



Volume 11 Issue 12

West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle



December 2024

Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

Tracing the Story of Christmas

In order to understand the story of Christmas, we have to go back. Not back just a few thousand years to the birth of Jesus, but all the way back, back to our first parents, Adam and Eve. God placed them in the lush and perfect garden of Eden. They had everything they needed. It was perfect. Then they sinned. As a consequence, God banished them. Now Adam and Eve lived under the curse. But as God pronounced the curse, thundering from heaven, He also gave them a promise.

God gave Adam and Eve the promise of a Seed, a Seed who would be born of a woman. That Seed would make all that was wrong, right. He would make all that was broken, whole. This Seed would bring peace and harmony where strife and conflict raged like a storm-tossed sea.

In the Old Testament, the third chapter of the very first book, Genesis, speaks of conflict and enmity. Adam and Eve, who had known only the experience of tranquility, would now be locked in bitter conflict. Even the ground would be a challenge. The pierce of thorns would be the constant reminder. As the poets say, nature is red in tooth and claw. Even the promised Seed would enter into this conflict, fighting with the Serpent, the great spoiler. But Genesis 3 promises that the Seed would overcome the Serpent, securing the final victory and ushering in wave after wave of peace. The Seed, however, would be a long time coming.

Adam and Eve had Cain and Abel, and neither turned out to be the Seed. When Cain slew Abel, God gave Adam and Eve Seth, a little grace in a very troubled world. But Seth was not the Seed. More sons followed. Generations came and generations went.

Then Abraham appeared on the world's stage. God called this man from ancient times to make from him and his wife, Sarah, a great new nation that would be a beacon of light to a lost and hopeless world. Again, God made a promise to this couple of a Seed, a son. They thought it was Isaac. But Isaac died.

This story was repeated from generation to generation, building anticipation of the One to come who would make all things right, who would bring peace. A widow named Naomi and her widowed daughter-in-law, Ruth, even entered into this story. They were in desperate circumstances. There were no social nets to catch the fall of such marginalized people in the ancient world.

Without husbands and sons, without rights and means, widows lived from meal to meal. They lived on a thread of hope. Then came Boaz and the classic story of boy meets girl. Boaz met Ruth and they married. Before long, just as the curtain fell on the biblical story of Ruth, a son, a seed, was born to Ruth. This son would be a restorer of life, a redeemer. But he was only a shadow of the Seed to come. He, too, died.

The son born to Ruth and Boaz was named Obed. Obed had a son named Jesse. Jesse had many sons, and one of them was a shepherd. One time this shepherd grabbed a handful of stones and felled a giant. He faced down lions. He also was quite a musician. To everyone's surprise—even his father's—this son of Jesse, the great-grandson of Ruth and Boaz, was anointed king of Israel.



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While David was on the throne, God gave yet another promise directly to him. This was another promise of a son. God said David's son would be king forever and there would be no end to his kingdom. That was God's promise. ~ *Dr. Stephen J. Nichols, president of Reformation Bible College, chief academic officer for Ligonier Ministries, and a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow.*

A Day of Doxology November 25, 2024

In the days leading up to Thanksgiving, many of us are rightly focused on thanking God for the many blessings He has given us.

We thank God for the temporal blessings of friends, family, and earthly comforts. We thank God for every aspect of our salvation: election, regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. We thank God for our union with Christ and baptism into the body of Christ.

When we consider all that we have to be thankful for, it can be overwhelming! But the Bible gives us a way of expressing this explosion of gratitude: doxology.

What is Doxology?

Although the word doxology is familiar to most Christians, many of us may not understand it properly. As a brief definition, doxology comes from two Greek words: *Doxa*, which means “glory,” and *logos*, which refers to a word or saying. Therefore, a doxology is a word of praise about God. It is giving thanks to God by means of praise.

When we come across doxologies in Scripture, they are usually in response to some grand work of God. They are not associated with mundane or trivial things, like finding a good parking spot at the grocery store. Blurting out, “Praise the Lord!” in response to something like that may be a legitimate expression of thanks, but that is not the kind of doxology we see in Scripture.

In the Bible, doxologies consistently appear as a punctuation mark concluding a discussion of something transcendent and marvelous—particularly God’s plan of salvation. They are the words of grateful praise offered from unworthy sinners who have been redeemed.

As you find the writers of Scripture contemplating the realities of salvation, they burst into praise, like a cork being blown off a bottle when the pressure builds up. The pressure is joy, thankfulness, or gratitude, and when it builds to the point of being overwhelming, a doxology comes bursting forth.

Doxologies are explosions of praise and joy—and they come in response to contemplating God’s work of salvation. Let’s look at some examples in the New Testament.



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A Day of Doxology *Continued from Page 2*

The New Testament contains a river of doxologies flowing from the gospels to Revelation. One famous example is Paul's conclusion to Romans 11. In some ways, this doxology summarizes all the others—it is a sweeping exclamation of praise for all of God's work.

In chapters 1–11 of Romans, Paul delivers the greatest treatise on salvation ever written. He covers the whole story of salvation from beginning to end—even taking into account the future salvation of Israel. He answers every objection and leaves no stone unturned.

Then, finally, he comes to the very end of chapter 11 and bursts forth in praise,

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.
(Romans 11:33–36)

Paul began Romans with the topic of sin (Romans 1:18–3:20). Then he wrote about salvation and all of its benefits (Romans 3:21–11:32). And here he sums it all up with an explosion of wonder and gratitude toward God. This doxology in Romans 11:33–36 is the apostle's sanctified response to God's plan of salvation. And it displays the kind of attitude that should characterize every Christian response to that grand plan.

Paul does the same thing in Galatians, but it doesn't take 11 chapters to get there this time. In the very opening of the book, he writes, "*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father*" (Galatians 1:3–4).

As Paul begins to write this letter, he immediately mentions grace and peace—the two great benefits of salvation. Then he talks about the Lord Jesus Christ with the simple statement, "*who gave Himself for our sins.*" This encompasses the whole story of redemption: Christ's incarnation, His humiliation, and His substitutionary sacrifice. It's a monumental statement that emphasizes the greatest reality of salvation: the forgiveness of sin.

Paul is ruminating on the tremendous truth of forgiveness and meditating on the redemptive work of Christ. Then he follows that up with a purpose statement: "*so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.*" This age is characterized by the dominance of sin, damning ideals, and damning conduct. But we have been rescued from it! And what's more, we have been rescued from hell.

What is Paul's response to this glorious truth? "*To whom be the glory forevermore. Amen*" (Galatians 1:5). Glory to God our Father forever! Paul can't contain himself. He's just four verses into this letter, and he's already lost in wonder, love, and praise.



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A Day of Doxology *Continued from Page 3*

This is the spontaneous combustion of praise in the life of a grateful believer—one who is overwhelmed with the reality that he is delivered from his sins. He will not perish with the passing world. He has been rescued, and he will be taken to the world of eternal glory with Christ. Just that simple contemplation of the forgiveness of sins elicits doxology.

But what about the difficult times in life? Is doxology appropriate then? From a human perspective, 2 Timothy was written during a bad time in Paul's life. It is the last letter he wrote as he faced a violent death.

Even the events prior to his death were painful. He was hurt by the defection of certain people close to him (2 Timothy 4:10)—so much so that he was concerned with Timothy's own faithfulness. That's why he reminded Timothy not to have a spirit of fear and encouraged him not to abandon the faith (2 Timothy 1:7–14).

Paul was being physically persecuted by Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy 4:14). Everyone had abandoned him except Luke (2 Timothy 1:15; 4:11). He was cold (2 Timothy 4:13). He knew his death was imminent (2 Timothy 4:6). This was a deeply difficult period.

How did the apostle respond to these trying times?

At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:16–18, emphasis added)

The Lord looks after His own. Even though Paul's earthly friends wavered and abandoned him, God was faithful. Paul essentially says, "*My friends desert me; my Lord stands with me.*"

That is why Paul could confidently say, "*The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed.*" Nothing, whether man or demon, could successfully destroy Paul. Even when they killed him, the Lord delivered him "*safely to His heavenly kingdom.*" Upon death, Paul was ushered into glory (Philippians 1:23). That is true security in hard times. This leads Paul to the final verse quoted above: "*to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen*" (2 Timothy 4:18).

Doxology was Paul's way of responding to all aspects of salvation, no matter how dire his earthly circumstances were. If he thought about election—doxology. If he thought about forgiveness—doxology. If he thought about being rescued from this evil age—doxology. If he thought about eternal life—doxology.



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A Day of Doxology *Continued from Page 4*

A Day of Doxology

When we get to heaven, we are going to spend eternity praising the Lord. We will sing, “*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing*” (Revelation 5:12). We will be offering Him a doxology with every celestial breath and in every heavenly moment.

So when we are overwhelmed with the truth of God’s goodness in this life and burst forth in praising Him, we are practicing for eternity. Thanksgiving in this life is a rehearsal of our eternal praise. That’s why doxology should characterize every believer’s life. God’s gift of salvation is a permanent reason for us to offer thanks to God.

And the pinnacle of our doxology—our thanksgiving to God—is our salvation. It is good to thank the Lord for earthly things, but the greatest gift we receive from God is redemption in Christ. That is what should elicit the most gratitude from us.

Whether you meditate on one of the many biblical doxologies (Romans 16:25–27; Ephesians 1:3; Philippians 4:20; 1 Timothy 1:17; Jude 24–25) or give thanks to God in your own words, I hope that your Thanksgiving celebration is filled with gratitude for the Lord.

May doxology always be in our hearts, in our minds, and even on our lips. “*Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen*” (Philippians 4:20). ~ *Dr. John MacArthur*

Joseph: His Role in a Bigger Story

Joseph’s sudden and shocking promotion to the right hand of Pharaoh was neither karma nor compensation. The betrayal of his brothers, the indignity of slavery, and the injustice of his imprisonment were all experiences ordained by God in preparation for a monumental rescue operation.

Abundant Blessing

During Egypt’s seven years of abundance, Joseph was busy organizing the collection and storage of grain in all the cities throughout Egypt. His efforts were so successful that it became impossible to keep an accurate count of the entire supply.

It was also during this time that Joseph got married and started a family. Joseph declared God’s goodness to him in the names of his two sons. He named his firstborn Manasseh, which means forgetful. Joseph explained that the name meant, “*God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household*” (Genesis 41:51). He named his younger son Ephraim, meaning fruitful. Again he explained, “*God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction*” (Genesis 41:52).



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Joseph: His Role in a Bigger Story *Continued from Page 5*

God at the Center

Despite all that Joseph endured, God was still at the center of his thinking. The Lord enabled him to put the pain of his past behind him and to enjoy blessings in the very place where he had endured so many trials. Though Egypt was about to experience a great famine, Joseph was enjoying great abundance.

When the good years of harvest ended and the famine began, Joseph's diligent preparations paid off. Not only were the Egyptians spared from mass starvation, but multitudes of people suffering famine in the surrounding regions came to Egypt to buy food (Genesis 41:57)—including Joseph's brothers. Twenty years after they sold their brother into slavery, Jacob's ten oldest sons made the same trek to Egypt that Joseph had been forced to make long ago.

God had allowed Joseph to endure so much so that, through his efforts, Jacob's family might be rescued from famine and brought to a place where they could grow into a large nation. It was all part of fulfilling the promise the Lord made with Abraham three generations earlier (cf. Genesis 15:13–14). In an ironic turn of divine providence, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt in order to avoid death and would be rescued by the very person they sought to kill two decades earlier.

That irony was not lost on Joseph. He could see the Lord's hand of providence in their earlier actions. He understood that God was using him to preserve his family and to bring them down to Egypt. Everything was according to the Lord's will. Listen to the God-centered theology that undergirded Joseph's thinking as he comforted his brothers with these words:

I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. (Genesis 45:4–8)

Three times, Joseph emphasized that God's hand was behind it all. Joseph was not excusing his brothers' sin—he was emphasizing the fact that the Lord uses even the wicked choices of sinful people to accomplish His sovereign purposes. Because God sent Joseph to Egypt, Jacob and his entire family were saved from a famine that could have wiped out the budding nation of Israel.

The Move to Egypt

When Jacob heard the news that his beloved son Joseph was still alive, he initially did not believe it (Genesis 45:26). He was already 130 years old, but he eagerly readied himself for a journey to Egypt to see his long-lost son. As he travelled, God appeared to him in a vision and reiterated the fact that this was all part of His design to fulfill His covenant with Abraham. The Lord told Jacob, “*I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there*” (Genesis 46:3; cf. Genesis 12:1–3).



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Joseph: His Role in a Bigger Story

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Pharaoh gladly received Joseph’s father and brothers and offered them the best land in Egypt—a region called Goshen. There they were able to establish their families, raise their livestock, and thrive. Jacob lived another seventeen years in Egypt and died at the age of 147. Over the next four hundred and fifty years, Israel went from a family of seventy to a nation of nearly two million—large enough to take over the Promised Land. Looking back, we can see what Joseph couldn’t—through him, the Lord set in motion events that would shape the history of Israel, culminating in the sacrifice of His Son.

God is Still Sovereign

Although Joseph’s circumstances and his place in redemptive history were unique to him, his perspective is one that all believers ought to emulate. The God who superintended the events of Genesis 37–50 still sits on the throne of the universe. He was sovereign over the circumstances of Joseph’s life, and He is sovereign over our circumstances too. We may not always understand what is happening around us, but like Joseph, we can rest confidently in the fact that the Lord is not only in control, but using that control to further His plans.

Throughout Scripture, the theme of God’s sovereignty is repeatedly presented as a comfort to believers. We need be anxious for nothing because our heavenly Father reigns over all. He is all-powerful, all-wise, and all-present, and He has promised to work all things together for His glory and our good (Romans 8:28). We have nothing to fear because if God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31)? No one can oppose His will, and nothing can thwart His plans (Isaiah 14:27).

As these verses—and a host of others—show, the Bible is explicit in its depiction of God’s sovereign control over all things. Joseph’s example reminds us that “*our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases*” (Psalm 115:3). That means we can trust Him and wholly rest in the reality that He is on His throne. Embracing that kind of perspective won’t take our trials away, but it will enable us to find joy and peace in the midst of them (James 1:2–4). Thus, even when others hurt us or life seems difficult and unfair, we can triumphantly declare with Joseph, “*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good*” (Genesis 50:20). ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**

Christmas: Prophecy and Fulfillment

The Bible has a fondness for the number seven. For example, there are seven creation days, and Joshua and his men marched around Jericho seven times. And then, the book of Revelation features seven letters written by Jesus to seven churches, as well as seven seals, seven bowls, and seven trumpets. Seven, then, is often referred to as a “perfect number.” Even the infamous number 666 is alluding to the fact that it is not 777.

Matthew employs the number seven in the first section of his gospel (Matthew 1:17–4:17). As he describes the birth of Jesus and the period before Jesus begins to preach, he cites seven Old Testament fulfillments: the child, Jesus, is born of a virgin (1:22–23); His birth is in the city of Bethlehem (2:5–6); the flight to Egypt and the consequent return (2:15); the slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem (2:17–18); the home-base of Nazareth (2:23); the ministry of the forerunner, John the Baptist (3:1–3); and the start of Jesus’ ministry in the northern regions, where people who walked in darkness saw a great light (4:13–14). Careful checking of each of these seven events will reveal Old Testament prophecies fulfilled.



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Christmas: Prophecy and Fulfillment *Continued from Page 7*

Christmas, and what follows, lies deep in the Old Testament. At every turn, Jesus was fulfilling a role that was shaped by more than a millennium of prediction. No aspect of the Messiah's ministry of redemption was without anticipatory reflection. At the moment of Jesus' birth, the entire scope and focus of the Old Testament came into sharp relief: "*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law*" (Galatians 4:4).

Our salvation is something God has been planning for a very long time—outside of time, to be exact: in the counsels of eternity, in a covenant that was made between the three persons of the Trinity, namely, the so-called covenant of redemption. Scripture speaks of the Lamb as "*slain from the foundation of the world*" (Revelation 13:8). The second psalm seems to depict a pre-temporal account of the terms of the covenant established between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." (Psalm 2:7–9)

From eternity, the Lord has loved His people. Christmas is the visible demonstration of it; Calvary, the cost of it; resurrection and ascension, the triumph and effectiveness of it. Little wonder, then, that creatures surrounding the Lamb's throne in heaven exclaim, "*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!*" (Revelation 5:12)—a sevenfold blessing. ~ **Dr. Derek W.H. Thomas is a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow and Chancellor's Professor of Systematic and Pastoral Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary**

Finding Your Identity

Several images are used in the Bible to describe the church: the body of Christ, the elect, the house of God, the saints. One of the most meaningful expressions the Bible uses is "the people of God," the *laos theon*.

The church, then, is people. The Roman Catholic Church once declared, "Where the bishop is, there is the church." The Reformation declared, "Where the people of God are, there is the church—the church under the Lordship of Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit."

The church is neither a building nor the clergy nor an abstract institution—it is the people of God. When Martin Luther articulated his vision of the priesthood of all believers, he did not denigrate the legitimate role of the clergy. He understood that Christ has given pastors and teachers to His church, along with other offices, with specified tasks. What Luther was getting at, however, is that the priestly ministry of Christ is passed on in some measure to every believer.

Coram Deo

Give thanks that you are part of the body of Christ, the elect, the people of God. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



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If you have a birthday or anniversary in December that is not posted here or is listed in error or you do not want to be published in this newsletter, please contact Walt or e-mail him at gwlcf10415@gmail.com.

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner December 2024

Birthdays

Terrye B. (4)
Laird E. (4)
Katie G. (9)
Auden Douglas T. (12)
Jennifer A. (13)
Wilma S. (16)

Scott T. (19)
John M. (21)
Cheryl P. (22)
Jessica T. (23)
Andrew K. (31)

Anniversaries

John and Teresa H. (1)
Russ and Terrye B. (5)
John and LeAnn M. (22)

Sacrifices Pleasing to God

Hebrews 13:1—6

13 Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. ⁴ Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. ⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." ⁶ So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" ~ **ESV**



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