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All News and Advertising Deadline is Monday at 5 p.m.
For Advertising: advertising deadline is Monday at 5 p.m. Cost for a display ad is \$5 per column inch. Cost for classified ad is 50¢ per word. Cost for Card of Thanks is \$10 up to 100 words. Cost for a classified display ad is \$5.75 per column inch.

For Public/Legal Notices: public/legal notices deadline is Monday at 5 p.m. Dates for publication must be specified. Affidavits must be required at the time of submission. Affidavits require three weeks to process after last date of publication (a sooner return date must be specified if required).

For Obituaries: Obituaries are published in the Heppner GT at no charge and are edited to meet news guidelines. Families wishing to include information not included in the guidelines or who wish to have the obituary written in a certain way must purchase advertising space for the obituary.

For Letters to the Editor: Letters to the Editor MUST be signed by the author. The Heppner GT will not publish unsigned letters. All letters MUST include the author's address and phone number for use by the GT office. The GT reserves the right to edit letters. The GT is not responsible for accuracy of statements made in letters. Any letters expressing thanks will be placed in the classifieds under "Card of Thanks" at a cost of \$10.

Hope found in Immanuel

Matt 1:18, 23 - Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way... "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, "God with us").

The power and political system at the time of the birth of Jesus was an interesting one. The Romans were in power in that part of the world and, while their occupation offered protection and peace, these came at price: Taxation was tremendous and personal freedoms were heavily controlled. Many Jews were severely punished or crucified at the hands of the Romans. Rome did offer some "self-governing," but the "political" party they (mostly) offered it to, the Sadducees, was corrupt and more interested in maintaining their wealth and power with the Romans than in truly helping the people. The Sadducees political adversaries, the Pharisees, were not much better. They were sticklers in following the letter of the beloved Torah, the Word of God, but found ways to explain around its personal demands. They had knowledge, but lacked action. They were hypocrites. Throw into that mix some isolationists (Essenes) and revolutionaries (Zealots) and you had quite a volatile social and political mix. In many ways these people were a part of the problem instead of being a solution.

Today is not so different. Taxes, climate change, health care, debt, economic and financial instability, cost of living, war, threats of nuclear power, poverty...well, you get the picture. We look to our political leaders, but I am afraid they are more like the Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes and Zealots of Jesus day; more interested in maintaining power, control and prestige than in really helping the people. I could see how someone would want to throw up their hands and quit. And yet, I have a great hope and confidence; I have peace.

You see, during this Roman occupation many looked for the coming of the promised Messiah, one who would fix the mess, one who would be "God with us," Immanuel, one who would establish the kingdom of God. There was great hope. And One did come. His name was Jesus, which means "Yahweh saves," as he would save the people from their sins. He challenged the political corruption of the Sadducees, the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the violence of the Zealots and the isolationism of the Essenes. But, He did not come to overthrow the political establishment. His kingdom was a different kingdom. His followers were to be known for their repentance, for following Torah with passion and compassion. They would love God and love their neighbors. This "kingdom" would be about releasing captives and healing. His followers would have freedom, joy, shalom, and a peace that passes all understanding in spite of and in the midst of all of the social and political turmoil.

You see, I too have great hope, freedom, joy, shalom and peace that passes all understanding, because I am a follower of this Messiah Jesus, "God with us." Even in spite of and in the midst of all of the problems of the world and in my life, I will not be afraid. I will try to love God and love people with passion and compassion. I have to tell you, there is great freedom in this...

Perhaps during this holiday season you find yourself a little down in the dumps. It might be because of the social and geopolitical circumstance. Maybe it is something intensely personal. No matter. I would offer you a message of great hope and great freedom found in Jesus, Immanuel, "God with us."

Pastor Keith Price
Willow Creek Baptist Church

Community lunch menu

Christian Life Center members will be serving lunch on Friday, Dec. 28, at St. Patrick's Senior Center. The meal will include Swiss steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, summer squash, pickled beets, hot rolls and apple crisp. Milk is served at each meal. Suggested donation is \$3.50 per meal. Menu is subject to change.

Route 74 Restaurant will be CLOSED FOR CHRISTMAS December 23, 24 & 25! Have a Merry Christmas!

Christmas messages of inspiration... Your Elizabethan gift

Last Christmas, I shared thoughts with you from the book Christmas is not Your Birthday, by Mike Slaughter, about how Jesus was born unto us as a person living in the margins. This year, I would like to share another thought from the same book.

If you haven't read the account of Jesus' birth recently, I suggest you open your Bible to the New Testament book of Matthew where, in the first chapter, verse 18, you will find an account of the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, which proceeds through to chapter two, verse 18. After reading these scriptures, I encourage you to turn to the book of Luke, which follows Matthew and Mark, to chapter two and read verses one through 21.

If you don't have a Bible of your own, I am sure that you have a friend who has a Bible. If not, then stop by any church and asked the pastor if you can read from a pew Bible.

I acknowledge that this is a different kind of Christmas message, different from any I have written in the past, because you are going to have to do part of the work yourself. I want to draw your attention to Luke chapter one, verses five through 56. In verses five through 25, we are told that the angel, Gabriel, appeared to Zechariah, a temple priest, as he was offering incense to God in the holiest portion of the temple in Jerusalem. Gabriel told Zechariah that his barren wife, Elizabeth, would have a child, who would prepare the way of the coming of the Lord.

In verse 26, we are told that Gabriel was sent by God to Nazareth to visit a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. The virgin's name was Mary. Gabriel told Mary that she would conceive and bear a son who was to be named Jesus.

When Mary asked how this could be since she was a virgin, Gabriel responded: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son."

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

Then the angel departed. Can you imagine how overwhelmed Mary must have been? She was probably 12 years old. She was engaged to be married. An angel appears to her, tells her that she is pregnant with the Son of God, then, as quickly as he appeared, he disappears. What is she to do?

Then she remembers that the angel had said that her relative, Elizabeth, was six months pregnant. So, she went to visit Elizabeth. We are told that as soon as Mary had greeted Elizabeth, Elizabeth affirmed to Mary that Mary was pregnant with the Lord. And Mary stayed with Elizabeth for the next three months, which means that she remained until after the birth of Elizabeth's son.

In his book, Mike Slaughter suggests that during those three months, Elizabeth tutored Mary what to expect during her pregnancy and also in her faith. This tutoring of Mary was Elizabeth's gift to Jesus.

And your tutoring—mentoring—sharing your life experience with someone who is facing the same experience for the first time, can also be your gift to Jesus, this Christmas or in the months to come.

Have you battled cancer and come out on the other side? Have you experienced a pregnancy? Or raised a child without an owner's manual? Have you cared for a loved one in their last days, or through recovery, or through a long illness? Have you applied for Medicare? Are you a veteran who has gone through the application process for benefits? Have you experienced chemotherapy? Or a mastectomy?

If you have, then are you willing to mentor someone who is facing this fearful time for the first time? I am sure that you know someone who is facing such a trauma in this community or in your family. Will you reach out to them? Will you allay their fears? Will you assure them that they can weather the storm? Will you relay your sense of God being present with you throughout your ordeal? Will you assure them that they need not suffer alone? That you will be there for them?

Your experience of fear, of pain and, eventually, hope can also become the seed for God's miracle in someone else's life. This is a gift that no one else can give. This is a gift that will be cherished forever.

May the gift of Jesus enrich you and your loved ones through out the coming year.

I invite you to join us Christmas Eve at 7 p.m. to celebrate the birth of Jesus and to help those less fortunate through the evening's offering, which will be donated to the Neighborhood Center.

Pastor JonathanENZ
United Methodist Church

The wise men keep on visiting

"...and when (the wise men) had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts..." Matthew 2: 11

The Heppner Gazette-Times has been my weekly life-link to the friendly streets of the Willow Creek Valley area.

From Salem, I can read of the people, businesses, churches and homes that I came to know in my years of pastoring a church there. And I marvel at the many ways that the Holy Child of Bethlehem is honored through the kind, giving, sharing nature of the folk I read about.

People still leave the comfort of their homes to journey out into the world. They bring the gifts in many forms that they have been blessed with. And when they do, I know that the child of the manger scene smiles.

It is as though the Christmas story is lived out before my eyes, in the pages of the Gazette-Times, every day of the year.

Thank you, good people, for the Gospel lived in truth.

Rev. Keith Brudevold, retired pastor
(Note: Rev. Brudevold served at The United Methodist Church in Heppner from 2002 to 2008.)

"Do you hear what I hear?" the caroler sings.

"It depends on where I am and what I'm listening for," I reply.

I hear music walking down Main Street. I hear laughter in a First-Friday game of Angel (a.k.a. Simon) Says, and laughter at a graveside as old memories are shaken loose. I hear the dogs howl before I notice the siren screaming toward another emergency in this little community, where so many are growing older and more frail, or battling cancer. Those are sounds you've surely heard, too.

But maybe you've also heard gunshots in the mall, ice clinking in a glass as another bottle of whiskey is emptied, a door being kicked open and children screaming. Some know those sounds.

Do your ears have enough imagination to hear insects buzzing on the far side of a mosquito net protecting your infant, thanks to the generosity of people you'll never meet, who seem to think malaria can be defeated? Are you able to hear with the ears of an orphan in war-ravaged Liberia, falling asleep to the noisy breathing of a dozen other orphans sharing your ragged mattress? Do you hear with the ears of our soldiers, deafened by unanticipated explosions?

Things can get pretty noisy in this busy and broken world, until we strain to hear what the caroler hears: a child in the night bringing goodness and light; God's only Son Jesus, born to die and rise and give us new life. With that tune in our ears, the dissonant sounds all around us—cheery and sad, wonderful and dangerous—are woven into a different melody that sings of peace instead...a peace that isn't limited to good times and happy days; a peace that persists on the inside even when peace on the outside seems out of reach.

So hear this: ever since God sent Jesus into the world, a song of peace and hope, love and joy, has been sung without interruption. As hard as we've tried, we haven't been able to drown it out, because it's God's song, not ours. Listen for it. Sing along.

Pastor Katy Anderson
Hope Lutheran/All Saints Episcopal churches

Looking for light in the darkness

Christmas carols playing over Macy's speakers were suddenly drowned out by the awful noise of close gunfire.

I asked the clerks who were motioning me away from the "employee only" locked room if I could come in, too. There was no time to figure out what was happening, where to hide, how to react—heroically or selfishly—or, worst of all, to find my loved ones. Sobbing and frightened customers continually knocked on the door as we let them in. There, they too discovered that the door was made of thin composite wood—hardly bulletproof! People discussed whether or not they should be quiet so the gunman wouldn't hear us. I wholeheartedly wished they would be quiet about being quiet so we wouldn't be discovered. Our phones didn't have service inside our wooden hiding place. The only one I could call on was the Lord.

He was and is our true hiding place. Psalm 32:7 says, "Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance."

The only safety I had was in His invisible guidance. See, my husband and I, and two of my pastors, had returned early Tuesday from a mission to the Philippines. Unwilling to give in to jet lag after that 30-hour journey, we'd wearily decided to walk the mall a while.

I had gone into Macy's first and, strangely, picked out an outfit to try on but put it aside to try on later. I walked away wondering why I didn't just try it now. My husband waited patiently at Starbucks instead of another place we have met before—outside of Macy's. My pastors visited a shop right outside the main mall.

I've always liked Psalm 37:23: "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way."

Just before the shooting, I walked past the store the gunman entered moments later, wishing to go in and shop for one last Christmas present. Instead, I continued to the place I'd left an outfit to try on. I didn't know why, since I didn't even really like the outfit and definitely wasn't clothes shopping. Instead of dawdling as everyone knows I do when shopping, I grabbed the outfit and went to the dressing room. That was when the gunman came through the same store, same floor, feet away.

The next morning, struggling to regain peace inside, I opened my Bible to Psalm 138:7: "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me."

See, the gunshots caused shock, but not being able to find my husband or beloved pastors in the ensuing confusion caused a terror inside me difficult to shake off. As we see the troubled and violent times we are coming into, we hold onto the above verse not only for ourselves but for our loved ones as we walk with the One Who is our Hiding Place.

May we hold onto Isaiah 60:1-2: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee."

Our fellowship prays, as we are sure so many others do, for healing and for God's help in our nation. Romans 8:21-22 says, "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

God help us to hear that groaning but to reflect the light as Jesus did when He came to earth. May we reflect the hope He brought to us that day, as Hebrews 6:19 says, "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast..."

Catherine Olsen
Elohim Covenant Church