

The Vanderveer Park UMC

perspective

NEWSLETTER OF VANDERVEER PARK UMC
DECEMBER 2021 – VOLUME 11 NO. 6

From the Pastor's Pen

Grace and Peace,

The holiday season is upon us and many of us are eager to get caught up in the holiday spirit. As we dust off our holiday decorations and review our holiday musical playlist, it may be unusually difficult for us to embrace the full essence of the holidays. The weight of the past 20 months has definitely taken its toll. Concerns about the relationship between police and community weigh heavily, concerns about political and civil unrest weigh heavily, concerns about judicial and healthcare inequity weigh heavily, concerns about job and food insecurity weigh heavily; on top of them all is the weight of the Covid-19 pandemic which has made the weight of the times almost too much to bear.

My prayer is that you find comfort in the words of Jesus who said;

28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."
Matthew 11:28–30 (NRSV)

Jesus has much to teach us about persevering in difficult times and He invites us to learn these lessons from a position of rest and peace. A rest and peace that may only be found as we put our faith in Him. In Isaiah 26:3–4 (NRSV) we find this encouragement from the prophet:
3 Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace— in peace because they trust in you. 4 Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock.

I believe it is still possible to find hope, peace, joy and love in this holiday season. You will find it as you trust the Lord and turn over every burden and care to Him in sincere prayer. We encourage you to join with your church family here at Vanderveer Park UMC as we offer worship, praise and prayer to our burden bearing God this holiday season. May the peace of the Lord, which is beyond understanding, be with you; may the joy of the Lord provide you with the strength needed for these days; may the love of the Lord overflow in and through you that your holiday season will be bright! Its time to shine!

In God's Service,

Pastor Melvin D. Boone

Church Events

- **Dec 5th — 2nd Sunday of Advent/Communion Sunday**
- **Dec 12th – 3rd Sunday of Advent**
- **Dec 19th – 4th Sunday of Advent**
- **Dec 23rd Caroling/ Annual Toy Giveaway at 7:00 pm**
- **Dec 20th Men's Breakfast**
- **Dec 24th Christmas Eve Service at 6:30 pm**
- **Dec 31st Watchnight Service at 10pm**

Christmas at Risk

By Tanya Rodriguez

If you have been paying attention to media reports as I have, you may have noticed that there has been quite the concern regarding retail stock for the holidays. One report caught my eye reading “Christmas at Risk as Supply Chain ‘Disaster’ Only Gets Worse.” The headline almost suggests that Christmas will not arrive if consumers fail to attain all the items on their wish lists. Another news report strongly urged retailers to start their shopping early to avoid disappointing their families. The real concern is that even

after an unprecedented worldwide pandemic, we still lose sight of what is truly important.

The reality is Christmas has been at risk for decades now. Not because the supply of toys and other coveted items are low in stock, or that the cost of ham, turkey and many of the other festive dinner “fixings” will inflate in price, but because the vast majority of those celebrating the holiday have lost its meaning. While the media propagates the notion that

Christmas will be lacking without the right items to make it complete, the truth is the season will fall short if the children of God fail to show up with the right spirit. This concept that we need to keep the Christ in Christmas is certainly not a new one. However, I believe most of us are either unaware or fail to acknowledge what that entails. Christmas is the recognition of Christ’s birth so how can we celebrate without inviting him to the festivities? But what does that truly mean? It means more than saying “Merry Christmas” instead of the politically correct “Happy Holidays” or attending mass

on Christmas eve. Our Savior is omnipresent and as Christians He lives in us. It is therefore up to us to make sure the Christ in us shines through so that His presence is felt by all we encounter.

The way to bring Christ to the Christmas of our neighbors is to show kindness, forgiveness, compassion, and love as Jesus did; do an unsolicited good deed, call someone who is lonely, sick, or shut in, pray with someone who needs encouragement. Most importantly always carry the Spirit of our Heavenly Father beyond the holiday season.

“It is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives in me.” Galatians 2:20

How Can I

By Ingrid Peters

How can I sing when all I want to do is cry?
I can when I turn to God who promised to dry
all my tears.

How can I pray when I feel that my prayers are
not being answered?
I can when I remember all the prayers God has
answered.

How can I be thankful when my heart is
breaking?
I can when I give my heart to God
and trust that He will always mend it.

How can I be open to act in love?
I can when I open myself to receive His love.

How can I discern His will for my life?
I can when I study and follow the guidance of
His Word.

When I remember that in *all* circumstances,
I am to give everything to God,
I know that through Him I can and that I always
will.

2022 Bible Reading Challenge

If you have never read the Bible through, let me challenge you to make 2022 your year.

With a little diligence and commitment, you can do that. There are many great resources to help you out.

Q. Why read the Bible in a year?

A. This is a short enough period of time to get a good overview while being a long enough period of time to feel doable. You shouldn’t have forgotten everything you read in Genesis by the time you get to Revelation. Yet it only amounts to 15-20 minutes of reading per day.

Q: How do I discipline my life to keep up with this?

A: You need to develop a simple daily habit of reading (if you don’t already have one).

Q: How do I pace myself to read through my Bible in a year?

A: If you read about 5 chapters per day, you will get through your Bible in one year!

Check out pages 5-9 for a Comprehensive Reading Plan.

By Dr. Rhonda Cambridge-Phillip MD, MPH, CHC

The holiday season is a great time to fellowship with family and friends. It's also a great time to enjoy some of our favorite foods. The holiday season may be more important this year because many of us are suffering from "cabin fever" brought about by the "new normal" of pandemic COVID-19 life. Research has shown that the average American adult gains anywhere from two to five pounds during the holiday season. On the surface this may not sound like a lot; but it can still throw off your overall health and wellness. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle over the holidays can seem like an overwhelming challenge, but it is doable. The key is finding balance. Check out the tips below to avoid over-indulging while still enjoying great food.

1. Do not skip meals. Skipping meals may lead us to overeat. It is especially important to eat breakfast because research shows that those who eat a healthy meal in the morning tend to consume less calories throughout the day. Snack on healthier foods throughout the day. This may help avoid over-indulging as well.
2. Eat healthy before holiday gatherings. If you fill up on healthy foods before the gathering, you are less likely to over-indulge than if you arrive hungry.
3. Fill up on veggies first. This leaves less room for the less healthy foods thus allowing us to eat them in moderation.
4. Stay Hydrated. Drink a full glass of water before those big holiday meals. This step will help keep our food intake in check because the water will fill us up allowing for portion control.
5. Eat slowly. Putting down your fork between bites allows you to eat slowly. It takes 20-30 minutes after we start eating, for our brain to realize that we are full.
6. Enjoy decadent desserts in moderation. As we know, sweets dominate the food pyramid during the holiday season, and I would never stand in the way of our sweet tooth. I just

recommend enjoying our desserts in moderation.

7. Do not forget to get your ZZZ's. Sleep deprivation can make it harder to control our weight. It can also make it harder to manage blood sugar levels. In addition, when we are not getting enough sleep, we tend to make less healthy food choices. We tend to eat more and prefer high-fat, high-sugar foods. Try to get 7-8 hours of sleep each night.
8. Keep Moving. Be sure to stay active throughout the holiday season because this is your secret weapon to avoid weight gain. Exercising can help make up for eating far more than usual. It also helps reduce stress which is often high during the holiday times. Consider taking a walk after a holiday meal.
9. Food is not the reason for the season. Remember that although food is a big part of our holiday season, it is not the most important part. Gathering with friends and family and being thankful to Our Creator is what the season is all about. Focusing on what really matters will take our focus off less healthy options.
10. Be patient with yourself. Give yourself grace over this holiday season. We have been through a lot over the past year and a half. Do your best. Do not punish yourself just because you have over-indulged. Take a deep breath and decide to make better choices moving forward.



Start the New Year With a Positive Attitude

The start of a new year is a great chance to get the next 12 months off to a good start. There is a lot to be said for “positive thinking” and many people swear by living in a positive mindset as it brings more positive impacts into your life.

Whether you believe this or not, living your life in a positive mindset is never going to be a bad thing. Stop your old habits and see 2022 as the time to set new goals and change your attitude if you want to. It is up to you after all.

1. **Start each day positively** - Get up and before you let yourself get into a negative mindset make a promise to be positive. Adopt new values and read about positivity and mindfulness in books or listen to them on audio. Perhaps, have a listen or read while you are commuting to set you up for a positive day.
2. **Get positive habits** - Instead of thinking negative thoughts you need to train your mind to be positive. It is easy for people to get bad habits, but it is just as easy to develop good habits as well. Decide to eat well, drink plenty of water and get plenty of exercise which all help in a positive mental attitude.
3. **Stick with people who bring you up and not down** - No one needs toxic people in their lives and if there are people who bring you down you may want to consider them letting them play a role in your life. Friends and family should be supportive of you and help you to be a better person. They should encourage you to achieve your dreams and understand you want to spend time chasing them.
4. **Celebrate the good things in your life** - The little things in life matter so much and you should take a moment each day to be grateful for each good thing in your life. Celebrate if you get a pay rise and if you close a deal at work; feel happy. Don't think negatively and tell yourself you should have got this or done more. You are doing great and pat yourself on the back for it.
5. **Stick with it** - Don't give up on your positive mindset after a few weeks as it can take ages for you to see results from the positivity. It is about the “law of attraction” and though there are lots to know about this you need to be positive to attract positive things in your life. This means sticking to your guns and remaining committed to a good positive lifestyle.

Good luck!

Winter Reading List

Adult

ADVENTuring to the Manger
25 Devotionals for Christmas
Rev. Betsy Haas

Anti-Racism 4REALS: Real Talk with Real
Strategies in Real Time for Real Change
Shelia M. Beckford & Michelle Ledder

Crazy Faith
Michael Todd

Children/Youth

Best Nerds Forever
James Patterson and Chris Grabenstein

Home is not a country
Safia Elhillo

The Christmas Promise: A Captivating Retelling
of the Birth of Jesus
Alison Mitchell

Marvelous Me: Inside and Out (All about Me)
Lisa Marie Bullard

Simon B Rhymin
Dwayne Reed

When I Pray for You
Matthew Paul Turner

Comprehensive Bible Reading Plan (365 Days)

Ready for the incredible privilege and adventure of reading the Bible through cover to cover? We hope so! It takes only about fifteen minutes a day. Enjoy! As you read, ask the Lord to help you see the redemptive story of the Bible. It's the heartbeat of every book from Genesis to Revelation.

Day	Today's Scripture Reading
Day 1	Genesis 1-3
Day 2	Genesis 4-6
Day 3	Genesis 7-9
Day 4	Genesis 10-12
Day 5	Genesis 13-15
Day 6	Genesis 16-18
Day 7	Genesis 19-21
Day 8	Genesis 22-24
Day 9	Genesis 25-27
Day 10	Genesis 28-30
Day 11	Genesis 31-33
Day 12	Genesis 34-36
Day 13	Genesis 37-39
Day 14	Genesis 40-42
Day 15	Genesis 43-46
Day 16	Genesis 47-50
Day 17	Exodus 1-3
Day 18	Exodus 4-6
Day 19	Exodus 7-9
Day 20	Exodus 10-12
Day 21	Exodus 13-15
Day 22	Exodus 16-18
Day 23	Exodus 19-21
Day 24	Exodus 22-24
Day 25	Exodus 25-27
Day 26	Exodus 28-30
Day 27	Exodus 31-33
Day 28	Exodus 34-36
Day 29	Exodus 37-40
Day 30	Leviticus 1-3
Day 31	Leviticus 4-6
Day 32	Leviticus 7-9
Day 33	Leviticus 10-12
Day 34	Leviticus 13-15
Day 35	Leviticus 16-18
Day 36	Leviticus 19-21
Day 37	Leviticus 22-24
Day 38	Leviticus 25-27
Day 39	Numbers 1-3
Day 40	Numbers 4-6

Day	Today's Scripture Reading
Day 41	Numbers 7-9
Day 42	Numbers 10-12
Day 43	Numbers 13-15
Day 44	Numbers 16-18
Day 45	Numbers 19-21
Day 46	Numbers 22-24
Day 47	Numbers 25-27
Day 48	Numbers 28-30
Day 49	Numbers 31-33
Day 50	Numbers 34-36
Day 51	Deuteronomy 1-3
Day 52	Deuteronomy 4-6
Day 53	Deuteronomy 7-9
Day 54	Deuteronomy 10-12
Day 55	Deuteronomy 13-15
Day 56	Deuteronomy 16-18
Day 57	Deuteronomy 19-21
Day 58	Deuteronomy 22-24
Day 59	Deuteronomy 25-27
Day 60	Deuteronomy 28-30
Day 61	Deuteronomy 31-34
Day 62	Joshua 1-3
Day 63	Joshua 4-6
Day 64	Joshua 7-9
Day 65	Joshua 10-12
Day 66	Joshua 13-15
Day 67	Joshua 16-18
Day 68	Joshua 19-21
Day 69	Joshua 22-24
Day 70	Judges 1-3
Day 71	Judges 4-6
Day 72	Judges 7-9
Day 73	Judges 10-12
Day 74	Judges 13-15
Day 75	Judges 16-18
Day 76	Judges 19-21
Day 77	Ruth 1-4
Day 78	1 Samuel 1-3
Day 79	1 Samuel 4-6
Day 80	1 Samuel 7-9

Comprehensive Bible Reading Plan (365 Days) cont.

Day	Today's Scripture Reading
Day 81	1 Samuel 10-12
Day 82	1 Samuel 13-15
Day 83	1 Samuel 16-18
Day 84	1 Samuel 19-21
Day 85	1 Samuel 22-24
Day 86	1 Samuel 25-27
Day 87	1 Samuel 28-31
Day 88	2 Samuel 1-3
Day 89	2 Samuel 4-6
Day 90	2 Samuel 7-9
Day 91	2 Samuel 10-12
Day 92	2 Samuel 13-15
Day 93	2 Samuel 16-18
Day 94	2 Samuel 19-21
Day 95	2 Samuel 22-24
Day 96	1 Kings 1-3
Day 97	1 Kings 4-6
Day 98	1 Kings 7-9
Day 99	1 Kings 10-12
Day 100	1 Kings 13-15
Day 101	1 Kings 16-18
Day 102	1 Kings 19-22
Day 103	2 Kings 1-3
Day 104	2 Kings 4-6
Day 105	2 Kings 7-9
Day 106	2 Kings 10-12
Day 107	2 Kings 13-15
Day 108	2 Kings 16-18
Day 109	2 Kings 19-21
Day 110	2 Kings 22-25
Day 111	1 Chronicles 1-6
Day 112	1 Chronicles 7-9
Day 113	1 Chronicles 10-12
Day 114	1 Chronicles 13-15
Day 115	1 Chronicles 16-18
Day 116	1 Chronicles 19-21
Day 117	1 Chronicles 22-25
Day 118	1 Chronicles 26-29
Day 119	2 Chronicles 1-3
Day 120	2 Chronicles 4-6
Day 121	2 Chronicles 7-9
Day 122	2 Chronicles 10-12
Day 123	2 Chronicles 13-15
Day 124	2 Chronicles 16-18

Day	Today's Scripture Reading
Day 125	2 Chronicles 19-21
Day 126	2 Chronicles 22-24
Day 127	2 Chronicles 25-27
Day 128	2 Chronicles 28-30
Day 129	2 Chronicles 31-33
Day 130	2 Chronicles 34-36
Day 131	Ezra 1-3
Day 132	Ezra 4-6
Day 133	Ezra 7-10
Day 134	Nehemiah 1-3
Day 135	Nehemiah 4-6
Day 136	Nehemiah 7-9
Day 137	Nehemiah 10-13
Day 138	Esther 1-3
Day 139	Esther 4-6
Day 140	Esther 7-10
Day 141	Job 1-3
Day 142	Job 4-6
Day 143	Job 7-9
Day 144	Job 10-12
Day 145	Job 13-15
Day 146	Job 16-18
Day 147	Job 19-21
Day 148	Job 22-24
Day 149	Job 25-27
Day 150	Job 28-30
Day 151	Job 31-33
Day 152	Job 34-36
Day 153	Job 37-39
Day 154	Job 40-42
Day 155	Psalms 1-5
Day 156	Psalms 6-10
Day 157	Psalms 11-15
Day 158	Psalms 16-20
Day 159	Psalms 21-25
Day 160	Psalms 26-30
Day 161	Psalms 31-35
Day 162	Psalms 36-40
Day 163	Psalms 41-45
Day 164	Psalms 46-50
Day 165	Psalms 51-55
Day 166	Psalms 56-60
Day 167	Psalms 61-65
Day 168	Psalms 66-70

Comprehensive Bible Reading Plan (365 Days) cont.

Day	Today's Scripture Reading
Day 169	Psalms 71-75
Day 170	Psalms 76-80
Day 171	Psalms 81-85
Day 172	Psalms 86-90
Day 173	Psalms 91-95
Day 174	Psalms 96-100
Day 175	Psalms 101-105
Day 176	Psalms 106-110
Day 177	Psalms 111-115
Day 178	Psalms 116-120
Day 179	Psalms 121-125
Day 180	Psalms 126-130
Day 181	Psalms 131-135
Day 182	Psalms 136-140
Day 183	Psalms 141-145
Day 184	Psalms 146-150
Day 185	Proverbs 1-3
Day 186	Proverbs 4-6
Day 187	Proverbs 7-9
Day 188	Proverbs 10-12
Day 189	Proverbs 13-15
Day 190	Proverbs 16-18
Day 191	Proverbs 19-21
Day 192	Proverbs 22-24
Day 193	Proverbs 25-27
Day 194	Proverbs 28-31
Day 195	Ecclesiastes 1-3
Day 196	Ecclesiastes 4-6
Day 197	Ecclesiastes 7-9
Day 198	Ecclesiastes 10-12
Day 199	Song of Songs 1-4
Day 200	Song of Songs 5-8
Day 201	Isaiah 1-3
Day 202	Isaiah 4-6
Day 203	Isaiah 7-9
Day 204	Isaiah 10-12
Day 205	Isaiah 13-15
Day 206	Isaiah 16-18
Day 207	Isaiah 19-21
Day 208	Isaiah 22-24
Day 209	Isaiah 25-27
Day 210	Isaiah 28-30
Day 211	Isaiah 31-33
Day 212	Isaiah 34-36

Day	Today's Scripture Reading
Day 213	Isaiah 37-39
Day 214	Isaiah 40-42
Day 215	Isaiah 43-45
Day 216	Isaiah 46-48
Day 217	Isaiah 49-51
Day 218	Isaiah 52-54
Day 219	Isaiah 55-57
Day 220	Isaiah 58-60
Day 221	Isaiah 61-63
Day 222	Isaiah 64-66
Day 223	Jeremiah 1-3
Day 224	Jeremiah 4-6
Day 225	Jeremiah 7-9
Day 226	Jeremiah 10-12
Day 227	Jeremiah 13-15
Day 228	Jeremiah 16-18
Day 229	Jeremiah 19-21
Day 230	Jeremiah 22-24
Day 231	Jeremiah 25-27
Day 232	Jeremiah 28-30
Day 233	Jeremiah 31-33
Day 234	Jeremiah 34-36
Day 235	Jeremiah 37-39
Day 236	Jeremiah 40-42
Day 237	Jeremiah 43-45
Day 238	Jeremiah 46-48
Day 239	Jeremiah 49-52
Day 240	Lamentations 1-3
Day 241	Lamentations 4-5
Day 242	Ezekiel 1-3
Day 243	Ezekiel 4-6
Day 244	Ezekiel 7-9
Day 245	Ezekiel 10-12
Day 246	Ezekiel 13-15
Day 247	Ezekiel 16-18
Day 248	Ezekiel 19-21
Day 249	Ezekiel 22-24
Day 250	Ezekiel 25-27
Day 251	Ezekiel 28-30
Day 252	Ezekiel 31-33
Day 253	Ezekiel 34-36
Day 254	Ezekiel 37-40
Day 255	Ezekiel 41-44
Day 256	Ezekiel 45-48

Comprehensive Bible Reading Plan (365 Days) cont.

Day	Today's Scripture Reading
Day 257	Daniel 1-3
Day 258	Daniel 4-6
Day 259	Daniel 7-9
Day 260	Daniel 10-12
Day 261	Hosea 1-3
Day 262	Hosea 4-6
Day 263	Hosea 7-10
Day 264	Hosea 11-14
Day 265	Joel 1-3
Day 266	Amos 1-3
Day 267	Amos 4-6
Day 268	Amos 7-9
Day 269	Obadiah
Day 270	Jonah 1-4
Day 271	Micah 1-3
Day 272	Micah 4-7
Day 273	Nahum 1-3
Day 274	Habakkuk 1-3
Day 275	Zephaniah 1-3
Day 276	Haggai 1-2
Day 277	Zechariah 1-3
Day 278	Zechariah 4-6
Day 279	Zechariah 7-10
Day 280	Zechariah 11-14
Day 281	Malachi 1-2
Day 282	Malachi 3-4
Day 283	Matthew 1-3
Day 284	Matthew 4-6
Day 285	Matthew 7-9
Day 286	Matthew 10-12
Day 287	Matthew 13-15
Day 288	Matthew 16-18
Day 289	Matthew 19-21
Day 290	Matthew 22-24
Day 291	Matthew 25-28
Day 292	Mark 1-3
Day 293	Mark 4-6
Day 294	Mark 7-9
Day 295	Mark 10-12
Day 296	Mark 13-16
Day 297	Luke 1-3
Day 298	Luke 4-6
Day 299	Luke 7-9
Day 300	Luke 10-12

Day	Today's Scripture Reading
Day 301	Luke 13-15
Day 302	Luke 16-18
Day 303	Luke 19-21
Day 304	Luke 22-24
Day 305	John 1-3
Day 306	John 4-6
Day 307	John 7-9
Day 308	John 10-12
Day 309	John 13-15
Day 310	John 16-18
Day 311	John 19-21
Day 312	Acts 1-3
Day 313	Acts 4-6
Day 314	Acts 7-9
Day 315	Acts 10-12
Day 316	Acts 13-15
Day 317	Acts 16-18
Day 318	Acts 19-21
Day 319	Acts 22-24
Day 320	Acts 25-28
Day 321	Romans 1-3
Day 322	Romans 4-6
Day 323	Romans 7-9
Day 324	Romans 10-12
Day 325	Romans 13-16
Day 326	1 Corinthians 1-3
Day 327	1 Corinthians 4-6
Day 328	1 Corinthians 7-9
Day 329	1 Corinthians 10-12
Day 330	1 Corinthians 13-16
Day 331	2 Corinthians 1-3
Day 332	2 Corinthians 4-6
Day 333	2 Corinthians 7-9
Day 334	2 Corinthians 10-13
Day 335	Galatians 1-3
Day 336	Galatians 4-6
Day 337	Ephesians 1-3
Day 338	Ephesians 4-6
Day 339	Philippians 1-4
Day 340	Colossians 1-4
Day 341	1 Thessalonians 1-5
Day 342	2 Thessalonians 1-3
Day 343	1 Timothy 1-3
Day 344	1 Timothy 4-6

Comprehensive Bible Reading Plan (365 Days) cont.

Day	Today's Scripture Reading
Day 345	2 Timothy 1-4
Day 346	Titus 1-3
Day 347	Philemon
Day 348	Hebrews 1-3
Day 349	Hebrews 4-6
Day 350	Hebrews 7-9
Day 351	Hebrews 10-13
Day 352	James 1-3
Day 353	James 4-5
Day 354	1 Peter 1-5
Day 355	2 Peter 1-3
Day 356	1 John 1-3
Day 357	1 John 4-5
Day 358	2 John, 3 John, and Jude
Day 359	Revelation 1-3
Day 360	Revelation 4-6
Day 361	Revelation 7-9
Day 362	Revelation 10-12
Day 363	Revelation 13-15
Day 364	Revelation 16-18
Day 365	Revelation 19-22

A Colonized Christmas Story

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In the colonized land of Judea, poor marginalized shepherds abided in the field, watching over flocks belonging to others. When suddenly, a messenger of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of God shone forth. They were filled with great fear. But the messenger said unto them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you, and all peoples of the world, good tidings of great joy. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Liberator, who is Christ the Lord! And this will be a sign to you, you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling-clothes lying in a trough located in a filthy, manure-filled barn.” Suddenly there appeared with the messenger a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards humanity” (Lk. 2:8-14).

The Christmas story has been retold so often, through sermons, church plays, popular literature, and movies that a false memory, detached from all reality, has been constructed. This memory romanticizes the birth of Jesus, thus masking the radical political implications of the event. Today, under our Christmas trees, we usually place a nativity scene among the multitude of conspicuous gifts which we cannot afford to give to recipients who seldom needs what we bought on credit. The baby Jesus, usually white with blue eyes and blond hair, rests comfortably in a wood-frame crib as angelic cows and donkeys gaze upon the miracle. The proud parents survey the sanitary scene as regal kings and peasant shepherds come to worship. Winged white angels surround the scene as if singing the glories of this event. And yet, stripping through the mythology we are left with a tale of the liberator of people being born in a dirty, grimy barn. Barns are smelly soiled spaces where animals, and the malodorous manure they produce, and the flies attracted to the manure create unsanitary conditions. In addition, a young maiden, either a teenager or someone who is not much older, goes through the bloody and messy process of childbirth. María was forced, like any other barn animal, to give birth amidst the unhygienic surroundings of an outbuilding.

We do not know if a midwife was present for the actual birthing event. The text is silent on that matter. But if there wasn't one, the birthing

process could only be considered to have been scarier and more traumatic. Upon the birth of Jesús, a place was needed for him to rest. Proper furniture did not exist. The text tells us that he was placed in a manger (Lk. 2:7), which our Christmas nativity scene interprets to be some type of crude crib. In reality, a manger was either a wooden box or a hole on the cave wall. The purpose of the manger was to place animal feed from where cattle ate. If the barn itself was not septic enough, the newborn was placed in an animal trough. In a very real sense, Jesús physically entered this world homeless.

The radicalness of the Gospels, usually missed by those who are privileged by houses within empire, is that the Jesús narratives are anti-colonial literature about a native resident displaced by the invading colonial power. The opening words of the Gospel of Luke set the stage. Luke begins by stating that in those days, an imperial decree was ordered from the colonial center of Rome by Cesar Augustus. To increase the revenues flowing toward the colonizer, all within the empire would be taxed. This revenue thief occurred when the Roman aristocrat, Publius Sulpicius Quirinius served as governor of Syria. To facilitate the taxing, with no regard to what hardship it might cause to the colonized, everyone had to return to their city of origin. So José left the city of Nazareth located in Galilee, toward Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, for he was of the house and lineage of a once heroic and mighty king. This descendant of royalty now made his living as a laborer, a carpenter. To Bethlehem he traveled with his espoused wife María who was great with child, in order to be taxed (Lk. 2:1-5). Remembering Jesus, all too often ignores the destitution of Jesús caused by the colonization process, missed when the scriptures are read from the center of empire.

The Gospel narratives depicts a careful dance which takes place between Rome the colonizer and Jesús the colonized. Not far from the story-telling surface is the real world dynamics and consequences of colonization.

A Colonized Christmas Story

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We see it throughout Jesús' everyday experience and how he responded to the circumstances brought about by the economic and political occupation of Judea, as made evident by questions posed concerning paying tribute to Caesar (Mt. 22:20), constantly facing danger for preaching of another reign or kingdom more powerful than the one to which Jews were subjugated (Mk. 1:15), or given a death sentence under the charge of being "king of the Jews," hence a rival sovereign (Mk. 15:2). Even the very audience that first heard the words of Jesús was fellow colonized compatriots, many of who held an abiding hatred toward the Roman oppressors. From this colonized space, the Gospel message is shaped and formed, and ignoring this historical reality leads to false remembrance, if not pure illusions.

We are told that among Jesús' entourage was Matthew the tax collector (Mt. 10:3), and Simon who was called the Zealot (Lk. 6:15). Tax collectors and zealots were deadly enemies. Given an opportunity, zealots or revolutionaries were known for ramming their blades into the backs of any tax-collecting collaborator upon whom they could lay their hands. And yet, these politically sworn enemies, the one colluding with the colonizer and the one violently rebelling, were counted among Jesús' disciple. What held them in fellowship? Could it be that Jesús modeled a new strategy between the two extremes represented by Matthew and Simon? If so, what is this reconciling praxis?

Jesús tells us to render to Caesar what is Caesar and to God what is God's (Mt. 22:21). Although Jesús is specifically referring to the colonizer's tax when he states what to render to Caesar; it seems that this imperial tax as sign signifies some deeper meaning. The tax to the empire underwrites the very structures that makes the colonization of Judea possible. Without the tax, colonialism would be useless. Such taxes, as illustrated by Cesar Augustus need for a census, create devastation for the colonized, i.e. having to return to one's city of origin and a greater financial tax burden leading to greater poverty. Yes, we are to give Caesar his tax, not because it is a civic duty, as many modern Euroamericans Christians would argue in regards to filing their own IRS tax returns, but because

failure to do so only provided the colonizer with the excuse to send the full force of the empire's military to domesticate the people with the threat of obviation for the sake of compliance. This is not some hypothetical possibility, it actually occurred in 70 CE which concluded with the destruction of the Temple.

To render unto Caesar what is Caesar may mean to pay the imperial tax as an act of survival (not civic duty), but also, it could encompass returning all of the misery, pain, and despair that colonial rule engenders. The issue raised by Jesús' call is how to render unto Caesar what Caesar deserves without bringing about the iron fist of Caesar while still planting liberative subversive seeds that may, in some distance future, blossom into salvation from evil powers, including colonial powers. The question raised for us by Jesús, the colonized man, is how to display compliance for survival's sake while disrupting the very social structures that creates, forces, and demands compliance.

*This op-ed is derived from the book *The Politics of Jesús: A Hispanic Political Theology* by Miguel De La Torre*

Giving Affirmation

I am a benevolent believer, therefore I am a grateful and cheerful giver. I sow into this church because I believe in the vision and the ministry of this church. Because I am a tither, I am not a beggar or a borrower, but a lender. I expect the windows of heaven to pour out blessings too big for me to contain, and God will rebuke the devourer for my sake. Therefore I will share my blessings with my family, my neighbors and the world. Amen.

Church Declaration

We declare this church to be a church that welcomes the Holy Spirit enthusiastically, embraces holiness totally, believes the Bible conclusively, worships the Lord exclusively, and loves one another exhaustively. Amen.