



The Rocky Mountain American Baptist

A Newsletter of the American Baptist Churches in the Rocky Mountain Region

Celebrate Christmas: Celebrate Change

How many times have you read the Christmas story? How many times have you seen it portrayed by children and adults in your church? How many times have you seen the pictures of shepherds, angels, and the holy family on greeting cards? These images are an integral part of our Christian tradition, and we don't want any of it to change. No matter how forward thinking or progressive we may believe ourselves to be as Christians, every Christmas we turn into traditionalists. And our Christmas traditions give us comfort and hope, year after year after year.

But isn't it ironic that as we celebrate the nativity of Jesus—a day steeped in sameness—we are celebrating a great moment of phenomenal change in human history? We are, in fact, celebrating a moment when God entered into history and nothing has ever been the same since then.

Incarnation means change. It means God coming into our time and

space, into our lives and comfort zones. God's coming shakes things up and recreates them in new ways. Through the incarnation, God confronts us with change and challenges us to be co-creators with God in the world around us.

As we celebrate the greatest change ever, we realize that change is not something to fear. Indeed, change is the very nature of life. It is the nature of the Church. It is, as well, the nature of our Region. We are intentionally moving from occasional changes to ongoing change.

So during this Christmas season, let's luxuriate in our traditions, all the while embracing a willingness to pick up our gifts and go to work with God to face and implement change as we. . .

*Discover our **PASSION**
and
Realize our **MISSION**.*

*Merry Christmas from
Your ABCRM Board and Staff*

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Have a Really *Real* Christmas

One of my family's traditions is to keep all the Christmas cards we get and use them as prayer reminders through the year. Try it. It's a wonderful way to "recycle."

Sorting through the cards, I'm fascinated by the images that have become part of Christmas. The scenes are dominated by New England snow-scapes, sometimes with a horse-drawn sleigh. Darling animals abound: reindeer, cute little mice, raccoons, and even frogs. Angels are a big hit, often the cuddly kind that would never need to say, "Fear not!" Occasionally the holy family is there, appearing calm and serene, perhaps even sporting halos.



It's okay to connect Christmas with warm and lovely sentiment, and the sending of cheerful cards is a rich, delightful tradition. Yet, when we read the biblical account of the first Christmas, we see a very different picture. The main theme seems to be disruption and disturbance. The angels, who play such a prominent role, are always frightening.

Zechariah prays for "*deliverance from those who hate us*" (Luke 1:71). Simeon mysteriously predicts that "*a sword will pierce [Mary's] soul*" (Luke 2:35). Even Mary's own hymn of praise mentions rulers blasted and kingdoms overthrown (see Luke 1:46-55).

It's much the same at the start of the story. When God's messenger came to Mary with the news of her impending conception and the subsequent birth of God's Son, she uttered no placid benediction. She was "*greatly troubled*" and "*afraid;*" and said at first, "*This can't be! I'm a virgin!*" (Luke 1:34).

Mary's dilemma has lost some of its pathos in our post-Christian culture. In her day, Jewish girls who got pregnant out of wedlock were likely to be stoned to death. She must have been afraid. With evidence of her apparent offense literally growing inside her, Mary hustled off to the one person who might understand: her relative Elizabeth, also miraculously pregnant. Later, when Elizabeth's son was born, the whole village gathered to celebrate the miracle. By contrast, Mary gave birth far from home, with no family present, and no villagers rejoicing.

Does this sound like what we see in the common portraits of the season? Not exactly! Perhaps we avoid the unsettling realities of the real Christmas because we don't like to consider that the real purpose of His

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God's redeeming grace almost always comes with a two-edged sword: not only does it cut away our sin, but it pierces our souls as well. Mary, brave girl that she was, embraced that sword, with both its edges: "*Be it unto me according to Thy word*" (Luke 1:38). She was the first person to accept Jesus on His own life-disrupting terms.

Have you accepted Him? Have your family members? What about those people on that Christmas list of yours? What could you say to them this year to show them Jesus? The *real* Jesus. He is the One they need! Share Him with them!

John Roberts, Pastor
First Baptist Church, Sterling, CO
If you care to post a response,
you can do so on John's blog,
at [http://
onceaweekforgod.blogspot.com/](http://onceaweekforgod.blogspot.com/)

JESUS IS THE REASON FOR THE SEASON

A Blessed Advent and Christmas Season to You from the WAC

May this Advent and Christmas be different than all others. May it truly be for you a time of new birth and renewal. The Wyoming Association of Churches (WAC) offers you this greeting and urges you to pray for the common life and work of all WAC churches during this holy season.

In the Tradition of Amos

Justice is a term that gets bantered about quite a bit. Usually we think of legal justice which comprises the heart and soul of our court system. But justice goes beyond the courts. As a people of faith, we have long been exposed to the concepts of social and environmental justice. Most of us believe that despite our human efforts, divine justice will ultimately prevail.

For churches, the call to social justice has always been front and center. Most church leaders espouse this in their thinking even if sometimes they become timid in their actions. True social justice means working to bring about social and economic changes that will allow people to change their lives for the better.

There is also a difference between “social work” and “social justice.” I heard this best put by defining social work as a group of well-meaning people standing below a cliff where people were falling off. Their job is to catch them in a net in order to save them from great harm. Social justice, on the other hand, involves a group of people standing above the



cliff and working with those potential victims to keep them from falling off the cliff in the first place. This involves making our churches proactive because God does not want them to fall.

The Old Testament is filled with stories of how people turned from God to seek out a life of pleasure and luxury. On their way to the top, they would often trample on the rights of others. God sent articulate prophets to point out the dire consequences of their ways. These were stalwart visionaries like Jeremiah and Hosea. My favorite is Amos whose powerful voice spoke so profoundly that its echoes carry into our world today. *“But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream”* (Amos 5:24).

When Jesus came along he was expected to follow the religious norms and customs of his day. But instead, he pushed the envelope and

continued to speak in the tradition of the prophets, whom he was fond of quoting. He spoke constantly about the poor and the need for his followers to serve them. The Church is at its best when it follows in that tradition.

Over its 30 year history, the Wyoming Association of Churches has done its small part in being a force for social justice in a state where that term is rarely heard. Churches are often very good at charity and catching people when they fall. We are often challenged when we are asked to keep them from falling in the first place.

May this Advent season be for us a time for listening to the prophets. May this be a time for discerning our individual and collective call to social justice.

Warren Murphy
Director of Ministry and Mission
Wyoming Association of Churches
Cody, WY

Leadership Changes

(since 9/30/06)

Jerry Springston, interim minister, First Baptist Church, Grand Junction, CO.

Benjamin Reynolds resigned as senior pastor, Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church, Colorado Springs, CO.

Cleveland Thompson, senior pastor, Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church, Colorado Springs, CO.

Dennis Bradley resigned, First Baptist Church, Lamar, CO.

Mike Halliburton resigned, First Baptist Church, Lander, WY (effective December 31, 2006) to accept the senior pastor position at First Baptist Church, Nampa, ID.

2007 Planning Calendar Available Online

The 2007 ABCUSA Planning Calendar is now available online for you to download. Go to <http://www.abc-usa.org> and click on the appropriate link from the homepage.

PrayerNet is Now Interactive

- If you submit your e-mail address in the appropriate field of the ABCUSA PrayerNet request form, you will receive a response assuring you that prayer has been offered on your behalf.
- In addition, if you give permission in the body of your request, the General Secretary/Denominational Pastor will send your request to all members of the PrayerNet via e-mail using only first names (or different names if you prefer).
- If you are a member of the ABCUSA PrayerNet, they will send those requests to you and thus broaden the prayer support and caring within our ABCUSA family of faith. They will, of course, use the utmost judicious care in sending out those requests keeping sensitive or personal information completely private.

For more information about PrayerNet, go to <http://www.abc-usa.org/ChurchLife/Worship/Praynet.aspx>

Police Chaplains Support Local Officers



“What do you do? Pronounce people dead?” That was the question posed by a person in a restaurant who noticed my police chaplain’s shirt. No, the work of the police chaplain is to assist the community and its police officers in a variety of ways.

Heavy on the list is the difficult work of informing family and friends of injury or death of a family member. We are often present at homicide and suicide scenes, as well as other sudden deaths situations. We go to the schools after the deaths of school children or school faculty.

We seek ways to honor and support the officers. Officers, doctors, EMT personnel, nurses, and firemen are people that hurt when others around them die. I recently prayed a prayer similar to last rites at the request of a Catholic couple who had just had a still born infant. I spent time with two doctors, several nurses, parents, and grandparents.

We also like to simply give support to police officers and police families on ride-a-longs. In just three hours of a ride-along, I was with an officer at auto accidents, provided household assistance to the elderly,

witnessed the writing of reports, assisted ambulance crews two times, and participated in other incidents. In their high stress jobs, officers can use a little common friendship and support. Chaplains often become best of friends after breaching the so-called “blue wall.”

I serve as Deputy Commander of the Fort Morgan Police Department Chaplains which means I do much of the training. Recently I led a Chaplains’ training session for Brush and Fort Morgan Chaplains in the police headquarters training room. I have helped get the chaplaincy program going with the Brush PD and the Washington County Chaplains.

*Submitted by Tom Wheeler
Pastor, First Baptist Church
Fort Morgan, CO
He is pictured at the left in the picture above with other police chaplains in Fort Morgan.*

Other police chaplains in the Region of whom we are aware are Alvin Wilkerson of Flagler, CO, who is serving the Highway Patrol and Mark Jervis with the Gillette, WY Police Department. If you know of others who serve in this capacity, please let the Region office know.

E-mail information to office@abcrcm.org

In the Winter Garden

When I was in college, I joined a small Christian singing group called "ACTS." We had many wonderful traditions, and—as a Christian singing group—Christmas caroling during finals was, of course, a favorite among them. The group got started several years before I arrived and, as story has it, the first year they went caroling, they decided to walk among the neighborhoods near campus. Apparently they felt that the homeowners were unappreciative of their songs and the following year decided that they would stick to the dorms. When school came back in session in January, however, they discovered a full-page ad that had been taken out in the campus newspaper: "Would the group that came and sang so nicely at my home last year please come caroling again?"

Of course, they went. And every year after that. We sang around campus, then walked to this elderly woman's home to sing for her. This

became the most meaningful part of the caroling tradition.

During my junior year, when we arrived, we were greeted, as always, by cookies and hot chocolate, but this year also by her nurse. She wasn't up to seeing us, we were told, but she still wanted to hear us sing. We sang a few Christmas songs and then asked if she had any requests. She asked us to sing "In the Garden." It wasn't a Christmas song, but we managed to figure out the words and put together a decent rendition. As we left, her nurse told us, "Thank you so much; that's her favorite hymn. It means so much to her to hear you sing it."

The woman, whose name I don't remember but who touched all of us deeply by her simple act of making us feel appreciated, died a few months later. "In the Garden" has been a particularly special hymn for me since then, and I realize it's not so un-Christmasy after all. As I prepare for Christmas this Advent season, I shall try to remember to tarry in the garden, share in the joy, and anticipate the coming of Him who walks with me and talks with me and tells me I am His own.

*Emily Mankin
(pictured at left, front)
Laywoman
First Baptist Church
Boulder, CO*

*Emily's article was first
printed in the 2006 Advent
booklet published
by her church where
Nancy Darnell is the pastor.*



Bacone College Announces Changes in Campbell's Labels for Education Program

(While Bacone College has asked us to share this update with you, the label information applies to all places that benefit from the Labels for Education Program.)

For many years now, Bacone College has participated in the Campbell's Labels for Education Program. In previous years, this project has allowed for the purchase of a 15-passenger van, as well as much needed office supplies such as paper shredders, a VCR/DVD player, and digital cameras.

Campbells recently changed the guidelines for the program. Now Campbell's will only accept UPC symbols from their products, and not the entire label. If you have labels that you are currently saving, please forward them to Bacone, and they'll prepare them for shipping. Since supporters are no longer required to send the entire label—only the UPC portion—this should save on postage. For a complete list of labels that are being accepted, please visit the Campbell's website: <http://www.labelsforeducation.com>.

Bacone College is a four-year liberal arts college affiliated with ABCUSA/National Ministries embracing an historic educational mission to American Indians.



Labels for Education

J. Alfred Smith Sr. Inaugural Institute Offers Prophetic Ministry Training

National Ministries and Palmer Theological Seminary are partnering to offer a five-day teaching and preaching event January 15-19, 2007, for people with a passion for justice. A two-credit January term course emphasizing the prophetic and pastoral ministry style of our 2006 Gathering keynote speaker, J. Alfred Smith Sr. is central to the event to be held at the seminary, located in Wynnewood, PA.

This institute seeks to embody Smith's ministry in order to challenge, cultivate, and equip a new generation of prophets who build their ministries with firm commitment to social justice. *Speak Until Justice Wakes*, the theme of the inaugural institute session, is also the name of Smith's latest book published by Judson Press in 2006. Smith will be in attendance at the J-term to lecture and provide learning opportunities in informal settings, such as lunchtime conversations.

Faculty members from the seminary will offer courses that explore the lives and ministries of those engaged in prophetic ministry and give students opportunity to learn from those who have expertise in exegeting a community.

A visiting lecturer for the institute, Obery M. Hendricks Jr. has a new book out: *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted*. He is professor of Biblical Interpretation at the New York Theological Seminary and an ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Marvin McMickle, also a visiting lecturer, is a nationally known preacher and political activist, and one of the foremost scholars of African American history.

"This institute draws its inspiration and insight from J. Alfred Smith's ministry, in both its congregational and community aspects," said Dwight D. Lundgren, National Ministries' coordinator for Intercultural Ministries and Reconciliation. "His compassionate, dynamic witness to the Gospel also makes it clear that socially prophetic leadership is essential to effective pastoral ministry."

Smith is senior pastor of the historic Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, CA., and Distinguished

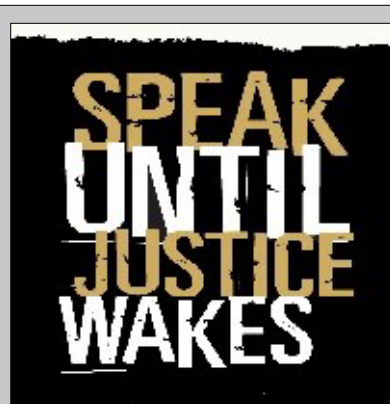
Professor of Christian Ministry and Preaching at the American Baptist Seminary of the West (ABSW) and the Graduate Theological Seminary in Berkeley. Whether in the academy or church, he champions the causes of the poor and downtrodden—"the left-outs and the left-behinds"—and gives voice to those who are rejected and treated with disdain.

As pastor of Allen Temple, Smith leads a church that has a rich heritage of social justice ministry to its community. And during his visionary leadership, Allen Temple has grown to a membership of 5,500, while continuing its legacy in holistic ministries focused on redeeming and transforming whole persons and communities.

In addition to his professorship at ABSW, Smith is visiting professor at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA, and has served as acting dean of the American Baptist Seminary of the West. He is a past national president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention and past president of the American Baptist Churches of the West.

Ten colleges and universities and 16 seminaries and theological schools across the United States and Puerto Rico are related to American Baptist Churches USA through National Ministries, which awarded \$315,000 in scholarships and financial aid to American Baptist undergraduate, graduate and seminary students last year.

This article made available by the National Ministries News Service



For further information or to register, contact the Registrar's Office at Palmer Theological Seminary at 800-220-3287.

Download the registration form at <http://www.palmerseminary.edu/news/asmith.shtml>

Christmas the way God meant it to be. . .

A Tornado of Love

Tornadoes are one of nature's most violent storms. In an average year, about 1,000 tornadoes are reported across the United States, resulting in 80 deaths and over 1,500 injuries. A tornado is a violently rotating column of air extending from a thunderstorm to the ground. The most violent tornadoes are capable of tremendous destruction with wind speeds of 250 mph or more. Damage paths can be in excess of one mile wide and 50 miles long. Tornadoes kill and destroy. In fact, tornadoes are put into five categories. An F1 is a light tornado and a F5 is the strongest one that does incredible damage.

What we need in our world today, especially during this Advent season, is an F5 tornado of love, a love that will sweep throughout our churches, schools, neighborhoods, and throughout the length and breadth of this great country. Is this possible? Is this possible when there is so much conflict among church leaders? Is it possible amidst the strife and tensions in God's house and schisms in the church? Some of these conflicts and tensions are so deep-seated that they are not easily settled.

I invite you to reflect on the birth of Jesus. He brought in a new kingdom. Donald B. Kraybill calls it the upside-down kingdom. He says that in this upside-kingdom, *agape* or utterly unselfish love becomes the new rule of governance. Indeed, this upside-down kind of love goes

beyond personal passion, sweet friendship, and benevolent do-goodism. *Agape*, he says, supersedes self interest. It is a love which acts. It concretely loves even enemies.

During this season of Christmas, let us be reminded that God loves this world and sent Jesus Christ to be born so that the world would experience this incredible love. God expects us to share this love with others.

Our personal faith as well as our church programs, both locally and globally, must be based on this truth: God is love and this love which was extended to the world some 2000 years ago in Bethlehem's stable is still a part of God's plan today. That plan requires that you and I and all of God's children step out of our comfort zones and make Christ's love a reality in the lives of people in need in our communities and as far beyond as we can reach. It means checking our attitudes, getting rid of selfishness, and replacing it with *selflessness*. It means celebrating Christ's birth the way it was meant to be celebrated by sharing joy, hope, and peace with all of humanity.

Can you imagine what will happen if Christians intentionally live out the gospel of love? It will be like a tornado of love, sweeping through the earth, touching the hearts and lives of people everywhere. It will be Christmas the way God meant it to be.

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Rodney Ragwan, Global Mission Partnership Specialist and Doctoral Student at Palmer Theological Seminary in Philadelphia

Holiday Schedule

This is the last issue of the *Rocky Mountain American Baptist* to be published this year. The next issue will be posted on January 15, 2007. The deadline for submissions is January 10. As always, we invite you to contribute news from your local church and auxiliary organizations.

Weekly devotionals will continue to be posted to the ABCRM website. Yes, devotional writers are welcome—and needed!

The ABCRM Office will be closed from December 22, 2006 - January 1, 2007. All ABCRM staff persons will be at their desks (and phones!) on January 2.

Reminder of January Activities:

Northern Front Range Cluster Planning Meeting at FBC/Greeley, January 11
Front Range Camping Meeting at Region Office, January 13
Baptist History and Polity Course at Region Office, January 12-14
ABW Min/CO, Winter Retreat at Silvendale Ranch, Loveland, January 19-21



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