

## From Dave's Laptop

Tuesday, December 17, 2013

Last Sunday's CHRISTmas cantata presented by our Sanctuary Choir was a stirring reminder of "the Reason for the Season" as we celebrate God's amazing love so wonderfully revealed through Jesus, and *The Star of Bethlehem* film last night reminded us that God structured the entire universe around that One Life.

In the midst of the hustle and bustle of holiday preparations, we're working together in many ways to remember and to honor the One whose birth we celebrate. Those observances include such ministries Thanksgiving baskets sponsored by our youth and L.O.V.E. (twenty all together, I think); meals served to the homeless at Route One; giving toward our third well in Ghana; Christmas baskets from L.O.V.E. to additional families; Angel Tree gifts to children of the incarcerated through Men in Ministry (photo); and the proceeds of bake sales and yard sales from L.O.V.E.— and these are just a sampling of our efforts to share the love of Jesus with our neighbors and our world!



With respect to sharing God's love with the world, Ben Davis, Dawn Howard-Davis and I attended an open house at the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) headquarters in Falls Church last Friday evening. As you may remember, the Baptist World Alliance "is a global movement of Baptists sharing a common confession of faith in Jesus Christ bonded together by God's love to support, encourage and strengthen one another while proclaiming and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit before a lost and hurting world."



Truly a global expression of Baptist life, the BWA coordinates world-wide efforts to lead men, women, and youth to Christ and then to equip them for Christian service through their national Baptist bodies. We've increased our missions giving through the BWA in next year's budget, and I've attached with this *Laptop* two documents that give more information about the BWA and its ministries. I hope that you'll look over those documents as a way of feeling more a part of this global Gospel work!

You can learn even more at [www.bwanet.org](http://www.bwanet.org) & [www.bwalive.org](http://www.bwalive.org), and apps are available for iOS and Android operating systems. Look for "Baptist World Alliance Network."

I've also attached two versions of the schedule for reading the Bible through that I use myself each year. As we move toward the end of one year and the beginning of the next, it's a good time to evaluate where you are in your spiritual journey and to consider how to take following the Way of Jesus to the next level.

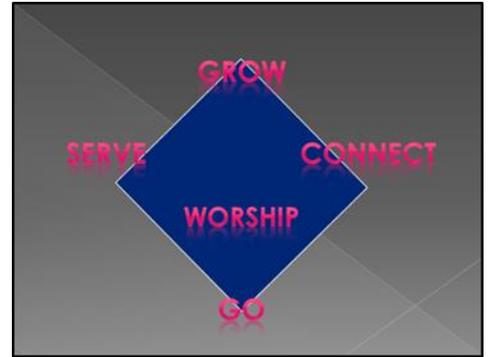
My Dad used to frequently ask, "What kind of church would this church be if every member were just like me?" While the grammar of that question could use improvement, the sense of it is hard to beat.

**GET IN  
S.H.A.P.E.!**



Making your way “around the baseball diamond” is a handy way to check your progress and to set new goals:

**WORSHIP:** How could you take your worship to the next level? Do you need to be more faithful in attendance on Sundays? While on vacation or out of town? Do you come to worship as a player, a spectator, or a critic? What sort of attitude adjustments would make worship more meaningful as a life-changing weekly event in your life?



**CONNECT:** How could you take your relationships with other believers to the next level? Do you need to be more faithful in participation in Sunday Bible Study? Do you need to do better at being on time? Do you need to begin the discipline of small-group study in the first place? Does your life have any meaningful intersection with other believers outside of Sunday morning? How might that change?

**GROW:** How are you doing with regular, serious, Bible Study and personal time with God? Do you need to print out the Daily Bible Reading Schedules attached with this *Laptop* and get started? Don't try to move from “the couch to a marathon.” Just focus on taking your practice of personal spiritual disciplines to the next level, one step at a time. Think about preparing for a marathon. You'd have to start slow . . . and keep at it.



**MINISTRY:** How are you doing at serving others and building up the Body of Christ? God has given you a specific and special S.H.A.P.E. without which CBF and this corner of the Kingdom simply cannot be all that God intends for us to be. Do you know which spiritual gifts God has given you? Are you using them? Have you discovered the JOY of stretching into what God created you to be? Remember the Eric Liddell principle: “God made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure!” What would that sentence look like for you?

**MISSION:** How could your life become more “missional” in 2014? How about asking God to show you ways to have more impact as a Jesus follower in your place of employment? Have you helped with a mission project or been on a mission trip lately? *Ever*? Are you investing your “time, talent, and treasure” in Kingdom causes, or in things that have no real eternal value? “Just one life, twill soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.” The only things you’re going to take into eternity are your character and other people you’ve led to Jesus, either directly through personal witness or indirectly through missional support.

Our congregation is increasing our missional giving by at least 1.5% a year until we reach the goal of tithing our ministry budget. That will enable us to make much more of a difference right here in Oakland Mills as well as around the world through such ministries as the Baptist World Alliance. Why not take your personal stewardship to the next level year by year with us?

I want to close with two gifts. The first gift is a really cool 2014 calendar, courtesy of NASA's "Astronomy Picture of the Day," which I think originates in "our own" Goddard Space Flight Center. You can download it at this link: <http://asterisk.apod.com/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=32474>

The second gift is from an unnamed rabbi, as reported by psychiatrist Scott Peck.<sup>1</sup> May the Gift be found among us as well!

Dave

## The Rabbi's Gift

Once upon a time there was a monastery that had fallen upon hard times. Once a great order, as a result of waves of anti-monastic persecution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the rise of secularism in the nineteenth, all its branch houses were lost and it had become decimated to the extent that there were only five monks left in the decaying mother house: the abbot and four others, all over seventy in age. Clearly it was a dying order.

In the deep woods surrounding the monastery there was a little hut that a rabbi from a nearby town occasionally used for a hermitage. Through their many years of prayer and contemplation the old monks had become a little bit psychic, so they could always sense when the rabbi was in his hermitage. "The rabbi is in the woods, the rabbi is in the woods again," they would whisper to each other. As he agonized over the imminent death of his order, it occurred to the abbot at one such time to visit the hermitage and ask the rabbi if by some possible chance he could offer any advice that might save the monastery.

The rabbi welcomed the abbot at his hut. But when the abbot explained the purpose of his visit, the rabbi could only commiserate with him. "I know how it is," he exclaimed. "The spirit has gone out of the people. It is the same in my town. Almost no one comes to the synagogue anymore." So the old abbot and the old rabbi wept together. Then they read parts of the Torah and quietly spoke of deep things. The time came when the abbot had to leave. They embraced each other. "It has been a wonderful thing that we should meet after all these years," the abbot said, "but I have still failed in my purpose for coming here. Is there nothing you can tell me, no piece of advice you can give me that would help me save my dying order?"

"No, I am sorry," the rabbi responded. "I have no advice to give. **The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you.**"

When the abbot returned to the monastery his fellow monks gathered around him to ask, "Well, what did the rabbi say?"

"He couldn't help," the abbot answered. "We just wept and read the Torah together. The only thing he did say, just as I was leaving—it was something cryptic—was that the Messiah is one of us. I don't know what he meant."

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<sup>1</sup> from M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community-Making and Peace*, pp. 13-15.

In the days and weeks and months that followed, the old monks pondered this and wondered whether there was any possible significance to the rabbi's words. The Messiah is one of us? Could he possibly have meant one of us monks here at the monastery? If that's the case, which one? Do you suppose he meant the abbot? Yes, if he meant anyone, he probably meant Father Abbot. He has been our leader for more than a generation.

On the other hand, he might have meant Brother Thomas. Certainly Brother Thomas is a holy man. Everyone knows that Thomas is a man of light. Certainly he could not have meant Brother Elred! Elred gets crotchety at times. But come to think of it, even though he is a thorn in people's sides, when you look back on it, Elred is virtually always right. Often very right. Maybe the rabbi did mean Brother Elred.

But surely not Brother Phillip. Phillip is so passive, a real nobody. But then, almost mysteriously, he has a gift for somehow always being there when you need him. He just magically appears by your side. Maybe Phillip is the Messiah.

Of course the rabbi didn't mean *me*. He couldn't possibly have meant *me*. I'm just an ordinary person. Yet supposing he did? Suppose I am the Messiah? O God, not me. I couldn't be that much for You, could I?

As they contemplated in this manner, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one among them might be the Messiah. And on the off, off chance that each monk himself might be the Messiah, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect.

Because the forest in which it was situated was beautiful, it so happened that people still occasionally came to visit the monastery to picnic on its tiny lawn, to wander along some of its paths, even now and then to go into the dilapidated chapel to meditate. As they did so, without even being conscious of it, they sensed this aura of extraordinary respect that now began to surround the five old monks and seemed to radiate out from them and permeate the atmosphere of the place. There was something strangely attractive, even compelling, about it.

Hardly knowing why, they began to come back to the monastery more frequently to picnic, to play, and to pray. They began to bring their friends to show them this special place. And their friends brought their friends.

Then it happened that some of the younger men who came to visit the monastery started to talk more and more with the old monks. After a while one asked if he could join them. Then another. And another. So within a few years the monastery had once again become a thriving order, and, thanks to the rabbi's gift, a vibrant center of light and spirituality in the realm.

**Be the Gift!**