25 Days
A DAILY BOOK OF CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONS

Written by faculty and staff of Bethel College
December is upon us and so are all the joys that go with the Christmas season!

While we know it’s a busy time, it’s also a time for celebrating our King’s birth. That’s why we want to encourage our Bethel family and friends with a 25-day Christmas devotional meant to inspire you with the Spirit of Christmas and prepare you for the New Year.

This small booklet includes 25 heartfelt Christmas devotionals based on Luke 2:1-19, written by Bethel’s faculty and staff. As you read each day, beginning on Dec. 1 and ending on Dec. 25, you can reference the Scripture in its entirety on the next two pages. You’ll also notice prayer points at the end of each devotional. We appreciate you taking the time to pray for the specific Bethel-related need mentioned.

We hope you enjoy this gift and this season of hope, love and joy in Christ.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Terry Zeitlow CFRE
Vice President for Development
The Birth of Jesus

LUKE 2:1-19 (NIV)

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3And everyone went to their own town to register.

4So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

13Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

16So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.
In Those Days

DAY 1 | LUKE 2:1

IMPERIVM. IVSTITIA. CLEMENTIA. PIETAS. PAX ROMANA. In those days, all of these terms were part and parcel of the propaganda machine of Roman Imperial Theology, along with more familiar terms like “Son of god,” “peace,” “savior,” “gospel (= good news).” In the Augustan revolution that transformed Rome from being a Republic into an Empire, Rome was portrayed as the center of the world, a city commissioned by the gods to rule the world, “to crown peace with justice” (Virgil, Aen. 6.853). Augustus Caesar claimed supreme rights to being the benefactor offering an empire with a just reign, life-giving mercy, restored relationship to the divine and the epiphany of global peace.

Jesus was born into a world with competing eschatologies — different narratives about who rules the world, about who is directing the meaning of history, and about what kind of end it will have — that were shaping the lives of those who lived in the region the Romans called Palestine. The clash of these differing end-time visions were well established by the time that Jesus came with his own climactic proclamation of “good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18-19) and established “in those days” the “today” of fulfilled Scripture (4:21), of the Messiah’s journey to his prophetic goal (13:32, 33), of the salvation of marginal households (19:9), and of the invitation of paradise to crucified terrorists (23:43). “In those days,” when Caesar’s decree for census was issued, the Lord of the universe (cf. Luke 1:32–33, 43; Acts 2:36) was inaugurating a universal reign that would outlast and transcend even Rome’s claims to be “the eternal city.”

David R. McCabe, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of New Testament and Greek.

PRAYER POINT: MUSIC TEAMS

The music department has several music ministry teams including: Concert Choir, Voices Of Triumph and The Collegians.
While Caesar Augustus was presiding over a remarkable four decades of relative stability and prosperity in the Roman Empire, there were still those reluctant Jewish subjects who saw his rule as anything but a divine appointment. To many Jewish patriots, the Roman occupation was an invasion to be repelled, a wrong to be righted, an affront to the God of Abraham. This couldn’t possibly be God’s plan for His chosen people. How could Yahweh fulfill His promises while these Gentile invaders occupied the land promised to the patriarchs? And this census … just a thinly-veiled attempt to sniff out new revenue for the empire. Another way to remind them that Rome was still in charge. There were nationalists who saw themselves as being called by God to repel the Romans — by any means necessary. They would be the ones to help re-establish God’s rule in Israel. They would bring “the right people” into power.

But God’s methods are often counter-intuitive. Where zealots sought the overthrow of the government, the Word sought the transformation of hearts. Where the Emperor of Rome demanded allegiance, the King of the universe risked rejection. Where Rome conquered, heaven wooed.

Luke 2 shows that God wasn’t necessarily concerned with having “the right people” in power, or even with the correct form of government. He quietly worked His will while others sought to establish their dominance. Even those who acted in opposition to Him would ultimately play into His hand. In the process of working out His design, God redeems situations that seem wrong — even hopeless to us. Even in the midst of the most corrupt regimes, the most oppressive and secularist governments, God still governs. His purposes unfold, through or in spite of those who think they are getting their own way.

Tim Matteson works in audio video/video services.

PRAYER POINT: FACULTY AND STAFF
Bethel employs an estimated 300 faculty and staff.
When I was in my early 20s, I went to the Indy 500 with some friends. The fact is it’s loud, hot and boring until there’s an accident. The other fact is that when you look out from your seat at the full stadium, there before you is a sea of people. When I saw all these people, I thought to myself, “What are the chances I would meet even a handful of these people within my lifetime?”

In the 2000 census, the population of the U.S. was 281,421,906. Since 1990, it had grown 13 percent. That’s a number I can’t wrap my head around, so I wanted to narrow it down a bit. I looked at the state of Indiana’s census. The figure was 6,271,973. Still too big! How about St. Joe County? 266,160. That seems more manageable. How about South Bend? 150,540. Lastly, the city of Mishawaka: 48,396 people. What are the chances I would meet even a fraction of these people within my lifetime? This makes me feel small.

I’m starting my own census. Jesus was just ONE, who eventually took on a group of 12 and He expected them to do great things. These 12, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke about Jesus, the one that had been crucified. The result was generations of believers; and centuries later, the result was you coming to know Christ. How many more will you add to the census?

Angela Myers is the department chair of sign language interpreting and an assistant professor.

PRAYER POINT: GRADUATE PROGRAMS
Bethel offers several degree programs, including business administration, nursing, education, ministry and theological studies.
Sometimes, the greatest challenge is daring to trust again.

Joseph had such great hopes, so many expectations. For years, he had been building up his business, saving his money and making a place for his betrothed. He had been a virtuous man, out of respect for the laws of God and for his bride-to-be. And when the time approached when he was to take Mary into his own home, he received the devastating news: Mary was with child. His plans were destroyed and his heart broken by this obvious betrayal. What could she, or anyone, say that could rebuild his dream and rekindle his faith?

And then, in place of the broken dream, God gave him a new one.

In the midst of his dark night, an angel spoke to Joseph, reassuring him that Mary had not been untrue to him. The child she would bear was the Son of God.

Would Joseph believe the angel’s message? After all, it was only a dream. It could be his own wishful thinking projected into his nighttime fantasies, his subconscious longings given form on his mind’s eye. The message alone would not settle the matter. Joseph still had to choose to believe. Naively, perhaps, he would have to accept the angel’s message.

And that is always the greatest challenge. When our hopes have been shattered, or our faith betrayed — when we have been disappointed by friends or family, or when God Himself has failed to meet our expectations, a word of explanation is not enough. As Joseph learned, and as we must learn, the issue ultimately comes down to a choice: will we choose faith or doubt? Can we dare to trust again?

Anthony Tomasino, Ph.D., is associate professor of Bible, Old Testament and Hebrew.

PRAYER POINT: BOARD OF TRUSTEES

This board meets three times a year to discuss the state of the college.
Location, location, location.

Real estate agents tell us that one of the deciding factors when looking to purchase a property is location. They are probably right, in terms of physical real estate, that is. But what about spiritual real estate — does location matter then? Think of it this way: have you ever heard or been tempted to say, “How can I make a difference in the world, I am just an ordinary person from ______?” Or better yet, “Nothing good ever comes from my town.”

As we read the Christmas story, we are reminded that the opposite is true, that God does not use where a person is from as a litmus test, and often enjoys using people from humble beginnings. Take the city of Bethlehem as an example. It is most widely known as the birthplace of Jesus; however, there is far more to this little town than meets the eye. As you scan through the Old Testament, you see that it is thought that Isaac’s wife Rachel is buried here; it is the place Ruth came to with Naomi and married Boaz; it is the birthplace and childhood home of King David and it is prophesied as the place the Messiah will come from.

So what is so special about this place? Location wise, nothing. It is not on the beach or in some tropical spot. Actually it is only about five miles southwest of ancient Jerusalem. God saw fit to have Jesus the Messiah born, not in the glory of Jerusalem itself, but in its shadow in a small, humble village. The question for us, then, is whether or not we allow our location to dictate how God can use us. Will you limit your impact for the Kingdom of God, or will you passionately pursue Him with all you are and see where God takes you? Spiritual impact does not have to be tied to physical real estate.

Tom Carpenter (’07, ’12) is an admission counselor.

PRAYER POINT: MISHAWAKA
Bethel is located in Mishawaka, Ind., a community of more than 46,500 people.
Mary

DAY 6 | LUKE 2:5

Mary of Nazareth is one of the most controversial people in Jesus’ life. Through the centuries, Christians have either venerated her as the “Queen of Heaven” or dismissed her as the simple conduit God used to birth Jesus. These responses fail to take into account the rich picture that we have of Mary as the first and foundational disciple.

While we do not have much, the gospels portray Mary in all of the phases of a woman’s life: a young woman proclaiming God’s goodness (Luke 1:25-2:51), a wise mother (John 2:1-12) and as an older woman at the cross (John 19:25) and Pentecost (Acts 1:14). These glimpses show the full blossoming of pain and sorrow, resulting from Mary’s fateful “Yes” to God. Her example is instructive and inspiring.

“I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as You have said.” This is the central call and response of Mary’s discipleship as she surrendered in trust to the love of God. This is our call as well. As Elizabeth exclaimed, “Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” (Luke 1:45). From this “Yes,” Mary expe-

rienced the joy of bearing God, the pain of watching Him suffer and die, the mystery of the resurrection and coming of the Spirit. She was front and center for all of the Paschal Mystery.

Contrasting the examples of Eve and Mary, the “No” and the “Yes” responses that are before every believer, we are each invited to surrender ourselves fully to the love of God every day. May we be found in the shadow of Mary, as those who are blessed with intelligent obedience, and ponder God’s love in our hearts.

Elizabeth McLaughlin, Ph.D., ’98 is associate professor and chair of the communication and media arts department.

PRAYER POINT: FUTURE GRADUATES

Typically, Bethel graduates anywhere from 550-600 students a year; that includes traditional, nontraditional and graduate students.
Pledged to Be Married

DAY 7 | LUKE 2:5

One of the exciting aspects of working on a college campus is seeing the development of relationships. Boy meets girl as they stand in a registration line ... or maybe they sit next to each other in a class ... or maybe their paths cross as a part of a service activity. However it happens, it is not uncommon for many people to find their life partner in college.

If you are married, think back to the moment you became engaged — pledged to be married — to your spouse. Maybe you met in college, a friendship grew over hours of endless conversation, a love for one another developed, the question was asked and a wedding was planned. Chances are you were filled with excitement and dreams for the future. And chances are you were a bit starry-eyed, focusing on your love for one another and completely unaware of challenges you might face in the future.

No doubt Joseph and Mary were planning for their future, too. No doubt they were filled with excitement. And then a challenge came across their path. I wonder if the donkey ride to Bethlehem was one filled with endless conversation where time just flew by or if it was quiet and seemed like it would never end?

In the midst of remembering this baby that was born for us this Christmas season, we also see the picture of a young couple who was facing great uncertainty. They had choices to make and challenges to face. Was this a difficult time for them? Absolutely!

The Christmas season can also be difficult for some, but it can also be a time of great renewal. I want to encourage those of you who are married to take this day to pray for the one for which you pledged to be married. Whether you are on top of a mountain or going through a valley right now, find time during this season to hold their hand, remind him/her of your love and his/her uniqueness, and continue on your journey — together.

Terry Zeitlow is vice president for institutional advancement

PRAYER POINT: MARRIAGES

Many of our graduate and nontraditional students are married. Pray for married couples today and the added challenge of attending college while balancing the added responsibilities of working and being a husband or wife, mom or dad.
The Time Came for a Baby

DAY 8 | LUKE 2:6

Mary and Joseph were planning to wed. They dreamed what their life would be like together. Joseph worked diligently to prepare for his soon-to-be bride. Mary, young and idealistic, worried about being a good wife. Then God intervened.

Mary did not anticipate a premarital pregnancy. In fact, the thought never had crossed her mind. Surely she questioned God’s timing. This startling development shattered her dreams of marriage, but she remained obedient to God’s new agenda for her life.

Joseph’s heart broke. His life lost meaning as he struggled to wrap his mind around the idea of Mary being with another man. Nevertheless, he decided to take care of the matter quietly so Mary would not be disgraced. There would be no wedding.

But God sent a message to Joseph about the baby. He recalled the prophecy: “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” Joseph became convinced that Mary was indeed the mother of God’s own Son and graciously embraced the new role of stepdad.

God’s timing isn’t always our timing. His plans aren’t always our plans. Our agendas are swayed by a change in our kids’ sports schedules, a burned pot roast or a broken-down vehicle. Or maybe our vision for the future is crippled by the death of a loved one, a divorce or a job loss.

God created time and uses it to orchestrate the design He has for your life. Sometimes you will discover His plan isn’t what you had in mind. But hold tight and seek God. Like Mary and Joseph, you will discover His plan is much better than anything you imagined.

Cindy Jacobs (’98) is assistant director of student media and an adjunct faculty member.

PRAYER POINT: ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

There are more than 50 areas of study. Pray for opportunities Bethel should consider for future areas of study.
Firstborn, a Son

DAY 9 | LUKE 2:7

“And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.”

I remember the moment I found out I was expecting. It was late October, and I was driving to Ft. Wayne for a seminar for work. To pass the time, I popped my Christmas Cantata disc into my CD player to practice the alto part. When I came to the song, “Angels are Making Their Rounds,” by Pepper Choplin, five lyrics gave me pause: “Elizabeth will bear a son.”

My given name is Elizabeth, but of course the song was referencing Mary’s cousin, who was carrying John the Baptist.

For several days, I had felt like something might be different. But since I had never been pregnant before, I wasn’t quite sure what to expect. I sang through the other songs on the disc and came back to “Angels.” I felt it again — a gentle knowing that these words were for me. It was as if God had used a song to plant a secret in my heart of the child He already knew was growing.

When we had the ultrasound to find out the gender of our child three months later, it came as very little surprise that we were expecting a boy. My husband was overjoyed. I was overwhelmed by the thought that God had already revealed this to me.

There are no words to describe the moment of his birth. After a long and difficult labor, my son finally arrived, and the doctor laid him on my chest. I held him for a long while, crying. I was so overcome with joy as I stared into his sweet little face. This was my son. My firstborn. My Gabriel.

I have to believe that Mary experienced similar emotions as she gave birth to Jesus and gazed upon His face for the first time. She must have felt the awe and wonder. The excitement and the weight of responsibility. After all, she knew that the child she delivered would one day save the world.

As you ponder the mystery of Christ’s birth this Christmas season, take time to listen for God’s voice. He just might reveal something to you in a way you never expected.

Lissa (Grashorn ’07) Diaz is the office manager and writer for marketing and communications.

PRAYER POINT: ONLINE PROGRAMS

Bethel offers several online classes for both traditional and nontraditional students. Recently the business degree became the first degree offered online for nontraditional students.
“... Because there was no room for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:7) It is only the last part of a verse, but it doesn’t take much for my imagination to fill in the blanks. Books, movies and pictures depicting the nativity find the drama in those few words.

NO VACANCY! Have you been there? I have. We were heading to Traverse City and Mackinac Island, Mich., for our first family vacation with our 3-month-old son. The plan was to take off after work on Friday evening and drive from Mishawaka to Grand Rapids, Mich., to get a bit of the trip underway. When we stopped for supper, my husband decided to continue on a little further. Every hotel we encountered from that point on displayed their bright, neon red NO VACANCY sign. My emotions ran the gamut from frustration to anger to desperation. I didn’t care where we stopped. I just needed a place for my baby and me to lie down and sleep. My husband was doing his best, but that did not change the fact that there were no rooms available.

At 2:30 a.m., we finally found a room at the Mushroom Cap Motel in Mesick, Mich. I admit that I appreciated the fact that the lighting was dim, and I would not see clearly until morning. More than anything, I was extremely grateful for a place to spend the remainder of the long, arduous night.

Multiply that 50 times for Mary and Joseph. My desperate prayers pale in comparison to what I imagine Mary’s were. She was expecting a baby, after all. I doubt she complained when a corner of a stable was secured. Desperation gives birth to gratitude when our greatest need is met. Do you feel desperate this Christmas season? There are many who do. In our desperation, may we reach out to the Savior, who provides for our greatest need, and respond to Him with overwhelming gratitude.

Jeanne Fox (’01) is the registrar at Bethel.

PRAYER POINT: ALUMNI

Roughly 9,000 students have graduated from Bethel; half of them have graduated in the last 10 years.
Advent is a time of preparation for the second coming of Christ. I have often wondered where I will be and what I will be doing when Jesus returns. Will I be sleeping? Playing? Worshipping? Praying? Expecting Him? The shepherds, at Christ’s first advent, were “living out in the fields.” In other words, they were working! They were completing the task given to them — tending the sheep, protecting them, seeking the lost ones. Many have wondered, “Why shepherds? Why were they the first to hear of the Messiah?” But, why shouldn’t shepherds be the first to know? Every day they cared for lambs that were destined to die — to be slaughtered in the temple for the forgiveness of sins. It seems only fitting that those who were closest to the pure sacrificial lambs would be the first to hear of “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29)

The fact that these shepherds were living out in the fields is a lesson for us. Can we say the same — are we living out in the “fields” while we wait for His return? Jesus, after seeing the multitudes “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,” told his disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His harvest field (Matt. 9:35-38). Are we tending the weak among us through discipleship and teaching? Are we bringing healing to the broken and wounded? Are we protecting young believers from the work of the enemy? Are we seeking for His lost ones through evangelism and mission? May we all be ready to hear of the glorious coming of our King while we are “living out in the fields” with those who need Him most.

Katie Weakland, Ph.D., is an associate professor of biology.

PRAYER POINT: ATHLETIC TEAMS
There are 17 athletic teams and roughly 340 athletes who represent Bethel.
Scripture is replete with the command that we should not be afraid. Examples include Moses’ assurance to the Israelites (Deut. 31:8), the Lord’s encouragement to Joshua (Josh. 1:9), God’s call on Jeremiah’s life (Jer. 1:8), and Jesus’ comforting of the disciples (Matt. 14:27). (See other examples in, for instance, Gen. 46:3, Josh. 10:25, 2 Kings 6:8-19, Neh. 4:14, Ps. 56:11, Luke 1:30 and Heb. 4:16.) The command probably comes up so often because fear is so pervasive in our lives.

So why should we not be afraid? The primary reason given in Scripture is that God is with us. “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” (Josh. 1:9) In all the uncertainty in life, the one thing we can count on is the presence of the One who never changes, the One who is sovereign over all creation, and the One who cares deeply for His children. He will fight the battles that we cannot; He will be our strength in weakness; He will be our hope when we feel we have none.

In the case of Christ’s birth, the angel’s announcement to the shepherds to “fear not” came because they would now experience God’s presence in an entirely different way: God in the flesh, Immanuel. And Christ would fight humanity’s battle in a way we never could: through the cross.

John tells us that “there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.” (1 John 4:18) If we know that God is good and that He is in control, we can rest in the assurance that He is with us, and we need not be afraid.

Robert Myers, Ph.D., is dean of sciences and an associate professor of mathematics.

PRAYER POINT: PROVISION

We rely on God to provide resources for the college.
Good News of Great Joy

DAY 13 | LUKE 2:10

In Luke 2, an angel of the Lord, God’s messenger, shares good news of great joy — literally, “gospel” in the Greek language. The long awaited Messiah, Jesus the Savior, had finally arrived on the scene!

However, this news was not good in the way most people were expecting. Many of the Jews of Jesus’ day had realpolitik in mind. They were hoping for a Messiah who would take charge, politically, and break the shackles of Roman rule. They were eager for salvation — national rather than individual. They were anticipating a grandiose visible kingdom, one in which Jewish ethnic identity was at its core. The real good news was widely misunderstood.

In adulthood, Jesus Himself went from place to place sharing the gospel. His three-fold ministry entailed teaching (or explaining) the gospel of the Kingdom, preaching (or proclaiming) the gospel of the Kingdom, and manifesting the Kingdom reality through healing, exorcism and other miracles. (Matt. 4:23) His good news was Kingdom-centered, but his Kingdom was unfamiliar, unexpected and clearly outside the paradigm of his hearers.

Even later the Jewish leaders protested when Jesus was labeled “the King of the Jews” as He hung on a cross. Surely no king of theirs would suffer such an appalling fate. It was only after Jesus’ inexplicable resurrection that He was able to convince some of the true nature of His Kingdom. Suddenly a few of them understood, and His Kingdom has been advancing ever since.

Though it took time to realize, the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth was indeed good news. Because of His life, death and resurrection, we all possess the celebrated invitation to enter into the eternal Kingdom of God — that glorious rule of God that begins in our hearts and will, in the eschaton, permeate all things.

Chad Meister, Ph.D. is a professor of philosophy.

PRAYER POINT: MENTORING

Faculty and staff mentor students throughout the academic year. Last year about 70 faculty and staff members mentored 120 students.
For All the People

DAY 14 | LUKE 2:10, 11

Can you imagine how the shepherds felt that night? Do you think they felt the electricity in the air, that sense that something huge was about to happen? Or do you think they were just focused on the status of their sheep? Just another quiet night in the middle of who-knows-where ... until ...

How many times in our lives have we been on the brink of “until”? That moment when the quiet is broken with a sound, even if silent, that shatters our current night. Sometimes we may sense that something huge is about to happen, and other times, it feels as still as a starry night in the country. But just as the shepherds’ nights were disrupted so long ago, our Savior comes to disrupt our nights as well.

A simple promise with vast potential, “Good news of great joy” ... for the good, He brings better; for the bad, He brings redemption; for the ugly, He brings beauty. Are you content, not really in need of a seismic event? He wants to give you better. Are you facing the other direction, not even interested in the source of the promise? He wants to help you turn around. Are you a shepherd — the lowly, smelly, slightly odd of the group? He wants to welcome you into a beauty you’ve never known. It doesn’t matter who you are, because His promise is for ALL the people — the good, the bad and the ugly. Even if you are in the middle of your night, it may be just moments away from the “until” ...

Cindi Pedersen is the assistant director of financial aid.

PRAYER POINT: SEMESTER ABROAD PROGRAM

Students have a choice to study in China, Russia, Pacific Rim, the Dominican Republic and more.
Today

DAY 15 | LUKE 2:11

Today I want my life to count and I want to make a difference; I want to positively impact at least one student. As I reflect, I realize that 40 years ago I was a student at Bethel. I don’t believe the professors who profoundly impacted my life could realize their influence. They simply lived out who they were as God had created them to be.

Dr. Norman Bridges capably assessed each individual student and realized how to assist in the student’s growth. Bridges possessed the gift of wisdom. Before Bridges was Bethel’s fifth president, he was a history professor who assigned students to read a book about a particular person or era in history. Then, in class, Bridges would call a name and ask that student to stand by his or her desk. The contest had begun. Bridges asked various questions about the book. He possessed wisdom and insight while challenging each learner.

My second mentor was Dr. Harold Burgess. Burgess communicated flexibility and spontaneity. My senior year in a counseling course, Burgess distributed the syllabus. There was no detail. When asked, Burgess shrugged his shoulders and responded that the class was ours. He challenged us to realize we knew the answers to our questions. We needed to think and understand.

When Don Taylor taught, the Pauline Epistles came alive. He loved as Christ loved and accepted each student. His charismatic personality radiated when he shared from Philippians 4. In a class filled with male Bible majors, I quickly learned that Professor Taylor believed I had as much to offer as the men in the class.

While there were many others who impacted my life, today I ask, am I making a difference in the lives of students like my mentors did for me? Does my life speak for Christ? I encourage you to reflect on how you are making a difference and reflecting Christ to others.

Kathy Gribbin, Ph.D., (’76) is vice president for life calling and student enrichment.

PRAYER POINT: LIFE CALLING AND STUDENT ENRICHMENT CENTER

Not only is this part of our retention program, but a center where students make important decisions about their passion and career.
Contemporary birth announcements are often crafted in a very cutesy manner to present the precious new baby’s arrival in an endearing manner. The recipient’s reaction is typically akin to “Ah, how sweet!”

In stark contrast was the angelic announcement of Jesus’ birth that required a “Fear not!” before the actual pronouncement. The delivery was over-the-top impressive and the content was anything but tranquil to the hearers living in a political system governed by the authority of Rome. Emperor Caesar Augustus was revered as the son of God by the Roman senate, and was therefore “Lord,” with total authority and control over his subjects. In direct conflict, the title “Christ the Lord” declared that this babe was the prophesied Messiah of the Old Testament who would trump Caesar as Lord, not only in the Roman Empire, but also throughout the world, for “all people” — everywhere! To a severely oppressed people, these were words of hope and liberation, but to the principalities and powers they were threatening, divisive words. The battle lines were drawn — not your typical birth announcement content, as God the Father made a clear declaration of His Son’s ultimate authority.

And more than 2,000 years later, the people of God are still called to verbally confess the same truth that Jesus Christ is Lord, not only of their lives, but of the entire universe. We look forward with great anticipation to the reality of Rev. 11:15, “The Kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever.” Let us join together during this Advent season in declaring that the Jesus of that first Christmas night is indeed Christ the Lord!

Lois Pannabecker is the director of alumni services.

PRAYER POINT: CHAPEL SERVICES

Students, faculty and staff meet three times a week for service in the Everest-Rohrer Chapel/Fine Arts Center – Auditorium during the school year.
“Arriving at destination, on right” her calm voice directs.

My GPS device is amazing, and I have one of the cheap ones. I almost always find the house I’m looking for with accuracy and ease. But a business, now that’s a different story. She is no help finding a location tucked away in a strip mall. I’m left to look for a sign — the bigger the better.

There weren’t any signs outside the stable that night, but whatever navigation help they received, the shepherds knew they were in the right place. They had been told what to look for. And there He was, right in front of them.

Humankind has asked for a sign from God from the beginning. Do you exist? Which of these two paths should I take? Is there really only one way to You? How often it seems that the Christian life would be much easier if we could just get some answers; if God would simply plant a few more signs along our route — the bigger the better. If we are honest, we would have been nodding our head in agreement when Thomas asked to see the nail marks in Jesus’ hand. Whether you think Thomas is a doubter or not, he did get to see.

Believers have taken comfort in Jesus’ response to Thomas, blessing us because we believe without physical sight. Right after recording Jesus’ blessing, the apostle John writes: “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.” (John 20:30-31)

Our family has a tradition at Christmas, shared by many, of reading the Luke Chapter 2 incarnation account. “This will be a sign to you; you will find the baby ... ” All of Scripture directs us to God and to His Son, our redeemer.

*Steve Matteson, Ph.D., (’81) is the assistant vice president for development and planned giving.*

**PRAYER POINT: ADMISSION OFFICE**

Our admission department consists of 14 staff who work hard to recruit students year-round.
A Great Company of Heavenly Hosts

DAY 18 | LUKE 2: 13-14

In the Western world, we often forget that this physical world is only a tiny portion of the real universe. But in Luke 2:13 we are told that, “suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heaven’s army, praising God.” Here we are given a glimpse of the spiritual forces at work — even at war — around us.

Recently, astrophysicists have posited that the matter and energy we can detect with our scientific instruments make up less than 5 percent of the universe. The majority of the stuff and forces in this universe are what they call “dark matter” and “dark energy” — so labeled because these scientists know nothing about them except that they must be there to explain why things are the way they are. It is no great stretch to see this “dark matter” and “dark energy,” which must be there but can’t be seen, as the spiritual part of the universe: heaven, hell and all the nonmaterial beings that God has created. This may fit with what we find in Hebrews 1:7: “He makes His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire.” They are dark matter and dark energy.

These are the beings who suddenly appear to some shepherds one night. Although usually called a “host,” the Greek word “stratias” is better translated “army.” And why does a spiritual army appear in the Judean countryside on the first Christmas Eve? They are preparing for the greatest spiritual battle of all time: the God of the whole universe has just entered the material part of that universe to reclaim it as His. And the heavenly army begins the battle (which will be won some 30 years later at Calvary) with one of the most powerful spiritual weapons: praise. “Glory to God in the highest!”

Christian Davis, Ph.D., is an associate professor of English.

PRAYER POINT: STUDENTS
Bethel’s students come from all over the world, including 34 states and Puerto Rico and 19 foreign countries.
People long for peace, but do not always find it. The words of the angel choir (KJV) are familiar, “... on earth peace, good will toward men,” so too the line from the Christmas carol, “Peace on earth, good will to men.” A better rendering of Luke’s Greek would actually be, “on earth peace to persons of good will.” God’s peace may be for all people, but only persons of good will enjoy His peace.

As Willard Swartley makes clear in his great work, “Covenant of Peace,” the theme of peace permeates the New Testament. God alone brings true peace. His peace may be shattered by our ill will. Christian peace has at least three dimensions. By the grace of God, we are to be peaceful, peaceable and peacemakers.

Christians are peaceful despite all the toils, turmoil, sorrows, pains, sufferings and malicious evils we experience. We are peaceful because God has in Jesus Christ identified with all our troubles and tragedies, from His birth in harsh circumstances to His horrific death on the cross. We are peaceful because our sins are forgiven and our guilt is gone.

Christians are peaceable because the God who loves us while we are still sinners shows us how to love our neighbors, even those who would be our enemies. Peace is both a supernatural gift from the Holy Spirit and the fruit of spiritual disciplines that require long-term character formation.

Christians are peacemakers because that is our Great Commission, to be God’s powerful agents of reconciliation, both between God and man and within human quarrels and conflicts. The Beatitudes culminate in peacemaking so disruptive that it leads to persecution. But we still rejoice in the favor of the Prince of Peace.

Timothy Paul Erdel, Ph.D., is associate professor of religion and philosophy and the college’s archivist.

**PRAYER POINT: ENROLLMENT**

Bethel’s total enrollment is currently 1,963, which includes traditional, nontraditional and graduate students.
Let’s Go to Bethlehem
DAY 20 | LUKE 2:15

One assumes that taking a census involves going door-to-door, collecting all sorts of data. At least that’s the way it happens in our neighborhoods these days. Such was not the case in the Roman Empire — at least for the Jews. The Roman government mandated that all Jewish families return to their town of birth to register. For Mary and Joseph, this meant an 80-mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, probably circumventing Samaria to avoid the dangers of traveling alone through hostile territory. The timing couldn’t have been worse for the elderly Joseph and his young fiancé. Scripture records that Mary was “great with child.” A healthy man could make the journey on foot in four days. A man advanced in age with a “very” pregnant fiancé would have required a longer journey.

It likely took at least a week.

It is hard to imagine the stress and hardship of that journey. Of course, we all know the result. Ultimately they arrived safely in the city of David, and shortly thereafter Mary gave birth to the Son of God, Jesus. Humanity’s Savior entered this world in the form of a baby amongst the most humble of surroundings. Prophetic Scripture was fulfilled.

As followers of Christ, we too are on a journey. It is a lifelong adventure. Sometimes it seems as though God’s timing is terrible. Too often the road is rugged. Occasionally the conditions even become perilous. However, for those who persevere by “leaning on the everlasting arms” of the Savior, the results make the challenges of the journey worthwhile. The Apostle Paul said it best in I Timothy 4:7 when he stated near the end of his life, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

Let’s go to Bethlehem!

\[\textbf{Dennis Engbrecht, Ph.D., is the senior vice president.}\]

**PRAYER POINT: BETHEL’S CABINET MEMBERS**

There are seven administrators, including President Steven R. Cramer, Ph.D. (75).
The Lord Has Told Us

DAY 21 | LUKE 2:15B

“You have to go to Five Guys. They have the best burgers.”

“The Artist’ is a great movie even though it’s a French, silent, black-and-white movie.”

“If you’re going to do a cruise, it should be the eastern Caribbean.”

We have all been advised by others to eat at a certain dining establishment, see a particular film or go to a specific locality for a vacation. We have learned over the years which individual’s advice we will follow up on and which ones we will conveniently put aside.

If you were watching TV at all in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s, you most likely remember the commercial with the tagline “When E.F. Hutton speaks, people listen.” One would think that when God speaks, people listen, but when we look around us, it’s evident that many do not. When it comes to others saying “God has told me,” I get a little skittish. More often than not, the phrase “God has told me … ” has negative consequences. The results at times have turned others away from God rather than bringing them closer. Yet, God does communicate with us. He communicates with us as we read Scripture, as we pray, as we meditate, as we see situations unfold before our eyes. God is making His desires known to us.

The shepherds took action on what the Lord had told them. Imagine what they would have missed out on if they had just gone on shepherding sheep that night. What is the Lord telling you and what is your response to what you have been told?

Harold Rodgers (’74) is the director of administrative computing in Bethel’s information technology department.

PRAYER POINT: MISSION OF THE SCHOOL

Bethel College, affiliated with the Missionary Church, is a Christian community of learners dedicated to building lives of commitment for leadership in the church and world. Bethel provides liberating academic and co-curricular programs to challenge the mind, enlarge the vision and equip the whole person for lifelong service.
Every Christmas, children wake up excited to see what they will find. Do you remember that feeling? Excited to go downstairs to the Christmas tree and see all the presents — big and small, wrapped, bagged or stuffed in a stocking — excited to find the fulfilled promises of parents ... families ... and friends.

But this is more than just an invisible feeling. These children didn’t start the day quietly. They moved quickly ... and with purpose. They bounced out of bed ... bounced in and out of their parents’ bed, and darted to the Christmas tree. Put simply, they hurried.

In Luke 2, we read about the shepherds that were visited by a “great company of heavenly host” — angels. They were visited by a group of angels. Angels that told them that the long-awaited Messiah had finally come. The Savior that had been expected for hundreds of years ... was here. And their response? “They hurried off.” They didn’t casually head for the manger. They hurried off. They went to find Mary and Joseph. Like most children on Christmas morning, they hurried off to see how a long-awaited promise was fulfilled.

Even today, we can look to Christmas with that kind of enthusiasm ... that kind of passion. We can still be that excited to see how God’s promises will be fulfilled today. Let this Christmas be a time when you look forward to seeing how the Messiah is going to work. May it be a time when you look forward to seeing God’s promises fulfilled in the work and the promised return of OUR Messiah.

James Lovaas works as assistant program manager for nontraditional programs.

PRAYER POINT: NONTRADITIONAL PROGRAMS

Degrees offered through this program are Bible and ministry, business (also available online), criminal justice, early childhood education, general studies, human services, nursing BSN completion and organizational management.
Spread the Word

DAY 23 | LUKE 2:17

Quite often our expectations get in the way of truly seeing the beauty of how God acts in the world … this world that He spoke into creation through His Word. We expect grand actions, we expect great people, we expect spectacular results; and yet in the case of Jesus’ birth, God chose the simple, the social outcasts, the least likely … the shepherds.

Jesus is the “Word” … the “Good News” … the “Gospel.” He is “God in the flesh,” the greatest act of love that God could give humanity. However, God gives this gift not in a huge metropolis where many can see; not by sending great orators to “spread the word;” rather, He gives the gift in the humble town of Bethlehem and He enlists a small group of people living in the fields with their sheep.

Jesus’ earthly birth is the greatest event of human history. As believers, we have the joy of knowing Jesus and celebrating His birth each year, but this good news is not reserved for one season and one group of people. The good news of Jesus is for every person and for every season. How will others know? God has enlisted us to spread the word. Our station in life, our gifting, our means, our education — none are too big or too small to be used of God. What He desires is our obedience.

What the shepherds began in Bethlehem, God now calls us to carry on as we live our lives for Him each day. Whether in our family, in our town, in our country or around the world, we are enlisted to spread the word: “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.” Our Savior lives and, because of that, we have a future!

Kent Eby (’94), Ph.D., is assistant professor of mission and the director of the intercultural studies program.

PRAYER POINT: FUTURE TASK FORCE TEAMS

Known as short-term mission trips, there are multiple opportunities for students to participate throughout the academic year and summer.
Once the shepherds had been to see the baby Jesus, they started spreading the word of what they had been told about Him. Luke tells us that all who heard them were amazed. It shouldn’t surprise us that people were amazed when hearing that the Messiah had been born. The Jews had longed for this event for generations, so when it finally happened, it is to be expected that many would be amazed. But is it consistent with our experience and expectations that everyone would be amazed? Wouldn’t some of those people have been skeptical or even uninterested in what the shepherds had to say? Today the message of Christmas is essentially the same as the news shared by the shepherds; we don’t see amazement from everyone.

Perhaps the important qualification, then, is that it was all those who heard who were amazed. Hearing often takes on a special significance in Scripture. It is not merely what happens when some sound waves hit your eardrums. “He who has ears, let him hear,” Jesus said later in His ministry.

In our theological tradition, we believe that God has given sufficient grace to all that they may find salvation and eternal life. But God has not necessarily made it easy. People often hear only what they want to hear. Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables so they would have to work at it a bit.

So it seems plausible to think that the shepherds’ message that first Christmas may have fallen on some deaf ears — those who responded with, “We’ve heard all this before, now let me go about my business.” But for all who really heard them, the response was amazement. May we truly hear the Christmas story afresh this season and continue to be amazed at God’s gift.

Jim Stump, Ph.D., ’91 is a professor of philosophy.

PRAYER POINT: THE PRESIDENT

Steven R. Cramer, Ph.D., ’75 was inaugurated as Bethel’s sixth president in 2004. Pray for our search committee as Bethel seeks its next president.
Treasured and Pondered

DAY 25 | LUKE 2:19

When something exceedingly wonderful happens to us, we love to relive the experience over and over. We picture it in our minds, and our senses tingle with the sensation of remembering and recalling this treasured memory. These are the special moments that permeate our lives with joy and wonder. We tuck them away in our hearts to enjoy forever.

Mary must have been practically giddy at the events of the last nine months. Gabriel’s first visit to her resulted in her being troubled, afraid and incredulous. She, a virgin, was going to have a child who was to be called “the Son of God.” As Mary yielded to the divine truth that the Lord was with her, she sang with soul and spirit in response to the Mighty One.

Upon hearing that Elizabeth was going to have a child in her old age, Mary couldn’t wait to see her and share in that wondrous news. Zechariah was struck silent because of his unbelief, but at the birth of his son, his tongue was loosed and he began praising God. Mary felt the baby, the Savior of the World, grow in her womb. Her heart grew too, as she filled it with the great things God was doing.

Ordered to journey to Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary made their way to a lowly manger where she gave birth to Jesus. Shepherds soon gathered to see the blessed family, and after beholding the sight, they took off to tell everyone what they had seen. Finally, Mary, reflecting on the events that had changed her life forever, savored the moments, treasured them in her heart and pondered them in quiet contemplation.

Today, as we live with the promise of Christ’s second coming, we have the privilege to treasure and ponder anew that nothing is impossible with God.

Bob Ham is an associate professor of music, music chair and director of Bethel’s Concert Choir.

PRAYER POINT: PERSONAL REFLECTION

Pray that each person in the Bethel family would experience Christ anew.