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PASTOR'S WIFE'S APPRECIATION DAY



THE CONGREGATION OF GETHSEMANE BAPTIST CHURCH in Berea, surprised Audra Cortez, Wife of Pastor Ed Cortez, by celebrating Pastor's wife's appreciation day. The event was held Sunday, November 16th. Audra the congregation showered Audra with gifts, and several shared memories and other special stories of how God has used Audra to bless their lives. A meal followed from Back Porch Smokehouse in Mount Vernon.



THE SEEKER
KY'S CHRISTIAN NEWS

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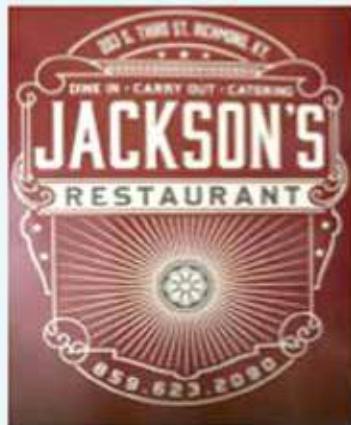


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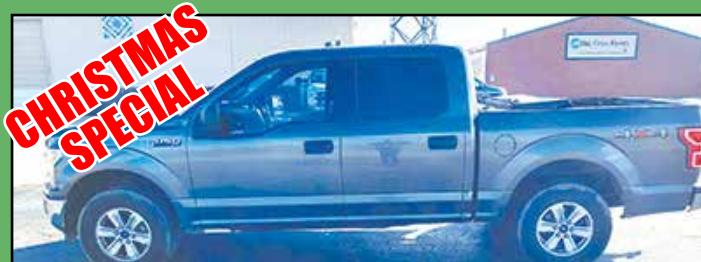
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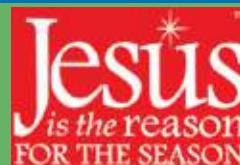


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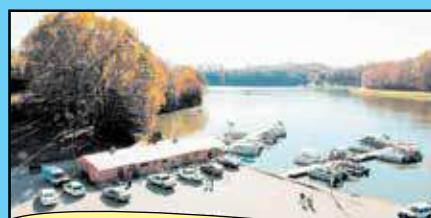


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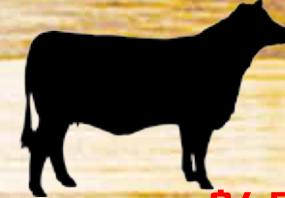
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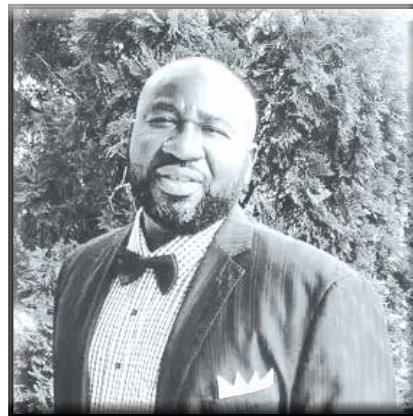


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**Rev. Arny
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March 17, 1949 - Nov. 16, 2025

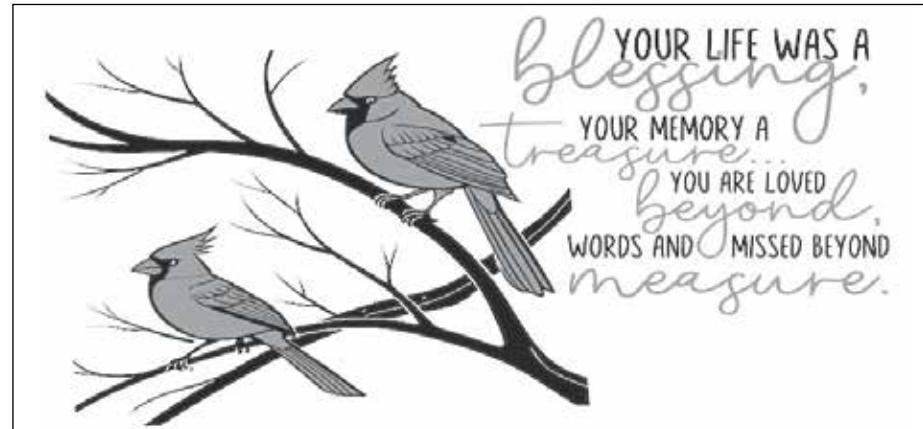
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**Arthur Harvey
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Merry Christmas!

Hope you had a happy Thanksgiving. I didn't do any cooking, and everyone was thankful for that.

Like I told the kids at church, let's all be mindful of what Jesus would want for His birthday. We can find out what is important to Him by opening the Book of instructions, the Bible.

Happy birthday Nathan Rader, and all December birthdays. Thank you for 41 years of The Seeker.

Visit Seekernews.com, for our Your Way Yahweh Devotionals. There are inspirational messages with scriptures, songs, and more! Please remember our flip book is available online, as well as extra photos and videos of regional events.

YOUR CORDIALLY INVITED...Don't miss the Dinner Christmas Show at Debbie's Music Hall. Featuring Jonathan Rader & Kristi Miller, Friday, December 12, at 6pm, in Salt Lick. See pg. 4 for details on tickets.

Let's enjoy life while we have the chance. One great way to do that is to take time out for an evening of great music and food at Charlie's Pickin' and Grinnin. More on Page 6.

We encourage you to join in worship at the church of your choice. Please visit our church directory on page 9.

As always, thank you for helping this ministry grow. It is an honor and privilege to serve. Many thanks to those who submit inspirational articles. We also thank those who allow us to distribute The Seeker in your store or business. We thank everyone who helps with selling and designing ads, and also delivering Seekers each month. This ministry would not be possible without each of YOU!

Please let us know if you appreciate The Seeker. Please post a testimonial on our website, seekernews.com.

Kristi Miller

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FROM THE EDITOR

We Want To Hear From You. Please Send Any Articles, Recipes, Jokes, Ads, or Announcements To:
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The Seeker Christian News

P.O. Box 302
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Kristi Miller,
Owner/Publisher
859-302-3103
kristimiller1005@gmail.com

PLEASE NOTE!
The deadline to get material in or out of The Seeker is the 20th of each Month.
All advertisements cancelled after our deadline, which is the 20th of each month, will incur a charge. When advertisements are cancelled on short notice, we do not have ample time to resell the spot(s) and cover our expenses.
As always, thank you for your support and consideration.
-The Seeker Christian News

NIGHT FOR LIFE

Bill Old- On Thursday, November 13th, Affirm Women's Health held its annual Night For Life at the Richmond campus of Southland Christian Church. Roughly 350 attended the gala.

Sarah Roof, Executive Director for Affirm, laid out three focus areas for the 2026 year. The first focus will be on expanding medical services. This expansion will include creating a new online chat widget to enable greater, timely access to communications between the pregnancy help centers and clients facing crisis pregnancies. Affirm plans to hire a new nurse to replace the current one who is expected to retire by the end of this year. Furthermore, Sarah shared her vision for acquiring a mobile ultrasound unit in the near future to deliver ultrasound services to clients living in rural counties, especially in southeastern Kentucky.

The second focus for 2026 will be on expanding the THRIVE outreach to public school students. THRIVE (Teaching Healthy Relationships, Integrity, and Virtue in Education) teaches students how to develop better social skills, to be more caring and responsible in their relationships with each other, and to make wiser choices in the realm of human sexuality (e.g. abstinence before marriage). Annually, over 1,000 students participate in THRIVE.

The final focus for 2026 will be on expanding educational marketing initiatives to promote the full array of services provided by Affirm. This includes increasing public awareness of the safe haven baby boxes that have been installed in Richmond and, more recently, in Berea. (As of this article, an additional baby box was just installed last Friday in neighboring Rockcastle County, bringing the total number of baby boxes installed in the Commonwealth of Kentucky to 59.)

The main contact number for the safe haven baby box program is **1-866-99BABY1**. Furthermore, Affirm plans to purchase up to five billboards to promote the pro-life message and pregnancy-related services.

The keynote speaker for the evening was Monica Kelsey, a very strong advocate for the safe haven baby box program throughout the US. She was conceived as a result of rape in August 1972 and abandoned by her birth mother a year later at

a local hospital. With much emotion, Monica described how she had hoped her conception and birth occurred under more pleasant circumstances. Those hopes were dashed after she found out the awful truth of what really happened years later. After meeting her birth mother and birth father to confirm what truly happened, Monica would begin a very difficult healing process.

A major turning point occurred while Monica was visiting a church in South Africa. It was the very first time she encountered an installed baby box. After inquiring as to how the baby box came to be, Monica returned to the US with an idea and a new calling. Being an Indiana resident, Monica researched extensively on what constituted a safe, viable baby box and lobbied state and local legislators. Despite encountering much initial skepticism and opposition, Monica prevailed and House Bill 16, authorizing the creation and installation of safe baby boxes, passed in the Indiana legislature.

The very first baby box in the US was installed in April 2016. There are currently 396 boxes in the country. To date, over 70 babies have been saved and placed for adoption. Coupled with her experiences of having served in the military and being a first responder through the local fire department, Monica's personal experiences have made her a staunch advocate for the safe haven baby box initiative. As she asserts, every child has a right to be born--regardless of the circumstances of their conception.

Anyone wanting to learn more about Affirm--its mission, the services provided, volunteer opportunities, and ways to financially support it--can reach Sarah online at affirmlifeky.org or by phone at 859-624-3942.



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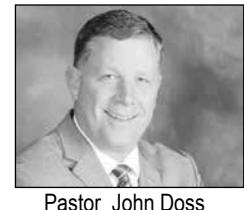


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And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

Revelation 21:5 (KJV)

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DONNA AGEE
MADISON COUNTY JUDGE EXECUTIVE
2026

DONNA AGEE is a lifelong public servant, healthcare leader, and proud Madison County resident with over 30 years of experience serving the people of Central Kentucky. A Registered Nurse and graduate of EKU's Nursing Program, Donna has dedicated her career to improving lives, from home health and senior care to behavioral health, addiction recovery, and services for the underserved.

She has held numerous leadership roles across Madison County, including as Executive Director of Dominion Senior Living and Chief Operating Officer of a Federally Qualified Health Center, where she led multimillion-dollar healthcare operations, secured vital grants, and fought for access to care for those without a voice.

But Donna's story starts on a small farm in Winchester, Kentucky, where she grew up the youngest of eleven children. Her father was a logger and her mother kept the home running cooking, canning, churning butter, and raising a strong family rooted in faith and hard work. Donna was baptized in a creek at age nine and still draws strength from her deep faith in Jesus Christ.

The first in her family to graduate from college, Donna's life has been shaped by service, grit, and grace. She and her husband of 38 years, Mike, have raised two children, April and Levi, both EKU graduates, and are now proud grandparents of two amazing boys, Jaxson and Jayce. Donna's son-in-law is a graduate of UK and a Kentucky State Policeman, continuing the family tradition of public service.

Donna is a Kentucky Colonel, award-winning nurse, and co-founder of Togetherrky.com, a nonprofit uniting churches, caregivers, and local leaders to serve the most vulnerable in our community. She proudly partners with EKU and Berea College Men's Basketball teams to bring their athletes into senior care homes to serve with kindness and compassion.

Now, Donna is ready to bring her lifelong dedication, leadership, and love for this community to the role of County Judge Executive — to lead with wisdom, serve with humility, and work tirelessly for Madison County.

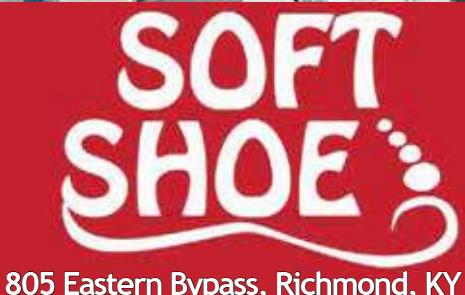
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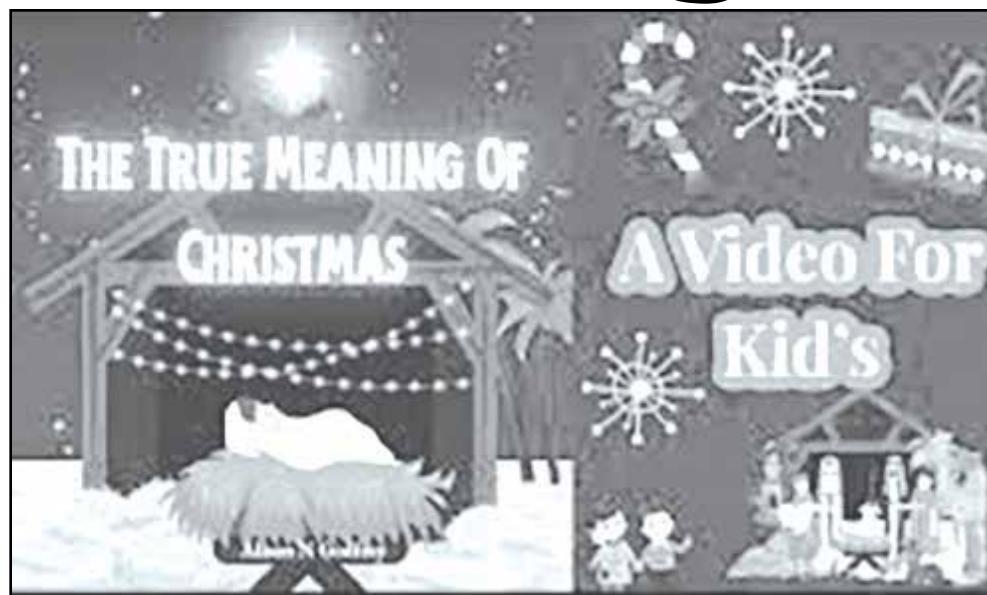
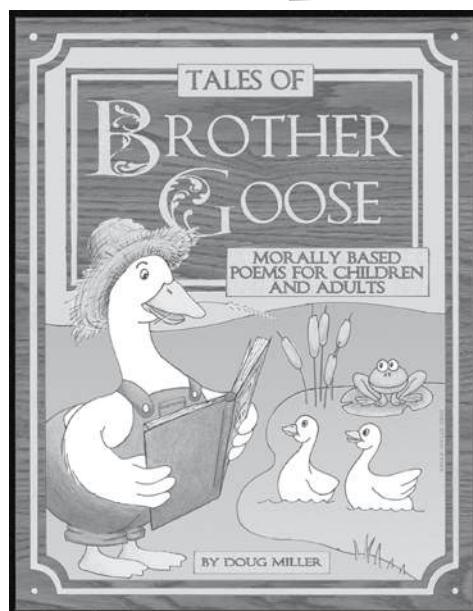
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What's a Christmas tree's favorite candy?

Orna-mints! :)

Knock, knock!

Who's there?

Mary.

Mary who?

Mary Christmas! :)

What currency is used at the North Pole?

Jingle bills! :)

Eenie Meeny, Miny Moe

Eenie Meeny, Miny Moe

Is how we choose when we don't know
But we should learn to hear God's voice,
To help us make a better choice.

God knows which direction's best

Better by far than had we guessed.

No matter what the situation,

God can give you revelation.

Learn to train your heart to hear,
Till his direction comes in clear.

Then you'll never go astray,

And you'll be doing things God's way.

By Doug Miller,

Co-founder of The Seeker

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https://youtu.be/XBpm3peGjXo?si=kc_bf-9nyN5mKuwE

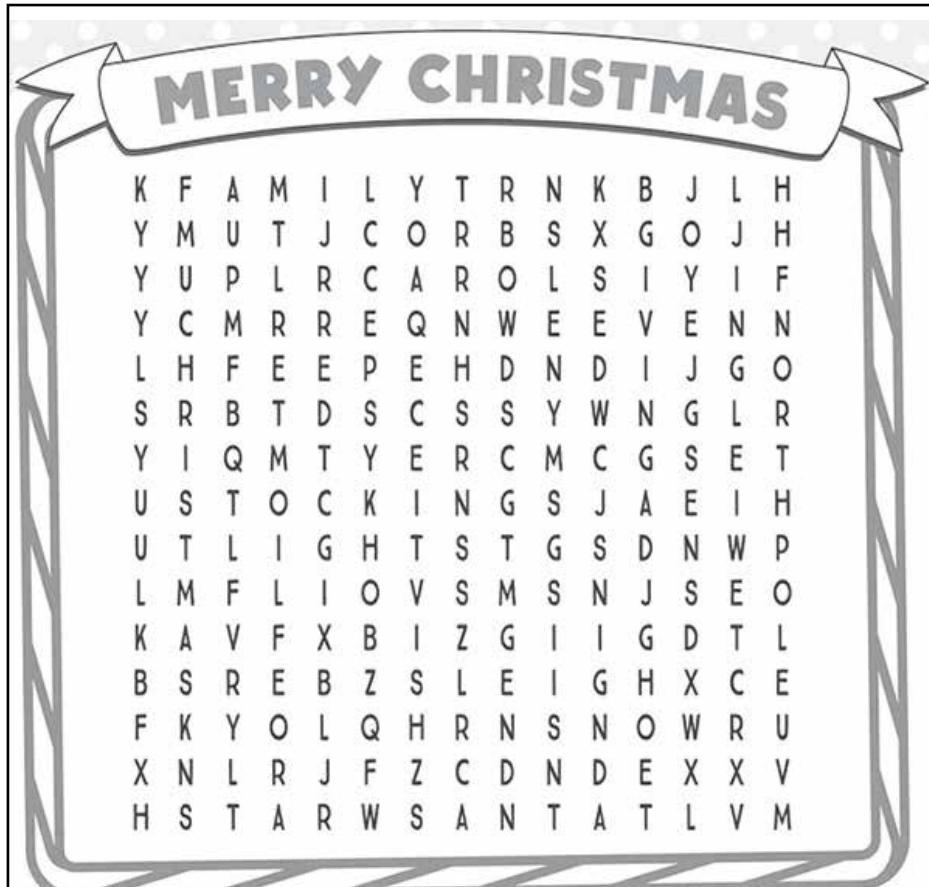
ASK JESUS INTO YOUR HEART

The ABC's of Salvation

ADMIT that you know you are a sinner and ask God for forgiveness

BELIEVE in Jesus and that the Bible is true. Pray and ask God into your heart.

CONFESS that Jesus is your Lord and that you believe he died on the cross for your sins

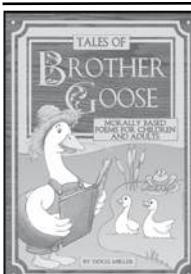


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You have from the 5th of each month when they are released into the public until the 5th day of the following month when the serial numbers expire to turn it into The Seeker. If the dollar is determined to

be a winner, the cash reward will be given at the end of the month. This feature of The Seeker is sponsored by Smith's Tire Center, US 25 North, in Berea, KY. We appreciate their support of this contest. Call (859) 986-2032 or email: kristimiller1005@gmail.com to make arrangements to meet if you have found the winning number. Three new Lucky Bucks will be released during the first week of each month.

Each month that the Lucky Buck is not retrieved, the cash prize grows by \$100, Thanks to our Sponsor, Smith's Tire Center. (Family and employees of The Seeker Christian News are NOT eligible to win. May take 6 weeks to process. All winners will be photographed and published in the paper)



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Thank you for your patronage, faithful, readership, and support in any and every way for 41 years of The Seeker Christian News ministry! We would not be in publication if not for the Lord and you. God Bless,

Bruce



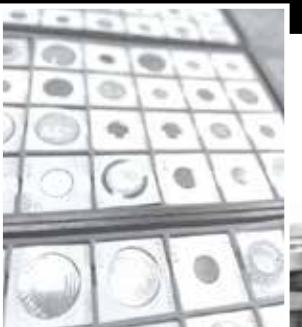
FOLEY'S FLORIST AND GIFTS

HOSTED THEIR ANNUAL Christmas Open House, November 22 and 23. This spectacular event drew crowds of people from Berea and surrounding areas. Guests enjoyed sales on beautiful gifts and decor, refreshments and door prizes! Suzy Carpenter was the door prize winner of a gorgeous candle arrangement. This was a first time win for Miss Suzy. Congratulations! Chestnut St., Berea.

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WHAT HAPPENED TO CHRISTMAS?

By Bruce Walker @2025

AMERICAN CULTURE HAS JUST ABOUT commodified Christmas out of existence. Oh, we still use the name, but it has become a brand. It's now just another marketing opportunity right alongside Labor Day, Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Thanksgiving.

How did we lose the heart of the Christmas message? It began when we mixed commerce (buying and selling) with the coming of Jesus to this earth. Satan—I do believe in a real and present evil being at work in this world—wanted to muddle the story of Jesus' coming and its implications, and he did it with the powerful allure of money.

Remember, Jesus plaited a whip of cords and did not tiptoe around the House of God saying, "Excuse me, would you please stop making merchandise out of the salvation of mankind?" He became righteously angry and forcefully drove the perpetrators out of the temple (John 2:13-17). Is the commercialization of Christ-Mass really any different?

Today, Christmas music has largely become a safe, sentimental stew that offends no one. Jesus is presented as a helpless little baby in a hay-filled corn crib. Crowded out of the modern narrative are the "heavenly host" of angels—God's special forces—each one a mighty servant of the Almighty. Jesus in the manger was not defenseless. That is why Satan didn't slither up to the manger and strike Him.

Unusual heavenly signs lit the sky as the angels descended, a spectacular and ominous light show announcing the arrival of God in our midst. The angel of the Lord declared the coming of God's Son to earth (Luke 2:9-14). No wonder Satan wants to distract, denigrate, and caricature this history-changing event. His main goal is to keep us from recognizing who we really are. In Christ, we are the children of our Father; our Elder Brother is "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).

The same strategy has been used on the resurrection. The empty tomb has been turned into an Easter bunny. Scripture warns us not to be ignorant of Satan's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11). Once again, Satan is at work masking the horror and evil of the cross—and his colossal failure to stop God's plan to redeem humankind and this earth.

So he dresses it all up with candy, plastic eggs, and costumes. Go ahead, buy the candy, hide the eggs—anything, as long as you don't stop to think about the real meaning of the resurrection.

Satan is using these same tactics today to try to destroy men and women—the image-bearers of God. Your God-given roles as provider, protector, nurturer, and consoler are under attack in American culture. So-called "entertainment" (TV, internet, movies, media, etc.) trots out tired tropes of men as incompetent, passive, bumbling idiots—or worse. Women are treated as objects to be used and discarded, mocked, belittled, and told they are incapable of emotional strength or clear identity.

If Jesus was subjected from birth to resurrection to Satanic attack, what makes us think we will somehow be exempt? Why would we imagine that we, as God's children, are not also coming under demonic pressure to keep us from realizing the truth of Scripture: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God..." (1 John 3:1)

That is the love Satan wants to hide behind tinsel, sale flyers, cartoon bunnies, and endless distractions.

So what happened to Christmas? It didn't disappear—it's being buried under everything but Christ. Our task, as believers, is to peel back the layers of commercialization, sentimentality, and distraction, and once again stand in awe at the miracle of God made flesh, dwelling among us, come to save His people from their sins.



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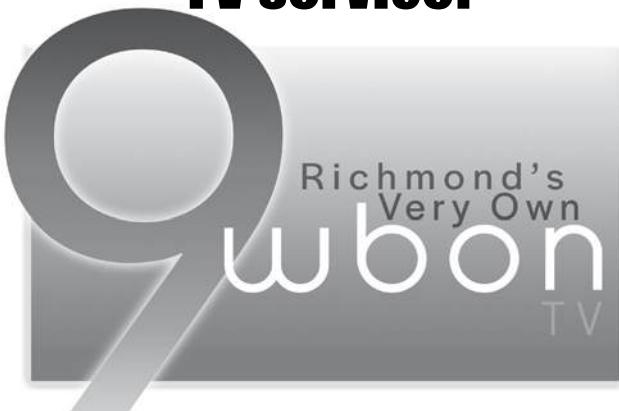
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DO YOU KNOW THE ANSWERS?

1. What was the first Christmas Carol ever recorded in history?
2. Why was Old holy night banned?
3. Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" was the theme for which 1942 holiday movie?
4. Which popular Christmas song was originally written for Thanksgiving?"

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Matthew 2:10

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THE OUTSIDER

By Charlenea Kay Wirth

Plastic snow globes carefully hung on perfectly decorated Christmas trees amongst an elaborate atmosphere of silver tinsel on boughs of green plastic branches. A middle-aged woman gazed at the display as she smelled a hint of an artificial pine scent as the tree stood tall and still in a busy grocery store aisle.

The transparent snow globes held inside tiny plastic people and snowy scenes emulating peace. There was a photograph in one globe with a family all dressed in matching black and red checked flannel pajamas and Santa hats on their heads sitting by a fireplace. Another globe displayed a miniature storefront twinkling with expensive laptops and tv screens inside the store window. And there was one with a tiny Tower of Pisa, a place she heard people brag about in their many travels abroad.

To some the little ornaments would remind people of memories on display for all to see in their shiny world of glamour and dreams. But to this observer it made her feel like an "outsider" and she felt alone and out of place. She had worked hard all her life raising her family with unconditional love but times were often difficult though they always shared what they had. A neighbor recognized this "Outsider" while rushing by her, nearly knocking her over and proclaimed, "Merry Christmas!" The Outsider echoed back a friendly, "Thank you. You too!" and smiled with all the effort she could gather.

The Outsider slowly walked to the coffee aisle to buy a cheap bag of coffee and tried to think of creative ideas for an inexpensive meal to bake for herself on a limited budget and rising prices of groceries. The Outsider thought of all the holiday, birthday and condolence cards she had

sent to so many over the years. While reaching for the generic coffee she accidentally dropped it on the grocery store floor. A stranger leaned down quickly and picked it up for her.

This stranger, a young woman, gently shared she was new in town and smiled. She kindly asked the Outsider about her plans for Christmas. They began to walk around the store and the Outsider felt like someone actually cared. This young woman wasn't made of plastic, like characters inside the globes. She didn't talk only of herself. She was dressed in humble kindness and humility. The Outsider was reminded of the unconditional love of Jesus of whom she celebrated these holy days.

The Outsider felt the realness, the freshness of Jesus's presence and they talked of "Him" being the "Reason for the Season." She was renewed in her spirit once again and decided the plastic people in the globes were nothing to be desired. She realized He was rekindling the "real compassion of a Savior," not held in a globe, but in humbleness.

He was born and lived on earth. He still lives in me; she remembered and they talked together all the way through the store, feeling a little lighter and grateful for experiencing the true compassion of a new friend. No longer feeling an Outsider, the Lord comforted her in His belonging!

*Charlenea Kay Wirth singingheartky@gmail.com



REDEEMING HOPE GALA



REDEEMING HOPE'S NIGHT TO BUILD HOPE was an unforgettable evening on November 15th at Rustic Ridge Barn in Richmond. The evening consisted of dinner, dancing, live music by Faded Blue Band, and a very inspirational story by guest of honor, Miss Kentucky, Ariana Rodriguez. The event was held to support Redeeming Hope's mission to raise funds to build a safe home for teenage girls who are rescued from human trafficking. Board members; Linda Blackburn, Margie Bilter, Lisa Foster, Zinnia Hensley, Shanna Sharber and not shown Jackie Collier. redeeminghopeky.org



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Seeker Snicker

What did Adam say on the day before Christmas? "It's Christmas, Eve!"

What do you get if you cross a snowman and a dog?
Frost-bite.

Why are Christmas trees bad at knitting?
They always drop their needles.

What do gingerbread men use when they break their legs?
Candy canes.

What do you call an old snowman?
Water.

Why did Rudolph have to attend summer school?
Because he went down in history.

What do snowmen eat for breakfast?
Ice crispies.

What's every elf's favorite type of music?
Wrap!

How do Christmas trees get their email?
They log-on.



A MAN ASKED HIS FRIEND, "Do you know a good roofer? I have a leak."

His friend replied, "Really, when did you discover the leak?"

"When it took me two hours to eat my soup." (Thank you, Nathan Rader)



Where would you find a snowman dancing?
At a snowball!

A MINISTER WAS WALKING down the street when he came up on a group of about a dozen boys, all between 10 and 12 years of age.

The group had surrounded a dog. Concerned lest the boys were hurting the dog, he went over and asked, "What are you doing with that dog?"

One of the boys replied, "This dog is just an old neighborhood stray. We all want him, but only one of us can take him home. So we've decided that whichever one of us can tell the biggest lie will get to keep the dog."

The Reverend was taken back. "What kind of contest is that?!" He exclaimed. "You shouldn't be lying about anything." He then launched into a 10 minute sermon against lying, beginning with "Don't you boys know it's a sin to lie" and ending with why when I was your age, I never told a lie."

There was dead silence for about a minute. Just as the reverend was beginning to think he'd gotten through to them, the smallest boy gave a deep sigh and said, "I guess we better give him the dog."

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The Seeker Christian News
P.O. Box 302

Breaking Bread



GINGERBREAD FUDGE

Ingredients:

2 (11-ounce) packages premium white chocolate chips
1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
1/4 cup molasses
1 tablespoon butter
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 teaspoons ground ginger
1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
1/8 teaspoon salt

Directions:

Line an 8x8-inch baking pan with aluminum foil and lightly grease or butter the foil; set aside. Set aside 1/2 cup white chocolate chips. Combine remaining white chocolate chips, sweetened condensed milk,

MOM'S ZUCCHINI BREAD

Ingredients:

3 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon or to taste
3 large eggs
1 cup vegetable oil
2 1/4 cups white sugar
3 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 cups shredded zucchini
1 cup chopped walnuts

Directions:

Gather all ingredients. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees F (165 degrees C). Grease and flour two 8x4-inch loaf pans.

Sift flour, salt, baking powder, baking soda, and cinnamon together in a large bowl.

molasses, and butter in a saucepan set over medium heat. Stir frequently until butter and chocolate chips are completely melted and ingredients are combined.

Add vanilla extract, ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, cloves and salt; stir well to combine.

Pour mixture into the prepared pan and smooth out evenly.

Working quickly, microwave the remaining 1/2 cup white chocolate chips in a small microwave-safe bowl until melted, 1 to 1 1/2 minutes, stirring every 30 seconds.

Spoon dollops of the white chocolate mixture atop the fudge and use a knife to gently swirl the 2 mixtures together.

Cover and chill about 2 hours or until firm.

Use foil to lift uncut fudge out of the pan; cut into 1-inch squares. Makes 2 pounds 6 ounces.

Beat eggs, oil, sugar, and vanilla together in a separate large bowl with an electric mixer until combined; add flour mixture and beat well.

Stir in shredded zucchini and chopped walnuts until well combined. Pour batter into the prepared pans.

Bake in the preheated oven until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 40 to 60 minutes. Cool in the pans on a wire rack for 20 minutes. Run a table knife around the edges to loosen. Invert carefully onto a wire rack and let cool completely.



CHRISTMAS PROMISES

By Dr. Charles Burton

THE MOST IMPORTANT PROMISE. LUKE 2:1-11

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

This you can Believe. So, because of Christmas, all his Bible promises are true, Our Heavenly Promises are always true. How are we able to make it through the Tough Stuff of life and get through each day? Simply stated... His Promises.

#1 Hebrews 13:5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

#2 Jeremiah 33:3 Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.

#3 Matthew 7:7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you

#4 Matthew 7:8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

#5 Psalm 31:24 Be of good cour-

age, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.

#6 Psalm 38:15

For in thee, O Lord, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God.

#7 Psalm 22:19 But be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste thee to help me.

#8 Psalm 79:9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake.

#9 John 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

#10 John 15:7 7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

Just a little taste of some of His promises. It is said by some that there are over 9,000 prayer promises in His Word.... I have always leaned to 30,000 promises in the Bible. Nevertheless; God has given all of us that are Born Again a unique opportunity to ask Him anything. I know God hears all of us and He moves at His desecration. God does what God wants to do, when He wants to. Pretty simple but Oh so true.

As this year ends, may all of us give Him the Glory and Praise He deserves. May we turn our face towards God and ask Him for wisdom for the year.

My Prayer for all is this:

Father bring to pass in our lives:

#1 Greater love for you.

#2 Greater love for our neighbor.,

#3 Greater obedience to you.

#5 Greater prosperity from you.

#6 Greater love for our families.

#7 Greater love and respect for the Church.

#8 Greater giving.

#9 Greater Going. Help us win this world for you.

#10 Greater health.

Father, as undeserving as we are ... We are still YOUR kids what you did for Moses do for us. Meet our needs because we are yours. Not because we meet some kind of standard. Yes, we must all strive to be like you and have your mind but as we fail... Bless us as you did the complaining Israelites.

"To God Be the Glory". Before I close, look at these PROMISES. A promise from God is a statement we can depend on with absolute confidence. Here are 12 promises for the Christian to claim.

God's presence -- "I will never leave thee" (Heb. 13:5)

God's protection -- "I am thy shield" (Gen. 15:1)

God's power -- "I will strengthen thee" (Isa. 41:10)

God's provision -- "I will help thee" (Isa. 41:10)

God's leading -- "And when He putteth

forth His own sheep, He goeth before them" (John 10:4)

God's purposes -- "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil" (Jer. 20:11)

God's rest -- "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28)

God's cleansing -- "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9)

God's goodness -- "No good thing will He withhold from them that work uprightly" (Psalm 84:11)

God's faithfulness -- "The Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake" (1 Sam. 12:22)

God's guidance -- "The meek will He guide" (Psalm 25:9)

God's wise plan -- "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28)

Press on soldier of the cross ... There is HOPE. Even Christmas Hope.

Round and round the baggage carousel turned, swarmed by the passengers from our flight to Tampa, all anxiously awaiting their luggage. My husband, Doug, leaned in and focused on the ramp where suitcases thumped and banged onto the conveyor belt. The bright red roller belonging to our son's fiancée tumbled out, but Doug couldn't grab it as it whizzed past. Several more bags passed before he managed to wrestle his own off the belt and dragged it over. That's when we all noticed... the zipper of the front pocket was open. Doug ran his hand inside. "Chris's hat is gone," he said.

Hadn't we lost enough? We were here to embark on a Christmas cruise, to help us heal, help us move on from the tragedy that had upended our lives just five months earlier. Our son, Chris, had died suddenly from an undetected heart condition. He was only 29, engaged to be married to his fiancée, Lauren, that August.

In the aftermath of Chris's death, Lauren, Doug and I wanted to spend Christmas together, but none of us wanted to spend the holiday at home. We debated whether or not going away would be any better.

It was Doug who'd found the hat. A Detroit Tigers baseball cap. Chris had worn it often, but it had gone missing after his death. Then Doug took Chris's suitcase out of storage and discovered the cap in the front pocket. To us, it was a sort of sign. We'd go on the cruise with Lauren and bring a piece of our son with us. Now we had lost it.

I tried my best to keep it together. Maybe the hat was still on the plane, somewhere in the cargo bay. But still, losing it, even for a little while, brought so much grief back up to the surface. I could see it all over Lauren's face.

Her expression suddenly changed. A look

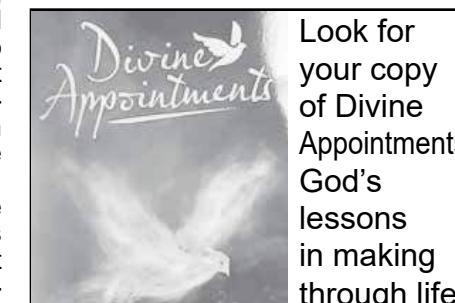


Dr. Charles Burton

of confusion. Then disbelief. Then a smile. She ran to the edge of the conveyor belt. What did she see? I followed after her.

It was her red suitcase, the one Doug had missed the first time around. Except this time, perched directly on top, like someone had placed it there, was Chris's baseball cap.

"My baby wanted to come on this cruise with us," Lauren said. Remember, we serve a wonderful Savior. The babe born in a manger. CHRIST THE LORD.



Look for your copy of Divine Appointments God's lessons in making through life

By Seeker Columnist, Dr. Charles Burton, D.D. PHD

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OH WHAT A GIFT

Dr. Robin Richmond Mason

It is the first of December, as I am sitting down with a cup of coffee and my keyboard. The Kentucky wind is blowing mightily on our mountain farm and the sound of the porch swing beating about, roused me early. I've lowered the porch swing and tossed another log on the fire. Rodger and the children are all snug in their beds but the thought of a gift prevents me from going back to sleep.

When I shake this waking gift box, it first appears to be one thing but as it is unwrapped the real contents emerge. Initially, I thought the gift was parental love. I tucked our youngest children into bed last evening with a gentle Christmas story from my own childhood. The tale featured my devoted parents, homemade ornaments, and the security of always knowing that they loved me unconditionally. Although the bedtime story had a happy beginning, middle, and end it still left me with tears in my eyes. I am so thankful for my parents! I have been so blessed to grow up with a mom and dad who have loved my siblings and myself, each other, and God. They gave me a heritage and foundation that has never cracked and I wouldn't exchange my childhood with that of Prince Charles.

I'm thinking of those parents in the darkness of this morning as the wind howls and the fire crackles. Those early birds are no doubt awake in their own living room. Their little Christmas tree is twinkling and they too are drinking coffee. Their fireplace is glowing and a cat is probably curled up, nearby. Maybe Mom and Dad are remembering Christmases past and counting their blessings. My parents took the gift of parenthood seriously. They loved us kids and we never doubted it. Maybe they are laughing about some of the gifts that we have shared over the years. I know that the conversation won't progress for long without a recognition of sadness because our oldest brother's image is in all of our wonderful childhood memories. His death, several years ago still leaves a lingering emptiness around their tree.

It is a tender appreciation for parenthood that shows me the further contents of this Christmas gift that wakes me. The real content is a view of another character at the nativity.

Dear Reader, you might rightly assume that I already have a few stable favorites all gathered around the crèche. At the top of the list of course, is the tiny baby all snuggled in swaddling clothes. Just the thought of a newborn makes me want to hug a pillow. I should have raised a dozen children. Forgive me, I digress. Then there is the blessed Mary. Oh what a female role model she provides! The view of her outward simplicity and the recognition of her inward majesty, speak volumes. A few years ago, we traveled to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and stayed on a working farm with an Amish family. I think that Mary's clean scrubbed face must have radiated something of the pure heart that I saw in the Amish mother, we knew.

Mary has called women of all time to virtue, strength, wisdom, and character. Her gentle, young face at the stable allows the viewer a moment of peace within her happiness. This scene is at the beginning of her story. It is the happiest of moments and the height of blessings but we the viewers, know the rest of the story. We know that Mary will have to watch the torture and crucifixion of the man child she adores. The manger scene is better. I want to stay there. I want to smile with Mary and watch that baby stir in its sleep for just another moment.

Now, that I've pondered the joys and sorrows of parenthood, the gift is clearer. I see the other visitor at the stable. God the Father is there in the humble gathering. He has given more than anyone else will ever give and he thoroughly understands the whole story. He too sees the joy on Mary's face, the responsibility on Joseph's shoulders, and the true identity wrapped in a baby blanket.

If we were discussing Biblical history, theology, or the view of the church fathers on literal interpretation; we might deserve a silencing at this point. But we are not discussing any of those things. All of those authorities are still asleep this morning. It is only you and I Kind Reader, and the crackle of the fire. We can talk about such things.

In *Fatherless America*, an astute sociological examination of a very present cultural dilemma, David Blankenhorn examines the role of a father and the void its absence creates. He points out that in our contemporary world, about 40 percent of American children sleep in homes in which their fathers

do not live. The whole book documents and discusses the ramifications of a culture that is increasingly fatherless. Blankenhorn points out that our nation is becoming a divided nation. He says that we are divided into two groups, separate and unequal. The two groups work in the same economy, speak a common language, and remember the same national history. But they live fundamentally divergent lives. One group receives basic benefits, psychological, social, economic, educational, and moral that are denied to the other group. The primary fault line dividing the two groups is not race, religion, class, education, or gender. It is patrimony. One group consists of those who grew up with the daily presence and provision of fathers. The other group consists of those who did not. Today those groups are roughly the same size.

Think with me for a moment about the love of a parent. Remember the irresistible urge to observe our children's every moment. Who didn't grab a video camera to capture those first steps and remember the joy of seeing that bike ride progress for more than 2 feet? Scripture shows us that the heart of God the Father is similar in many ways to the heart of a loving human father. In this year's Christmas gift, I see God the Father at the stable, incognito. He is there, on the outskirt of the scene, right where the lighting fades. See him? He is the bedraggled shepherd, the one who peers most intently at the babe. See him lingering for just another moment as the others tire and leave? He too has enjoyed the rest of the slumbering child and the joy on Mary's face. He gave a nod of encouragement to Joseph and blinked back knowing tears that no one else could understand.

John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that who so ever believeth on him should not perish but have ever lasting life. How? How? How, can a parent love anything so much that he could give up his only child as a sacrifice? I don't know the how, but I do know the certainty. God, incognito, moved away from the nativity scene knowing that he had given his best and loved with every ounce that was within him. That is the gift that wakes me this Christmas, the image of God at the stable giving his all. The knowing that we all have a father who loves

us that much. He offers this Christmas gift to each of us.



Dr. Robin Richmond Mason

I have gifts for everyone.

I only have one, but it's enough for everyone.

Jesus can give you the gift of eternal life!

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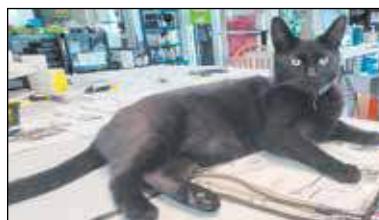
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