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Letters to My Church

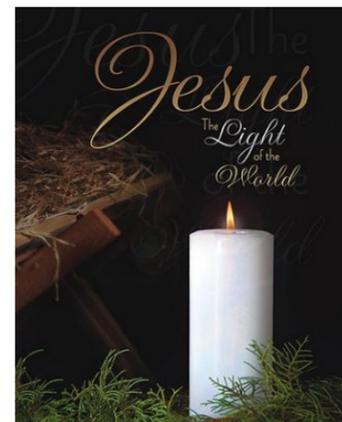


Jakob Topper
Senior Pastor

Advent emphasizes a convergence of themes. By shining the light on the first coming of the baby Jesus at Christmas, it also points toward the much more strange "second coming" of Christ, as some have called it, to set the world right.

Advent begins in darkness and with the acknowledgment that the world, even with all of its technological and social advances, is still not as it should be. Suffering still wreaks havoc on the most vulnerable members of our societies. At Christmastime it is especially painful and obvious that we are all unwittingly complicit in this system of injustice through our participation in the materialism of our times.

Our hope is two-fold during Advent. First, because God came to us incarnate as a child at Christmas, we can trust that God is aware of the world's troubles. God was here in the flesh surveying for godself. For God to come in the flesh in the form of a baby means that our God is humble and bold beyond measure. A God who is aware of the problem and brave enough to risk God's own self in the process is a God that can be trusted. That knowledge brings us hope in the darkneses of this world.



Second, even though we believe Christ won the ultimate victory over death and darkness at the cross, we can see for ourselves that both death and darkness still have a significant hold in our world. They themselves have been

struck a fatal blow and their time is limited, yet they lash out all the more dangerously in their fury and despair. Therefore, though the fatal blow has been struck, we still await the final victory when Christ will put an end to the struggle once and for all.

Though our world is still plagued by pain, it will not be this way forever. Christ will make all that is wrong in this world right. The oppressed will receive justice with finality and captives will be free once and for all. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes and death will be no more.

Historically, second coming language attempts to name this great hope. Today, find light in the darkness and strength to continue our struggle because our faith tells us the outcome is decided. Christ will stand victorious over all the powers that assail his good creation, and we at his side—creature, creation, and Creator all in harmony.

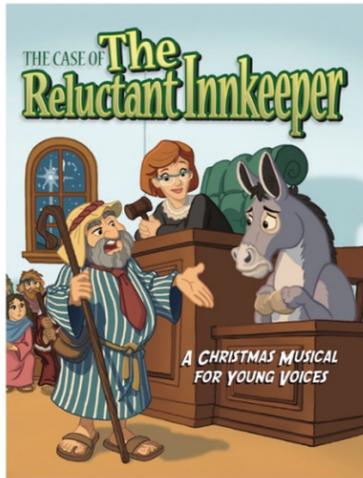
Second coming language has fallen out of vogue in moderate and liberal churches over the last couple of decades. It's easy to see why since it is so strange and can feel so otherworldly, but it tries to describe a reality that is central to the Christian understanding of the culmination of God's good creation. And is it really any more strange than God coming as a baby in a barn?

Advent is a beautiful opportunity to reclaim this reality in a way that honors all the earth and all of God's children on it instead of merely as an escape plan for insiders.

There is still a lot of darkness in the world, and we remember the child in the manger as both the one who came to bring us hope and the precursor of all that is yet to come.

Jakob

NorthHaven: An inclusive family of Christ followers, inspiring, challenging and equipping each other to participate in God's great story.



CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

Wednesday, December 11
6:30pm

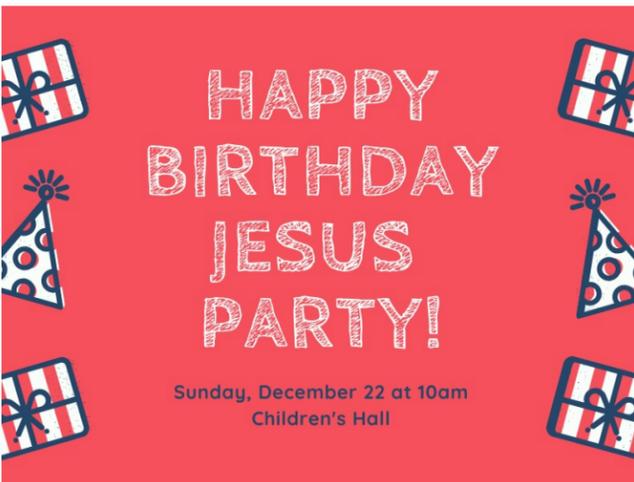
REFRESHMENTS TO FOLLOW



December Mission Project
Christmas Toy Drive

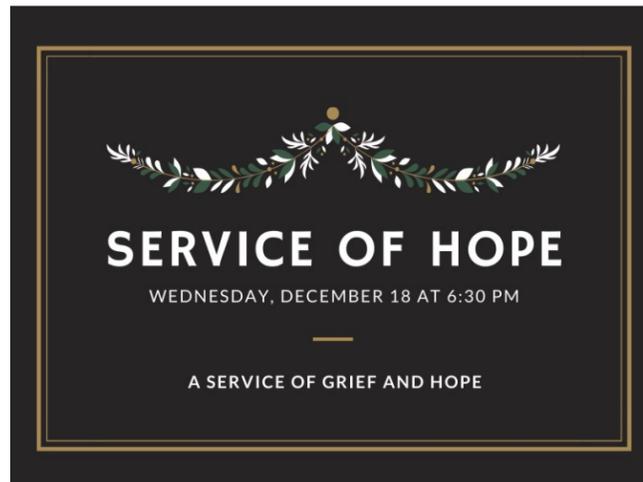
Benefiting Native American churches in Canton & Watonga

Bring new, unwrapped toys for kids of all ages from December 1 through December 15



HAPPY BIRTHDAY JESUS PARTY!

Sunday, December 22 at 10am
Children's Hall



SERVICE OF HOPE

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18 AT 6:30 PM

A SERVICE OF GRIEF AND HOPE



During the month of December
NHC Goal \$3,000



- December 2: Michelle Valantine
- December 3: Jerry Evers
- December 3: Loneta Hayes

- December 4: Chris Canary
- December 4: Gina Payne
- December 8: Molly McCutcheon
- December 8: Caroline Whitaker
- December 10: Jamie Whitaker
- December 14: Connel Smalling
- December 14: Abbie Waggoner
- December 15: Donna Evers
- December 15: Joe Nostrand

- December 16: Ethan Cox
- December 18: Jim Chapman
- December 20: Merry Dorean
- December 28: David Biles
- December 29: John Knowles
- December 29: Rose Miller
- December 30: Lavonn Brown

Music Matters

"It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year"

"It's the most wonderful time of the year; with the kids jingle belling and everyone telling you be of good cheer. It's the most wonderful time of the year!"

If you have been listening to a radio or watching television or shopping in stores, then more than likely you have heard this well-known Christmas song. I am not naming names, but I know some folks who have had their Christmas decorations up for a month. Don't get them wrong, they are very thankful and will duly celebrate Thanksgiving, but with an angelic Christmas glow about them!

That said, do you know how the song, "Jingle Bells" came to be? Well, even though we typically sing it during the Christmas season, it was originally composed by James S. Pierpont as special music for a Thanksgiving service at a church pastored by his father. It was so well received that church members asked James and the choir to do a repeat performance at the Christmas service. It was such a hit that many Christmas visitors to the service took it back to their own communities, teaching it to family and friends. Eventually, James had it published and within twenty years, "Jingle Bells" became one of the best-known caroling songs in our country. So, you see, those Christmas early-birds are on to something.

I would guess that the songs and carols of Christmas are possibly more well-known than any others and known by more people. This year is the 300th anniversary of the carol, "Joy to the World," written by Isaac Watts. His inspiration for it came from his study of Psalm 98, with the fourth verse, "Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth," as a starting point. Forty-four years later, Lowell Mason used Watts' text and set it to the tune ANTIOCH with which we are most familiar today. There's actually no reference to the birth of Jesus in the carol, yet it somehow has become a Christmas standard. In his book, Stories Behind the Best-Loved Songs of Christmas, Ace Collins states that perhaps this non-Christmas Christmas standard is a fitting tribute to both Isaac Watts and Lowell Mason who "strove to push the envelope in order to get people to see Scripture and music in a whole new way. Watts and Mason knew, and

we should remember, that Christians should exude joy each and every day because the 'Lord is come.'"

Finally, lets think about a Christmas song that has become one of the most loved in recent years. The lyrics for the song, "Mary, Did You Know?" were written by Mark Lowery several years ago. Unable to find a suitable tune for such God-inspired words, he filed it away and decided to wait on God's timing. It was during his time in the Gaither Vocal Band that he remembered his song that needed a tune and he asked Buddy Green, also in GVB, to give it a go. Buddy took the opportunity very seriously and wrote the beautiful tune we know so well. This song has been recorded by so many people. For me, it is hard to top the Pentatonix version. A further note about Mark Lowery. When he was a youngster, he provided plenty of challenges to teachers and adults due to his hyper-activity. His parents, however, did not give up on him and looked for many opportunities for Mark to work out his energy in musical performances and being on stage. Ace Collins says, "There can be no doubt that Mark Lowery was born different. Yet because his problems were viewed as gifts by his parents, Mark thrived. Looking at the world through his unique, God-given perspective led him to think of one of the world's most familiar stories in a new light. 'Mary, Did You Know?' is a song like no other Christmas carol ever penned, written about a mother like no other, came from the hand of a man like no other."

You don't want to miss hearing some great Christmas music this month. On Wednesday, December 11th, 6:30 p.m. the NHC Children will present **The Case of the Reluctant Innkeeper**. Then on Sunday, December 15th during morning worship, **Christmas at NorthHaven** will be presented by the NHC Choir and instrumental ensemble.

Humming as I go, and inviting you to join in,
Cheryl

