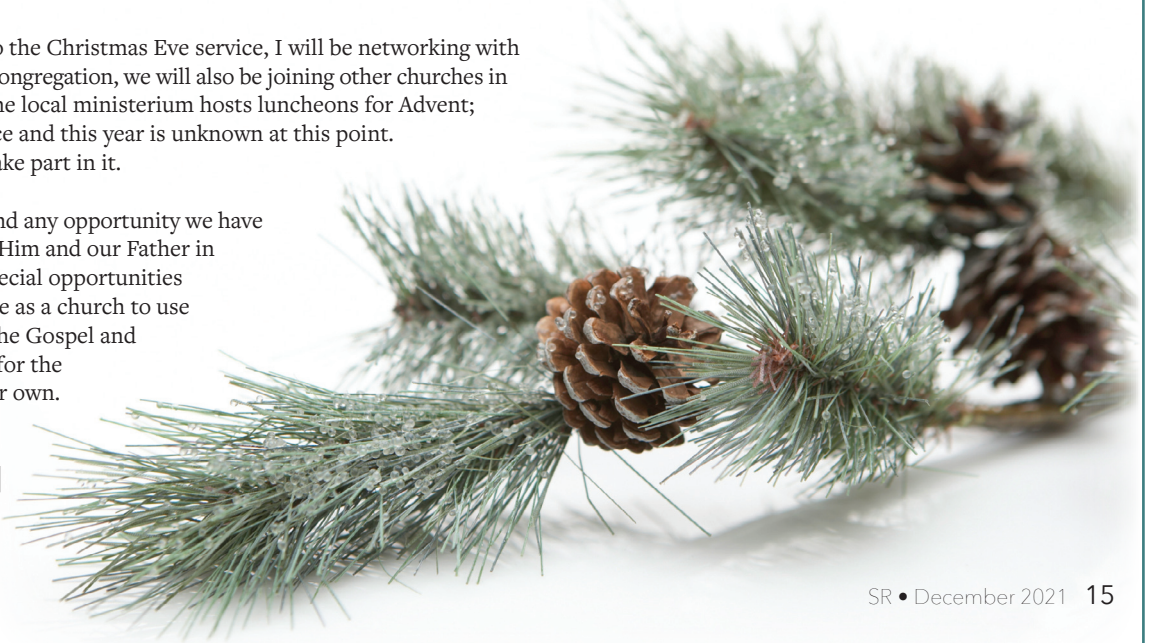
On the same Sabbath that we light the first Advent candle, we will be bringing back a tradition in our church that hasn't been done in a few years. This tradition is called, "Hanging of the Greens." During this Sabbath we will have a story being told. This story will be narrated and, during it, individuals will place certain decorative items within the church. During that time, they will give a short message on the significance of the item and what it represents in relation to the story of the birth of Jesus. This will be my first time participating in this tradition and it is something that my wife and I are looking forward to with great anticipation.

The Hanging of the Greens and the lighting of the Advent candles build us to an event that I personally believe is the pinnacle of our celebration leading into Christmas Day. That is our Christmas Eve community candlelight service. We did not hold this last year in person due to COVID and I was recovering from a surgery. This year we are planning on having this service in person. We will have to evaluate COVID considerations as we get closer. If we aren't able to celebrate in person, we will again do the service online. During our Christmas Eve service, we have individuals within our congregation prepare short 3-to-5-minute messages outlining certain aspects of the birth of Christ. One person will talk about Mary and what her story means to them personally. Another will represent Joseph; another, the Angels and their significance; another is the shepherd's and the wise men.

During the month leading up to the Christmas Eve service, I will be networking with other pastors in our area. As a congregation, we will also be joining other churches in their celebrations of Advent. The local ministerium hosts luncheons for Advent; last year these did not take place and this year is unknown at this point. If they are reinstated, we will take part in it.

Our congregation loves Jesus and any opportunity we have to celebrate and draw closer to Him and our Father in Heaven. Christmas provides special opportunities for each of these. It is our desire as a church to use these opportunities to spread the Gospel and affect those in our community for the glory of God's kingdom, not our own. May God richly bless all in this season of celebrating the birth of our Lord, Jesus. 

## Christmas in Hebron



New York City Seventh Day Baptist Church  
Brooklyn, New York  
Pastor Ericessen Cooper

## Christmas Message



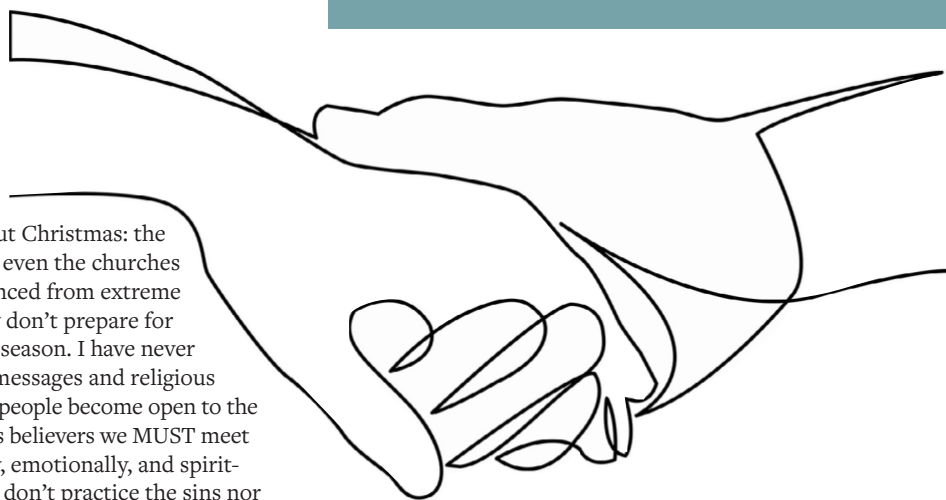
Celebrating Christmas means a lot of things to different people. For some it is the season of giving, for others it is about the decorating, and for others it is the exchange of gifts and the precious looks on loved ones' faces. While for others, it is a special family time. Then there are those who love all of these things—that's what makes the season.

I remember a church brother once telling me, "Jesus may not have been born on December 25, but this is the time of year that men's hearts are more open to hearing the message of Jesus Christ." I thought about those words and I had to agree. There's such a euphoria that comes with this time that people do have an attraction to the "Christmas Story."

My favorite Bible passage surrounding the birth of Christ is from Luke 2—the account of the shepherds being visited by the angelic host. Imagine with me what that was like for those men. Being a shepherd wasn't the most sought-after job of the time. These were lowly men doing a menial job, watching over their employer's flock, keeping them safe from predators. Yet, these were the men that God wanted to make this important announcement to. The announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ, God's son, was made to common men. Isn't that how God works—He calls simple men and women to his work, not necessarily those who are wise and learned in their own eyes? He equips them, He emboldens them, He fills them with His Spirit for His purpose. These men saw this spectacular scene unfold before them, angels praising God and declaring, "Peace on earth and good will towards men," but that wasn't all there was. They were told of the Savior being born in Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. There was a mission to accomplish. They had to find this child and they went with enthusiasm. They could have been satisfied with seeing the angelic host or just hearing the message, but something moved them to go and seek the child. We all need to be like that when we hear about Jesus—there needs to be an enthusiasm in us to seek to know Him more, a "don't stop" attitude. Unlike the magi, they didn't have a star to guide them. They searched throughout Bethlehem until they found the child. Can you imagine Mary and Joseph with their newborn child—into this animal shed, during this joyous moment, come these men smelling like sheep telling them about their encounter with the angels and the message they had received about their child. If there was any doubt in Joseph's mind, hearing God's message regarding the child would certainly remove any apprehensions.

Here's my favorite thing about this wonderful account: the shepherds don't just return to their jobs satisfied that they have located the child. They begin going throughout Bethlehem telling everyone who would listen to them about what had happened to them and what was told to them about Jesus. That's what we are called to do. When we come in contact with Jesus and have experienced that newness in our lives, we can't just be satisfied with the change in our own lives, we need to have an urgency to tell others of our Savior. Everywhere we go we need to tell someone about our own encounter with the Savior of the world.

He didn't just come for us to celebrate His birth with giftings, decorations, and family time. He came to this world to be the perfect sacrifice, to save us from our sins so that we could have life and life more abundantly. Let's celebrate this season of Christmas by being like those shepherds and telling all who will listen of the Good News. [SR](#)



Many of us have different feelings about Christmas: the origins and especially how society and even the churches celebrate it. Over the years I have bounced from extreme to extreme on the subject. I personally don't prepare for Christmas nor even follow the Advent season. I have never followed the normal yearly pattern of messages and religious routines. Yet, one thing I know is that people become open to the Gospel during the Christmas season. As believers we MUST meet people where they are found: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We don't change the Gospel. We don't practice the sins nor behaviors they have embraced in their lives. We must be the light to those walking in darkness and even in the shadows of the transition between the two realms. So how can we do this?

One example we have found here at Freedom Community Church is the opportunity to serve others on the day we set apart as "Christmas." Believe it or not, here at the "FCC" we have people with varying viewpoints on Christmas. (Probably not shocking to those who know us.) As we earnestly strive to increase our "Biblically World View," we sometimes have divisions about what to do with some of the items that come to our attention. When it comes to Christmas, a group of us decided to meet people where they are. We decided to serve our community, especially those who feel abandoned, isolated, rejected, and lonely. Some may be individuals, while others may be families. For the last few years we have served a "Christmas" dinner at the church in the afternoon on Christmas Day. If families want to get together in the morning for the holiday they can. But we set aside the afternoon to present the love of Jesus Christ to those who may or may not already know it.

We make contacts with those in our community and beyond that we feel would be blest by being invited to a community event that feels like a family get-together. It is about them and bringing the Gospel to them. In our family, where we have everything we need and many things that are wants, we felt it was important to train our children that Christmas (Jesus coming to earth) is about giving eternal presents that begin with our time, abilities, and money. There is no substitute for the feeling we get serving others when it is most inconvenient for us to do it. The smiles on their faces, the joy within their conversations, and the warmth of others' presence are the best "presents" that will change our lives as well as their own.

It takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of dedication. It takes a lot of patience. But it is all worth the reward we receive by being an instrument of God's expression of His love in the lives of others. So, remember—we may all disagree if we should or should not celebrate or even recognize the holiday of "Christmas." But we must be able to meet others where they are in order to present and be the Gospel of love and the good news of Jesus Christ. While this may not work for every holiday, I feel very confident that for Christmas we can obediently and righteously reach out to people where they are at and serve them the food for the body—but more importantly the food for eternal life. SR

## "Christmas Rethought"

*One thing I know is that people become open to the Gospel during the Christmas season!*

It was Christmas season in Kansas City and I was employed at Skaggs Drugs. Over the speakers came the words of a poem, “Christmas was made for children. Children like you and me with mistletoe and holly and toys upon a tree...” When I ponder these words, my mind often drifts back to Christmas childhood memories: the putting up of a Christmas tree on December 24; the Christmas lights placed just so on its branches and then the ornaments reflecting those lights. (The particular lights that the memory allows me to see were those shaped like a red candle. When these were upright and heated, it created a flow of bubbles rising and falling in the glass light encasement.) Mom had her icicles (yes, that was the name for strands of sparkling material attached to a thread). Mom placed them on the tree gently and stretched out. Of course, my brothers and I would find those that had fallen on the floor, rolling these fallen icicles into a ball and tossing our creation behind the tree. Dad had a different task which did not take place until after we boys went to bed. He had a plywood platform as a base for the tree—on it he put a winter scene with lake, houses, church, cars, and appropriately, snow.

Yet for all the remembrance of these Christmas trappings, my thoughts focus on what I recall were two life-shaping traditions of this season. Each year at this time, a music box shaped like a chapel was brought out which had been stored away for the year. A new coat of spray snow was added to the roof and its surroundings. The stained-glass windows made out of colorful wrapping paper were checked and refurbished. Then the chimes were

wound up. What was the front door of the chapel was opened and out of it came the sweet sounds of “Silent Night, Holy Night.”

The other shaping event which shouts forth the holiness of the season was all of us gathered around Dad sitting in his chair, picking up a Bible, and reading:

*“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed everyone to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David which is called Bethlehem: (because he was of the house and lineage of David).”* Luke 2:1-4

Year by year, Christmas season by Christmas season, the mystery and awe of the Babe of Bethlehem, what we called the Christmas Story, was embedded into my heart, “that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:14) May the LORD Jesus be embedded in your heart this Christmas season.

A side note: even though my Dad, Pratt J. Chroniger, went to be with the LORD this year, still he speaks. When we were visiting my Dad during a Christmas season, my daughter recorded with her camera his reading of the Gospel of Luke. This video is posted on Facebook every year at Christmastime to remind us all of the fulfillment of the words of the Prophet, “For unto us a child is born.” SR



This is more a personal testimony of celebration of Christmas, though it reflects on church celebration over the years since I was partly responsible for what happened.

For me, the best part of Christmas is the lights and music. I love the lights at this darkest time of the year because it points to Jesus, the light of the world—it is badly needed this time of year to provide a contrast to the darkness. It has blessed me that the Christmas lights have become more numerous and brighter over the years. I like to think of that as a reflection on the increasing light of Jesus in a dark world. I try to use the decorations I put up to draw attention to the true meaning of Christmas and not to the secular Christmas.

The classical, choral music of Christmas is also one of my favorite Christmas things. Its beauty and how it reflects on the beauty of Jesus warms my heart and moves me to worship. The churches I have been in have always included lights (especially here at Dodge Center) and music in their celebration. SR



# How Great Is Our God!

2022 Conference Theme

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; His greatness no one can fathom.

—Psalm 145:3

I don't believe that events just randomly occur in our lives, that things just happen through coincidence. I think God plays a big part in the drama and adventure we call life. This has been evident in the experiences that have occurred as my husband Don and I have purchased our first home after living in parsonages these past decades.

With Don retiring in December 2021, we needed to find somewhere to live in the vicinity of Shiloh and close to our married children and grandchildren. This past spring we contacted a local realty agency. The Christian couple who met with us were experienced professionals and we felt a sense of peace about working with them.

We looked at several houses over the next few months, but nothing seemed to match our expressed needs. One day our realtor called and said his wife had a house going up for sale that seemed perfect for us. We agreed to see it, loved it, and made an offer. The next day he called to say the family selling the house would talk that weekend and let us know what they decided on Monday. Over the weekend we talked about "if God wants us to have this house, He will make it happen."

Monday morning our realtor called and said our offer was accepted! And then he shared something interesting. When a house goes on the market, he and his wife would get lots of calls on the weekend to set up times to tour a house. He said that no one, literally no one, called about this house that weekend. His wife commented that "God must really want you to have this house."

Among the blessings we experienced after purchasing this home were:

The seller of the house was my former superintendent when I was teaching.

The carpet we chose for the new house was at a really low price—the store manager wasn't sure why.

The owner of the company we chose for purchasing blinds for the windows lived just down the street from our new house. His employee who installed the blinds was a former student of mine.

I had another former student and her mother help with the painting, and another former student did some landscaping for us.

All of these experiences reminded us of God's care and provision for us.

As we reflect on the Christmas story, we see God's involvement and divine plan in the lives of Mary and Joseph. Mary wasn't engaged to just any Jewish man. She was engaged to Joseph, also from the line of David, who was a man of integrity and deep faith. He was a man who would listen to an angel and decide to honor his commitment to Mary even though he knew he wasn't the father of her baby. Mary wasn't just any Jewish girl—she was a virgin who God knew would agree to carry His Son so that the world would have a Savior who understood people. Mary was willing to do whatever God asked of her.

It was no coincidence that Mary visited Elizabeth before Elizabeth's son was born. The special bond between Mary and Elizabeth in the final months of Elizabeth's pregnancy would be a blessing and encouragement to Mary as she began her adventure with Joseph and her baby who was waiting to be born.

God used a pagan Roman emperor to get Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem for a census so that the prophecies could be fulfilled about the birth of the new King. It wasn't a random trip, but a God-ordained trip.

What events have happened in your life that you know without a doubt were directed by our great God? SR

—Charlotte Chroniger  
Conference President



## FOCUS on Missions

By Andy Samuels

Chief Executive Director  
SDB Missionary Society

# Seventh Day Baptist Africa Bible College

The Seventh Day Baptist Africa Bible College (SDB ABC) is off the ground, and is in operation. Twenty-one individuals from ten African countries make up the student population, with only one of those students being female.

The two modules which have so far been completed are Bible Interpretation and Spiritual Formation with Leadership Development. Pastor Johnmark Camenga and I served as Instructors for those two modules. Sixteen of the twenty-one students, along with the Instructors, gathered for a seminar at the Regions Beyond Ministries (RBM) Retreat Center located on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya, October 5-9 to engage in reinforced study of the modules.

Everyone had to navigate the hassles of international travel which have become part of our current reality, such as COVID-19 testing and quarantining on return home. Yet, even those inconveniences were not enough to dampen the enthusiasm and dilute the passion of the class. The students are hungry and teachable. What more could be asked for?

At the seminar, the students were assigned to lead in worship, to conduct devotional times, to share sermons and testimonies and to sing. They embraced those ministry opportunities with tremendous willingness and readiness. It should be noted that the seminar is conducted completely in English and none of the students speak English as their first or native language. And again, even with the discomfort of having to engage in a foreign language, the students are not deterred. They are determined.

The Africa Bible College is a major and significant investment of Seventh Day Baptists. It is an investment of all kinds of resources with the prayer and hope that generations to come will be blessed by fruitful return on those investments. Financially it is costly, and we are grateful for all the support we have received, which makes the SDB ABC a reality at present. When the budget for the ABC was put together, COVID-19 testing was not included, because it was not part of our world at that time. So, the expenses for putting on the seminar represented about a 30% increase in our estimated costs. So, prayers for the additional funding are appreciated. Funding is also needed to sustain the program over its two-year duration.

The seminar attendance was also historic in another way. It was the first time ever that so many leaders of African SDB Conferences and Churches were coming together in the same physical space. The environment created the opportunity for relationships to be developed among the students, and for significant interactions to take place. There can truly be a facilitation of iron sharpening iron.

After leaving Kenya, Pastor Johnmark and I were privileged to travel to neighboring Uganda. We visited with the widow and children of Pastor Daniel Nsubuga, the late General Secretary of the Uganda SDB Conference, who passed away in June 2021. The family continues to struggle with the loss of their breadwinner and are trying to cope with that reality.



*The Africa Bible College students and instructors*



*The new interim leadership team in Uganda*



*Pastor Johnmark Camenga at  
the Africa Bible College Seminar*



*Victoria Nsubuga and her three  
biological children*

The Uganda Conference has no clear leadership succession process. Six months prior to Pastor Daniel's passing, their Assistant General Secretary was killed after being hit from his motorcycle by a motorist. So, in six months, their top two Conference leaders departed this life. They were left with a crisis of leadership. With a view to providing support and counsel, we were able to mobilize the pastors and leaders of the Conference so that they came together to meet with us face to face. After prayer and good discussion, the group agreed to elect a seven-person interim or transition team to work for the next two years on re-engaging the churches and bringing stability to the Conference. Interestingly enough, Pastor Daniel's wife Victoria Nsubuga was elected as the leader of this leadership team. So, the team has a big job ahead of them, and they need the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. <sup>SR</sup>

# Celebrating on Purpose

By Nicholas J. Kersten  
Director of Education and History



Later this month, Seventh Day Baptists have the opportunity to conclude our year of celebration commemorating the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of our Newport, Rhode Island, church in December of 1671. Our Conference has capitalized on the opportunity presented to us to celebrate our history and heritage this year—and the many ways that the actions of those few believers in Newport led to the movement of God that followed, even right up to the present day.

What  
is there  
for you to  
celebrate?  
What has  
God done?

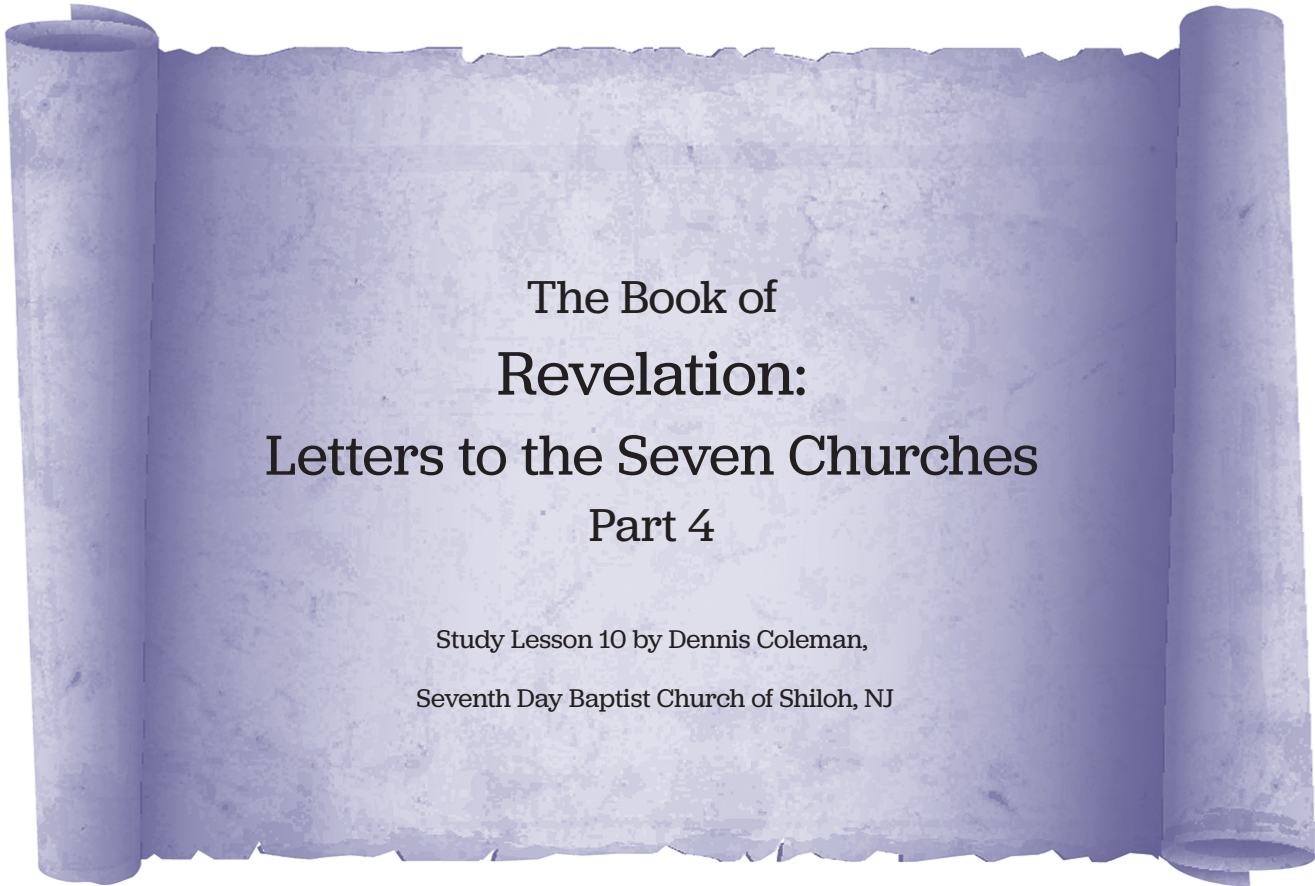
It is right for us to celebrate these “big” anniversaries. All anniversaries are in some ways arbitrary celebrations—nothing happens during the time we choose to celebrate—it’s a period of time where we remember something else that we deem sufficiently historically significant has happened. But it’s important to remember that those celebrations can themselves become something historically significant for us: celebrating a thing God has done can be a powerful catalyst for God to do something new. When we praise God for His faithfulness and power in the past, we are recognizing that God can and is still doing something **now**. Those moments of celebration can also project us forward into the next thing that God wants to do.

For this reason, what I’d like to encourage you, this month as we prepare for 2022, is that you celebrate on purpose: that you find opportunities and reasons to celebrate what God has done and is doing among us. There is no reason to celebrate that is too small if it will encourage you and remind you what God has done. We can (and will) celebrate as a General Conference. We can celebrate as local churches or groups of local churches. We can celebrate what God does in the lives of individuals. And we should do all of these! The testimonies of the work of God among us are powerful fuel and encouragement in the midst of difficult times, and one of the great benefits of having a proud spiritual heritage and a Spirit-soaked history.

God has been at work among Seventh Day Baptists in the last 350 years in North America. Through close communities of faith joined in covenant, basic Christian faith, and faithful Sabbath observance, we have preached the Gospel faithfully in many, many places around our world. We have disciplined generations of believers. Generations have been raised, lived and died. The kingdom of Jesus Christ has advanced through our people. Congregants have cared for one another. Books, magazines, tracts, videos, and other forms of media have been produced. Schools founded. Leaders trained. All of these things are worthy of celebration!

What is there for you to celebrate as 2021, this year of challenge and tumult, comes to a close? What has God done? Who can you encourage with what God has done? What anniversaries are there for you and your congregation and our conference to celebrate in 2022? Take the opportunities you have to celebrate what God has done in the past to encourage you in the present and give you a vision for the future!

If you need assistance with celebrations in your local church, please reach out to the Council on History! We may be able to provide additional material to aid you in your celebrations. May God bless you and your church as you enter into this new year! May God bless you and your church as you enter into this new year! SR



# The Book of Revelation: Letters to the Seven Churches Part 4

Study Lesson 10 by Dennis Coleman,  
Seventh Day Baptist Church of Shiloh, NJ

We have read six letters written by Jesus to six different churches, dictated to John in a vision. Before we review these first six letters I ask that you pray, seeking to hear the voice of the Lord instead of simply reading what I am writing. This month's installment ends with a challenge, one that I believe comes from the Lord. Pray over it and if you believe it is from God, respond according to His will.

**Ephesus** – Ephesus was doing the work of the Lord. However they had left their first love. Their work was no longer motivated by their love for God. The fix: love God with all of their being.

**Smyrna** – They were also doing the work of the Lord, even while facing great persecution. The fix: Remain faithful, even unto death.

**Pergamos** – They seem to be trying to fit in with the culture around them, accepting practices which opened the door to idolatry. They did not deal with the false teachers in their midst. The fix: Confront the false teachers and deal with the false doctrines before the Lord comes to deal with them.

**Thyatira** – They were being misled and manipulated by a person with a Jezebel spirit who called herself a prophetess. The fix: God Himself will deal with that spirit.

**Sardis** – Their works were not perfect, likely because they were lacking the life-giving Spirit of God. They had a good external reputation but something was wrong on the inside. They were no longer on “watch.” They were doing but were no longer seeking God. The fix: Watch and draw from God.

**Laodicea** – They had lost their fire. They settled for lives of blessing without having a real fire for seeking God and introducing Him to others. They were in a holy huddle. They no longer embraced the faith nor did they reject the faith. It was kind of just there. Fix: Get back to seeking what God offers and rekindle the fire that comes with a passionate pursuit of our Lord.

I think Jesus has a very specific goal in each of these letters and it's not to simply point out the flaws in each church. In each case, Jesus gives instructions on how to improve. His goal with each is to edify and to draw each into a closer relationship with Him. This is a part of His ministry to His churches: the work of cutting the world out of each of His followers in order that we might grow to be more like Him. It's all about growing in Christ and He continues this ministry in our churches today.

### **Revelation 3:7-13**

The letter to the church in Philadelphia is a little different in that it commends the church without pointing to a problem. This was not a perfect church but it was one that was at a point where Jesus could commend them on their faith. They did their best to follow Jesus' teachings. Though they were targeted by a group of fakers, they did not deny the name of Jesus. This was their identity, and because they did not deny Him, they would receive a number of promises at the hand of God. Those who challenged their faith would one day come to worship at their feet. They would avoid going through a trial which the whole world will one day face. And with these promises, our Lord is just getting started.

These promises are followed by promises made to those who overcome in the faith. Like pillars in the temple of God, the one who overcomes will stand forever in the presence of our God. Jesus will write upon them the name of His God, declaring that the identity of these saints is wrapped in the fact that they belong to God. Further they are a citizen of the new Jerusalem by virtue of the fact that they belong to Jesus. It seems that if you declare the name of Jesus (our Lord and Savior) Jesus will go out of His way to declare that you are His.

### **Take Time to Look into the Mirror**

When I think about these seven letters, they remind me of mirrors. Jesus held a mirror to each of these churches so that they could see themselves as He saw them. Six of the churches likely did not like what they saw in those mirrors. Like it or not, what was being revealed was the truth. Upon receiving the letters each church had a choice: repent and follow our LORD or continue as they were in a state of defiance.

What would you see if Jesus were to hold one of these mirrors up to your church or even up to you as an individual? If you were able to see through the eyes of Jesus, what would you see? Remember that when Jesus reveals the truth of what He sees, He is doing so in order to help you become more like Him. This is true for the individual, for the church, and for the Seventh Day Baptist Denomination as well.

It's time to look in the mirror. It's time to ask Jesus to reveal the truth, helping us to see what He sees. When you do, remember that the goal is growth both for you and for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Also, remember that He loves you unconditionally. Even when the truth hurts, remember that Jesus is acting out of His love in order to help you live the abundant life He has given you.

***The thief does not come except to steal,  
and to kill, and to destroy.  
I have come that they may have life,  
and that they may have it more abundantly.***

*-John 10:10 NKJV*

***"And you shall know the truth,  
and the truth shall make you free."***

*-John 8:32 NKJV*

SR





## Women's Banquets

by Beth Brown

Since we were unable to meet together for a second year at conference for the Women's Banquet, the Women's Board had the idea to let individual churches hold their own banquets, whether for breakfast, lunch, or dinner, and disburse the love gift collected to locally chosen deserving recipients. I have heard of several churches really enjoying this experience. If the women of your church haven't gotten together lately, I challenge you to do so. It's never too late. Here are pictures and testimonials from two different churches who held their banquets this fall for you to enjoy.



### *Riverside SDB women's luncheon*

39 females (from 5-96) attended our Women's Luncheon on Sabbath, September 25, following church and Sabbath school. Our Love Gift of \$1281 will be divided equally between a widow, Teen Challenge and a community women's shelter. We enjoyed fellowship, food, and our recorded speaker and music.



### *The Women of the Milton SDB Church*

celebrated our "Virtual Women's Banquet" on Sabbath, August 14, with a continental breakfast. We watched the video from the Women's Board, including Lori Roleveld. It was a great time of fellowship and fun. We collected \$457 for our Love Gift which was doubled by our Deacons' Fund. We were able to help a church family in need of rent and food with this \$914 blessing. Thanks to our ladies for their generosity! Thanks to the Women's Board for this great idea. SR



## December Memory Verse:

### PRIMARY

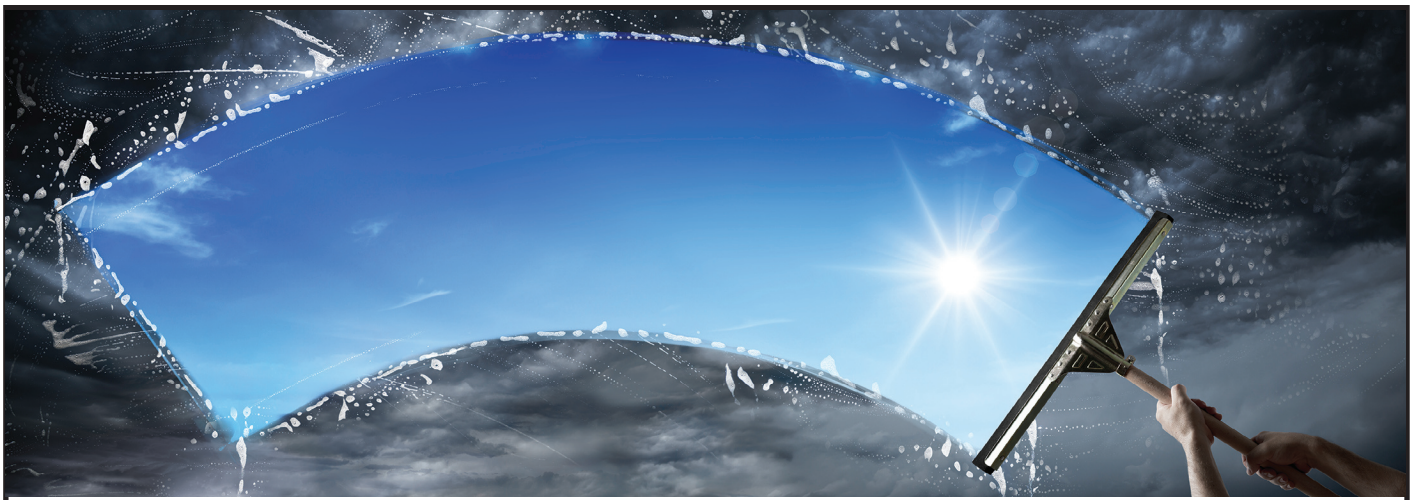
Enter His gates with thanksgiving and praise His name.

—Psalm 100:4

### JUNIOR/YOUTH/ADULT

Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise, give thanks to Him and praise His name.

—Psalm 100:4



## Gathering Around Washed Windows

Have you ever noticed that the windows of your home are dirtiest just before guests arrive? During certain seasons of the year when we routinely gather with family and friends, I notice that our windows are dirty. It is at this point that I finally prioritize getting them washed.

The odd thing is that my wife, Cindy, thinks that we should have a schedule for cleaning the windows, that *they are dirty even if other people do not see them*. Maybe she has a point.

When it comes to gathering together as family and friends, or even as a church family, we can treat our relationship health in a similar fashion. When our

strained relationships or soured friendships are going to be on display, we decide that we need to do something about it—or at least put on a public act to make it seem like we have no relational issues. Rather than gauging relational health on what we want other people to see, maybe we should get right to the issue of forgiveness and reconciliation.

During seasons of gathering, hopefully we move past putting on the image of health (like seasonally clean windows). Our homes, churches, and families will be blessed all the more if we are focused on relational health every day—and that begins with you and me. Blessings as we keep our windows clean. SR

By Carl Greene, SDB Executive Director



### SERVANT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT A SUMMER OF SERVICE: LEADERSHIP FOR A LIFETIME

*Leadership development training for college age students  
grants available from Memorial Board Trustees*

#### DATES AND INFORMATION

January 15 .....DEADLINE for Student Applications (18 or older by 6/16/22)  
February 15 .....DEADLINE for Church Project Applications  
June 16 – 19 .....Project Director Training  
June 16 – 23 .....SCSC In-Person Training  
June 23 – July 21 .....On-site Projects  
July 21 – 24 .....SCSC Evaluation  
July 24 – 30 .....SDB General Conference in Colorado Springs, CO

*Information and forms can be found under the SCSC drop down tab at:  
<http://www.sdbwomen.org/>*

## Passionate Pastor with Heart for Outreach Sought for SDB Church in WV



The Middle Island Seventh Day Baptist Church at New Milton, WV, is praying and seeking a pastor who is passionate about God and the ministry. We are looking for solid Biblical teaching and an interest in evangelical outreach in the community.

We are currently active with Sabbath services and Sabbath school along with continued support of the SDB Missionary Society, local food pantry, and SDB fund requests for special projects and needs including the Christmas Wish List. We wish to return, under pastoral leadership, to such activities as Bible study, VBS, and community outreach. We are open to new activities and programs, and to the discussion and development of said ideas.

We do not require a specific number of hours per week devoted to church-related work. We trust that God will send a pastor who will see needs and address them as they become visible. We trust that a new pastor will pray for the church and the community and the congregation will be willing to support and assist with outreach and meet church needs.

Middle Island is a small congregation and would therefore be able to pay a supplemental salary. A pastor who is employed outside of the church or a pastor who is retired and receiving retirement and/or social security would work best.

Those interested in this position can make that interest known by emailing or calling:  
Clara Glover: [grannyglover@frontier.com](mailto:grannyglover@frontier.com) or call 304-758-4243;  
or  
John Pethtel: [jpethtel@seventhdaybaptist.org](mailto:jpethtel@seventhdaybaptist.org) or call 608-752-5055 x702

## PART-TIME PASTOR WANTED

### Who are we?

The Good News Seventh Day Baptist Church is a church plant in Apex, NC. We are passionate about God, people, and the Sabbath. Our mission is to engage our community by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and meeting the needs of the people. The Good News SDB Church is currently made up of a small core group of committed disciple-makers with the vision of raising up leaders to transform our community one life at a time. We are proudly a part of our Seventh Day Baptist Denomination.

### Who are you?

We are looking for a passionate, relational leader who is called by God to plant churches for Him. Do you have a love for the Word of God? Are you Christ-centered and seeking opportunities to point others toward Him? Have you completed formal theological training? Are you relational and community oriented? A servant shepherd?

### What's Expected?

In this role you will be expected to lead in our efforts toward reaching our community and creating disciples. This is a part-time position of 20 hours per week. We will expect you to spend time each week:

1. In prayer for the church and the community
2. In the community building relationships outside the church
3. Preparing a sermon and preaching
4. In visitation/member care
5. Being disciplined and discipling

If you are interested in this role, please email [goodnewssdbchurch@gmail.com](mailto:goodnewssdbchurch@gmail.com) with your resume and cover letter. We are excited to meet you!

## DEATHS

**PAMELA GORDON**—April 28, 1943–July 25, 2021.  
Union Station SDB Church at Dunedin, FL.

**DEBORAH K. KAGARISE**—October 3, 1952–October 15, 2021. Bell SDB Church, Salemville, PA.

**LEORA MARIE PINDER**—November 25, 1929–September 29, 2021. Verona SDB Church, Verona, NY.

## NEW MEMBERS

### UNION STATION SDB CHURCH

Dunedin, FL

Michael Pearl, Pastor

Lonnie Calais

Michelle Calais

## SDBs ONLINE

<https://www.seventhdaybaptist.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/7thDayBaptists>

<https://twitter.com/7thDayBaptists>


<https://7thDayBaptists.tumblr.com/>

<https://www.pinterest.com/7thDayBaptists/>

<https://www.sabbathrecorder.com>

**Find a Listing of SDB Churches offering live streaming of their services:**

<https://www.seventhdaybaptist.org/find-a-church/livestreams/>



For this is how God loved the world:  
He gave his one and only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him  
will not perish but have eternal life.

—John 3:16 NLT

Periodicals postage paid  
at Janesville, WI  
and additional offices



How Great Is Our God!

Conference 2022\*

University of Colorado at Colorado Springs  
Colorado Springs, CO

JULY 24 - 30, 2022

\*Dates and location are subject to change. If making travel arrangements,  
please consider purchasing trip insurance.