



THE LIVING NATIVITY

A JOURNEY FORETOLD

BROADUS CHURCH

December 1-3 & 8-10, 2023

**Pole Green Road Campus
5351 Pole Green Road
Mechanicsville, VA 23116**

**Hebron Campus of Broadus Church
3407 King William Road
Aylett, VA 23009**

Welcome!

Thank you for participating in “The Living Nativity - A Journey Foretold.” This event is a gift to our community that is presented every other year by members and friends of Broadus Church. It is our hope that you will have the opportunity to renew in your hearts the true meaning of our holiday season or, for the very first time, hear and see the wonderful Gift of God that is the “Reason for this Season.”

This booklet contains four devotions written by Rev. Howard Rhodes to encourage you to ponder and pray about your relationship with Jesus Christ, God’s Son. We would welcome the opportunity to talk with you further and to share with you the hope, joy, peace, and love He brings into the lives of those who choose to follow Him.

At the conclusion of your program in the woods, we will take you to our Worship Center for some special events.

- Wonderful desserts, hot chocolate, coffee, tea are available.
- We also have crafts to share with the children.
- There is a beautiful background provided for a free Christmas picture of your family.

Sunday Schedule

Pole Green Campus	9 am Sunday School 10 am Worship
Hebron Campus	9:30 am Worship 10:30 am Sunday School

On Dec. 24th we will follow our regular morning schedule. At 5 pm there will be special Christmas Eve Services at both campuses.

Making each one a witness!

Broadus Church

Belong. Believe. Become.

Christmas “Timing”—

“But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.”

Galatians 4:4-5

Are you ready for it? It comes at the same time every year so it should be no surprise. We might ask those around us (or even ourselves), “Are you ready for it? Are you ready for Christmas?” We might feel the urgency of getting the right gifts, planning the perfect party or event, and, of course, decorating everything around us to reflect that this is a time different from all the others that we celebrate.

Paul reminds us that God was not surprised by the first Christmas nor was He stressed out by the details. Jesus was born in a unique time. The Roman Empire stretched far and wide establishing a common language and freedom to travel great distances. Such a time enabled all lands to be open to the message of mercy and love that was coming.

For over 400 years the Jews had waited for a word from God. A passionate commitment to the law had swept through their land. The temple had been rebuilt and rituals of worship reestablished. Synagogues and Rabbis to oversee the teaching and observance of the law were a central part of every community. Along with this commitment to the law, there was a renewed hope for the one who would free them from foreign dominance and influence, the Messiah, the Anointed One. This time, promised to them 700 years earlier through the prophet, Isaiah, was about to be fulfilled. The “time” had come, God’s perfect time.

The Living Nativity is a celebration of that time. Amidst all the excitement of the holiday season, we are given the opportunity to pause and celebrate Immanuel, God with us, the “reason for the season.”

Isaiah 7:14—"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and shall call his name, Immanuel."

- "Therefore"—The timing is right; the preparation has been made.
- "Lord Himself"—All-knowing, all-powerful, all-present God is accomplishing His purpose.
- "Sign"—An announcement, a signal of what is ahead, a promise of God is being fulfilled.
- "The virgin"—"The" is specific. A young, never married woman will be chosen by God.
- "Conceive and bear a son"—Though unplanned by Mary, this child is unique, purposed in every way.
- "Immanuel"—Meaning "God with us," this is the most dynamic truth of Christmas. This is the heart of all that happens from this moment on, even to this very day.

As a child, I was one who searched the presents under the tree, looking for one that had my name. I would shake it, trying to determine what was inside; sometimes even tearing the wrapping paper just a bit. My mother would scold me, reminding me that it was not "time" for knowing the content and sometimes hiding the present somewhere else. Even today, I'm anxious for Christmas day, but for a different reason. My favorite Christmas carol, "O Come, O Come, Immanuel" best describes my heart at this time of year. My Redeemer has come.

The Living Nativity is a celebration of Immanuel's coming. It's a simple event that happened in a stable to an ordinary couple at a time thought to be insignificant. Yet, it is the most significant event in the history of mankind. Now is the time to celebrate this event in a very personal way. It is a "time" appointed for each of us. Are you ready for "Christmas time?"

Prayer: Father God, lead us to understand your perfect timing in our lives that, in the midst of this busy holiday season, we might bring glory to You.

Christmas “Miracles”—

**“I am the Lord’s servant, may your word to me be fulfilled.”
Luke 1:38**

Do you have a favorite Christmas movie? “A Wonderful Life” “Elf,” “A Christmas Story,” or maybe “Die Hard.” Most of us have our favorite. Then there are the animated stories—“Polar Express,” “Rudolph,” and “A Charlie Brown Christmas”—that capture the minds and hearts of children of all ages everywhere. Most of them have a “happily ever-after” ending with relationships, faith, trust and truth restored. Then there’s Santa Claus. We stand in line to see him and have pictures reminding us of his importance to our celebrations. Christmas Day arrives and the miracle is validated. Santa is real because he’s eaten the cookies and left us exactly what we wanted.

In our world today, it’s becoming harder and harder to tell truth from fiction. Pictures are no longer “worth a thousand words” and “what you see” is not always what you get. “Speak your truth” has become a popular catch phrase, but the reality is that not everyone’s truth is true.

So what is true about Christmas? I think we must admit that the Christmas events recorded in Matthew and Luke do seem a bit out of this world; but that does not make them untrue. Seeing and hearing angels, a young woman’s mysterious pregnancy, shepherds awakened by a heavenly choir, Wise Men following a star looking for a new king—these are just a few of the characters and events celebrated in The Living Nativity.

- Mary didn’t understand what the angel, Gabriel, was telling her—“How will this be since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34)
- Joseph wanted to divorce Mary, but he trusted the voice of an angel.—“He did what the angel of the Lord told him and took Mary to be his wife.” (Matthew 1:24)
- Lowly shepherds, relaxing around their campfire, were terrified when angels told them to look for a baby wrapped in swaddling cloth, lying in a manger.—“Let’s go to

Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened.” (Luke 2:15)

- Astrologers traveled for weeks believing a new star was a sign of the birth of a new king for the Jews—“We saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him.” (Matthew 2:2)

These out-of-this world events seem unbelievable, yet they are really precursors of other events in the life of Jesus and those who follow Him. Google tells us a miracle is “an effect or extraordinary event in the physical world that surpasses all known human or natural powers.”

In March 2015, officers in Spanish Fork, Utah, discovered a car that had overturned in a body of water. All the officers heard a woman’s voice crying, “Help me, help me.” Upon reaching the car, they discovered the body of a woman who had been dead for over 14 hours. In the back seat they discovered 18-month-old Lily still alive after 14 hours in freezing temperatures. One of the officers looks at the world differently now proclaiming, “God will always come through.”

That is the message of Christmas, “God will always come through.” While Santa brings what we want, Immanuel, “God with us,” brings what we need. To the shepherds, the angel proclaimed, “Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you.” The Christmas “Miracle” is not about what Mary, Joseph, shepherds and Wise Men did. It is about what God has done. It is also about what God is doing. As you experience The Living Nativity, think about the “miracles” in your own life; things and events that really have no logical explanation. The “Christmas Miracle” is real.

Prayer: Father God, help us to hear Your voice and see Your miracles in our own lives each day.

Christmas “Music”

**“Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.”
Ephesians 5:19**

What did “my true love give to me” on day 6? What about day 8? The “Twelve Days of Christmas,” is a must for this holiday season but most of us can’t wait for the song to end. We love our holiday music. From the day after Thanksgiving until New Year’s Day, it’s pretty much everywhere. “White Christmas,” “Jingle Bells,” and “I’ll Be Home for Christmas,” are among a long list of secular songs we hear. Millions all over the world will attend a production of the “The Nutcracker,” a ballet performed each holiday season. For most of us, however, holiday music becomes “Christmas music,” as familiar carols dominate our playlist.

Can we celebrate Christmas without music? The answer, of course, is yes, but it just wouldn’t be the same. We love the music, from the large, dramatic productions by choirs and orchestras to the smallest children’s enactments of the Christmas events. These songs help us focus on the reality of what happened in the small village of Bethlehem over 2000 years ago. They help us understand the significance of Jesus’ birth not only for our world but for each one of us personally.

- “O Come, O Come Immanuel”—We are reminded of our great need, and this song is a plea for One who will rescue a people from the darkness of the world around us; a reminder of God’s purpose.
- “Silent Night”—Nothing quiets our hearts at Christmas like singing and hearing the words of this most beloved carol. When sung from the heart, it truly does bring a calmness, a peace that transcends the chaos around us.
- “Away in a Manger”—The simplicity and magnitude of Christmas is captured as we imagine the God of our universe sending His only Son to be born in a lowly stable and laid to rest on a bed of hay.
- “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing”—The splendor of heaven is in full display as the birth of God’s Son is announced,

not to kings, presidents, or religious leaders, but to lowly shepherds. The message, a Savior is born “to you” is a reminder of the significance of this event for each of us.

- “We, Three Kings”—Do we grasp the significance of Wise Men from afar coming to worship a new-born king? The door to heaven is opened for ALL mankind, not just those of a particular belief, ideology, ethnicity, or economic standing.
- “Joy to the World”—What a privilege it is to join with the angels in proclaiming the birth of God’s only Son and to be reminded of our responsibility to share the good news of His coming; to “Go Tell It On the Mountain.”

“Messiah,” by George Frideric Handel, was written in 1741 and is a Christmas staple. Performed in its entirety would take almost 3 hours. We usually hear only portions but always love the amazing, “Hallelujah Chorus.” As you probably know, the audience stands when this production is sung. Most trace this tradition back to King George II who was so enthralled by the beauty of the music that he could not remain seated. Others say his standing is only a myth. Some believe he stood because he thought the choir was singing about him. Regardless of his reason, we have our own—the King of Kings has come!

Christmas music celebrates Immanuel, “God with us.” Christmas music celebrates the matchless gift greater than all others. Mary sang praises to God as she awaited the birth of Jesus— “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior; for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant” (Luke 1:47-48). The angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth, peace to those on whom His favor rests” (Luke 2:14).

As you experience “The Living Nativity,” take an opportunity to sing praise in your heart to God for His “indescribable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Prayer: Father God, may our hearts be filled with the sounds of worship and praise for who You are and what You have done.

Christmas “Promises”

**“For no word from God will ever fail.”
Luke 1:37**

What was your last promise? The last promise someone made to you? Were those promises kept? Was it made with fingers crossed behind your back? It has been written that “promises are like a pie crust; they are meant to be broken.” Promises are only as strong as the person who gives them.

The Christmas events are truly miracles that are dependent on one thing, God keeping His promises. As was the custom of their Jewish faith, Mary and Joseph took their baby boy, Jesus, to the temple in Jerusalem “to present him to the Lord.” This was an act of ritual law that decreed that every firstborn male was to be dedicated to the Lord.

There is much more to the story, however, than what was a normal, everyday temple occurrence.

- God’s promise to Simeon is fulfilled—Simeon was righteous and devout and waiting for the “consolation of Israel.” Consolation means comfort, relief; the removal of a burden. Simeon’s heart longed for the fulfillment of God’s promise made through the prophet, Isaiah. Upon seeing Jesus, Simeon proclaimed, “My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations” (Luke 2:30-31).
- God’s promise to Anna is fulfilled—Anna was 84 years old and a widow. She “worshipped night and day, never leaving the temple, fasting and praying.” Upon seeing Jesus, Anna gave thanks to God and “spoke of the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Israel” (Luke 2:36-38).

Soon after Christmas day, we carefully pack our decorations and put them away until the next year. Christmas is over. Or is it? We often forget that the real promise of Christmas is not just what

happened in Bethlehem. Joseph escapes the anger and wrath of a jealous king by taking his wife and child to Egypt for some 3+ years. He then brought his family to the town Nazareth where he supported them as a carpenter and taught Jesus how to be a carpenter as well.

We know very little of Jesus as a child except that He does visit the temple when he is 12 years old. He causes quite the impression as he sat among the teachers who were amazed at His “understanding and answers” concerning Jewish scripture.

At the age of 30, Jesus begins His journey to fulfill God’s promise and purpose for His coming. He teaches, does miracles, and the people begin to ask, “Could this be the Messiah,” the fulfillment of God’s promise.

Helping kindergarten students write letters to Santa was designed to be a fun activity for the older students. It took a different turn when a small 5-year-boy ask Santa, “Please bring my daddy back home to live with us.” I was heartbroken and had no words to say. Surprisingly, the story ends well. His daddy did return but not because of Santa. In the midst of Christmas, his mom and dad, not only reconciled but discovered the true gift of God for Christmas.

The earthly life of Jesus ends tragically when He is unjustly arrested, beaten, mocked, and left to die on a cruel Roman cross. That is not, however the end of the story. It is in the celebration of Easter that we find the real miracle of God and His promises fulfilled.

The child we celebrate at Christmas is the sacrifice for our sin that opens the way for each of us to have a relationship with God. He is the “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). God keeps His promises.

Prayer: Father God, may our hearts be open to the truth of Jesus, the One who came in God’s time and plan to show Your love for each of us.