

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”



The Christian life is a journey.

TrailNotes speaks to forward movement, paying attention to the “landscape” we are passing through in this trail-laced, wooded hillside and valley, not to mention the world beyond. **TrailNotes** is an unfolding, ongoing journal of the people who share the trail with us and the things we’re learning and doing. This is a monthly publication of Grace Fellowship Church, Mansfield, Ohio.

ElderTalk: Emmanuel: God With Us — Now and All Year Long

JADAÉ FOX

I look forward to the Christmas season, the carols we sing, the lights glowing in the dark, and even the way people seem to soften a little toward one another. But every year, it also feels as if the season slips through my fingers. There’s so much busyness, so many places to go, so many expectations to meet.

And this year, that feeling hit me harder than normal.

Maybe it’s because my oldest will be eighteen soon. Maybe it’s because our youngest is suddenly not so little anymore. But I’ve been feeling the weight of time in a different way. So this year I’m choosing—very intentionally—to slow down. To breathe in the moments I used to rush past. To sit with my kids a little longer, even if it means something else doesn’t get done.

Because right now they are still with me...Still under my roof...Still piling into the car for Christmas lights...Still asking to bake cookies...Still excited to open presents.

But I know a day is coming—sooner than I want—when Christmas will look different. They’ll be grown, with families of their own, creating memories in homes that aren’t mine.

And in that mix of joy and ache, God whispered

something steady to me: **“Your children won’t always be with you... but I will... Always.”**

The celebration of Jesus’ birth is a reminder that He came near once, and He has stayed near forever. He is Emmanuel—God with us (Matthew 1:23).

In the busyness of life—and certainly in the busyness of the holiday season—it is so easy to forget that what makes God so different from all other gods is the fact that He is near. He wants daily closeness with you and with me. In the good and the bad. In the busy and the quiet. In the exciting and the painfully ordinary. Christmas reminds us that Jesus is with us.

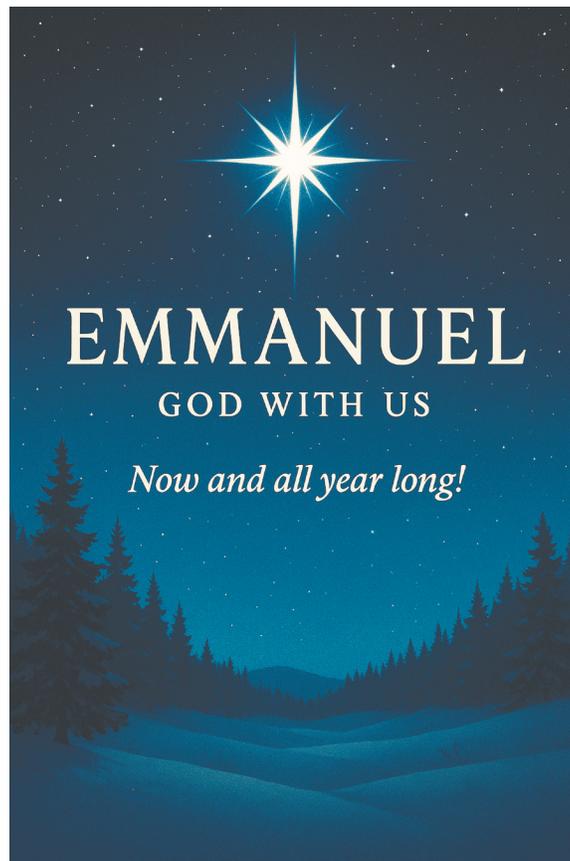
Knowing that Jesus is always with us doesn’t just comfort us — it also calls us into His mission. Emmanuel is not only God

with us; He is God who sends us.

Because of that truth, we can say confidently:

- **He is with you in joy** — God celebrates with His people (Zephaniah 3:17).
- **He is with you in hardship and loss** — God is close to the brokenhearted and present in trials (Psalm 34:18; Isaiah 43:2).

(Continued on page 2)



Emmanuel: God With Us — Now and All Year Long *(Continued from page 1)*

- **He is with you in uncertainty** — God goes before us and guides our steps (Proverbs 3:5–6).

GFC, our short definition of a disciple of Jesus is **Study, Imitate, and Share Jesus**.

Study Jesus: God is near, and we have Someone we can know—not a distant deity but a present Savior. Christmas invites us to begin the year by rediscovering Jesus: His heart, His character, His ways (Matthew 11:29; John 1:14).

Imitate Jesus: Jesus is near both in His Word and by His Spirit. When we look at the Christmas accounts in the Bible, we see who Jesus is and what it looks like to imitate Him—Mary’s surrender, Joseph’s obedience, the shepherds’ wonder, the Magi’s generosity. Of course, there are many other examples throughout Scripture. (see also Philippians 2:5–8; Ephesians 5:1–2).

Share Jesus: Like the shepherds, we are to carry the good news to others (Luke 2:17; 2 Corinthians 5:20).

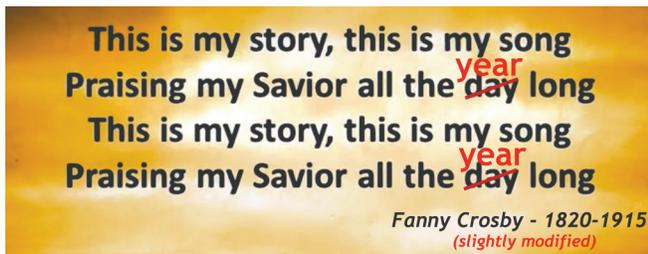
Because of this, we can go through whatever comes our way—the good, the bad, and the ugly. And what’s more, He’s with us because we have HIS mission.

Will you commit this year to **Studying** His Word... **Imitating** His character... **Sharing** His love and salvation with others?

This is what discipleship is; and Grace Fellowship, we are **“A family for God who will go into the world and make disciples who make disciples.”**

Remember: Jesus is always with you. He’s leading you, and He’s transforming you. And the amazing thing is that He wants you to participate in this process—to be a blessing to others in love for God and our neighbor.

We celebrate Jesus, **Emmanuel — God with us**, now and all year long!



Remembering My Baptism

DANNY MEYER

(Editor’s note: This is from a Facebook post on 11/14/25 and used here by permission. Danny is a former Grace Haven “Farmie” and the now retired pastor of Vineyard Church Delaware County.)



Fifty-four years ago today, on a cold November morning, I walked into a frigid farm pond to be baptized. One could ask what motivated that 19-year-old to get up at dark-thirty on a Sunday morning so he could hitchhike 30 minutes to get to Mansfield, Ohio, in time?



The answer in a word is Jesus. Not religious fervor. Not church tradition. Not peer pressure. The motivation was that 17 days earlier I encountered Christ...and that encounter continues to change me.

For the last 54 years what sustains me in difficult and dark times, what lifts me up when I have stumbled, fallen or lost my way is not that I found Jesus but that He found me. He invited me to walk with Him, follow Him, abide in Him. What I find most amazing is that when I fail miserably and walk away from Him... He doesn’t walk away from me. He pursues me and again and again and again invites me to turn around and embrace the One who embraced me. He is the Hound of Heaven, my Prince of Peace, and the Lover of my Soul.

As I remember my baptism, I remember it as an outward sign of an inward reality. I gladly give my life to the One who willingly gave His life for me.

Kay Berry—GFC’s Operation Christmas Child “Elf” (and others)
(Caught in the act by the camera’s lens)



Into the shipping cartons the filled shoeboxes go...



...after much prayer...labor...

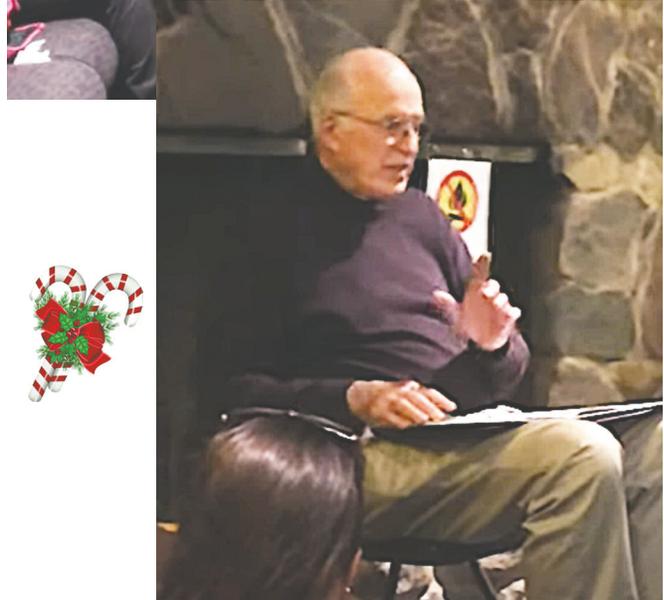


...and organization!



All the results of “love’s labors” gained!

Who needs Santa when GFC has Ray Nethery to read the Christmas story? *(A couple of stills from a video made a few years ago)*



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Eric Byrom Presiding Elder/ Pastor
 Jadaé Fox Elder
 Matt Godsil Elder

(A complete list of church functionaries will return next month)

Messiah is coming! JOHN KURTZ

God did promise the children of Israel (and kept telling them) that Messiah was coming. There may be as many as 48 prophecies in the Old Testament pertaining to the coming of a future Messiah, all of which were proved to be fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, except for those having to do with His Second Coming, a still much anticipated event for each of us as Christians. Of those 48 prophecies, only a few refer to His arrival, or as we now know, His birth as a God-man babe in a manger some 2000 years ago, the event which we celebrate on the 25th of this month each year. Here are those passages from Scripture (ESV translation) just so we can all read them together:

Genesis 49:10 - "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between His feet, until tribute comes to Him; and to Him shall be the obedience of the peoples."

Isaiah 7:14 - "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

Isiah 9:6-7 - "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this."

Micah 5:2 - "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."

Reflect for a while on those verses. Would you have been ready for, atuned to, or waiting with baited breath for your Messiah to come when He did and in the way He did? Perhaps that is why it took a special announcement by the Angel of the Lord to a bunch of humble shepherds alone out in a field with their sheep and a unique sign in the sky to a trio of sophisticated astrologer-priests to find their way to be the first to greet Him. Not even when that baby Jesus had become

December 2025

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7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

3 & 10 Connect Groups, 6:30-8:30 PM.

7 Jadaé Fox preaching – Advent Week 2.

14 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching – Advent Week 3.

17 GFC Christmas Party, 6:30-8 PM. 

21 Matt Godsil preaching – Advent Week 4.

24 Christmas Eve service, 7-8 PM.

25 CHRISTMAS DAY

28 Greg Frankenfield preaching on I Samuel 18. 

a fully grown adult did those closest to Him fully grasp who He really was. It took another special gift from God the Father to help all mankind understand who Messiah, Jesus Christ, God the Son, was. That gift came a little later, with a lot of suffering and turmoil in between, in the Upper Room at Pentecost when God the Holy Spirit was sent to give them (and us) a clearer view as to who Messiah was and exactly what that meant for this world and the world to come, when Christ would return in full glory as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Even though those early disciples and followers of Jesus couldn't go with Jesus where He was going when He left them, they (and all Christians since) knew (know) that Jesus (Messiah) had gone ahead to "prepare a place" for each of them (and for each of us as Christians) to spend eternity with Him one day.

Christmas, the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the promised and long-awaited Messiah! Let us praise Him as we too await His return.