

# advent | what if jesus were missing from the celebration?

BY CELESTE MCDONOUGH, PASTORAL STAFF

Each of us has our own response to the sensory experience of Advent and the Christmas season. Some can't wait to hear and sing carols – they have to discipline themselves not to get out the decorations and put up a tree before Thanksgiving. Others find the constant barrage of “sleigh bells jingling” and ads for the best gifts distracting from the true meaning of Christ’s coming. Yet we each can rejoice with the angels because we know the good news of great joy that is for all people, including us.

Our Christmases in Central Asia, living and working among an unreached people group, gave us a chance to experience what those who don't know – and don't have a chance to hear – what Christmas means, experience firsthand. Throughout the weeks leading up to Christmas, there was no indication that a special day was coming. No decorations in businesses or homes, no carols playing in the background, no place to purchase even a tiny artificial tree. December was just like any other month, and for all except the close friends we invited to share in our celebration, the 25th was an ordinary day filled with work and family obligations.

We were surprised to find that a few decorations actually did go up - the day after Christmas! As in many parts of the world with Western but not Christian influence, the secular wrappings of Christmas - gifts, trees, tinsel - were attached to a New Year's holiday instead. But the deep sense of anticipation that Advent brings, and the joy of knowing a Savior had been given, were missing.

Even after many years of outreach, fewer than 0.01% of the members of this Central Asian people group follow Christ. Most people within the group still do not personally know someone who is a true follower of Jesus, someone who can introduce them to Christ our Immanuel. Imagine how different our lives would be if only one person out of every ten thousand or more we encountered - at work, at school, in our neighborhoods, or out in the community - knew Jesus, while the rest had never heard his name! Imagine trying to find the one person in Van Andel Arena who understood Christmas and could tell you about it. Imagine being that one person.

God is at work in the nation we lived in and around the world, through His people, making the message of Christmas available to these unreached groups. But much more can be done. To learn more about the unreached, and to find out how to pray for those who still need to hear, go to [peoplegroups.org](http://peoplegroups.org) or [joshuaproject.net](http://joshuaproject.net).

## congregational care

### RECENTLY HOSPITALIZED PRAYER LIST

If you have been hospitalized, or anticipate hospitalization, and would like to be added to the prayer list, please call the church office at 956-9377.

**Blodgett:** Paul Ceton, Roland Haveman

**Mercy Health:** Joanna Leavenworth

**PRAYER CHAIN:** If you need prayer, contact Don & Cindy Marrell ([cmarrell@calvarygr.org](mailto:cmarrell@calvarygr.org)) at 450-9622.

### BEREAVED

We extend our Christian sympathy to Mary Jo & Tom Kingshott and Darren & Jill Herweyer at the homegoing of Mary Jo's father and Darren's grandfather, Jake Buffinga, on December 4; to Brian and Amy Geers at the homegoing of Brian's father, Harold, on December 8; to Audrey Meindertsma at the homegoing of her husband, Larry, on December 11; to Joy and Glen Dennis at the homegoing of their son, Edward

Oliveira, on December 11; and also to Sandy Hagberg at the homegoing of her husband, Neil.

### YEAR-END GIVING

As you plan your year-end charitable giving please remember Calvary Church. We also accept donations of stocks, bonds and mutual funds. Please note that our account information has changed. Should you wish to contribute any of these securities, please contact Chris Snedeker in the Financial Services Department for new giving instructions.

### SIGN CHANGERS NEEDED

If you would be interested in volunteering to change Calvary's road sign, please contact Jackie ([jrice@calvarygr.org](mailto:jrice@calvarygr.org)).



### FOR THE RECORD

	Projected Offerings	Actual Offerings	Surplus/ (Deficit)
Last Week	\$ 250,072	\$ 140,428	(\$109,644)
Fiscal YTD Sept. 1 - Dec. 10	\$ 2,314,719	\$ 2,140,157	(\$174,262)
Open Door Project		\$ 28,250	

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 CalvaryChurchGR  
 calvarygr

December 17, 2017

9:00am & 10:45am

*The Priority of  
Our Spiritual Family*  
Mark 3:20-35

Jim Samra, *Senior Pastor*



calvary   
**CHURCH**

# welcome

If you are visiting today, we are glad you are here. For information about our many groups, programs and events for all ages, pick up a copy of the quarterly *Calvary Life* magazine, visit us online at [calvarygr.org](http://calvarygr.org), or stop by the Connection Point (located in the Gathering Place across from the main Sanctuary entrance). We would love to meet you! If you need hearing assistance, listening devices are available at the Welcome Center in the Crosswalk.

## this week at calvary

- 1 LUMIN8 Kids Choir Christmas Musical**  
**TONIGHT | 6:00pm | Sanctuary**  
Bethlehem's homes and stable are bursting at the seams with travelers for the census! Bethlehem's top temp agency must call on their most eager but often-inept family of workers, the Wooltons to help them through this difficult time (temporary "staffing" takes on a whole new meaning!). What they expect to be an unglamorous assignment will soon put them face to face with the good Shepherd himself- Jesus! Join the kids choir for this fun Christmas evening. Refreshments to follow in the Gathering Place.
- 2 Third Monday Missionary Prayer**  
**December 18 | 11:30am | Room 114**  
Join us tomorrow to hear updates from and pray for our missionaries around the world. Bring your lunch and meet in Room 114 (Entrance G) at 11:30am.
- 3 Christmas Eve Services**  
**December 24 | 9:00am, 10:45am and 10:00pm**  
We invite you to make Calvary's Christmas Eve service part of your holiday tradition. We will sing carols around the piano and read the Christmas story by candlelight. It's a simple service; a warm and spirited prelude to your Christmas celebration. We hope you'll join us.  
  
Childcare will be available for children through preschool in the morning services.

## this morning

Today is a family service. Childcare is available for children through three years old. Children four years of age and older are encouraged to attend the service with their families. If needed, room 124B is open for a limited number of preschool age children. Middle School Ministry (5th-8th grade) is not meeting.

## coming events & announcements

### **UNITED Christmas Party** **TONIGHT | 6:00pm | Room 208**

Join us for a holly jolly Christmas celebration! Wear your most festive attire and bring a plate of your favorite Christmas cookies to share!

### **Middle School (5th-8th Grade) Christmas Party**

**December 20 | 6:30pm | Room 208**  
Instead of our usual programming, we're going to celebrate Christmas together with cookies, milk & A Charlie Brown Christmas! Bring a plate of your favorite homemade Christmas cookies (or your favorite store bought ones!) to share & we'll take care of the rest.

### **Middle School Parent Prayer** **December 20 | 6:30-7:00pm** **Prayer Room**

All parents of 5-8th grade middle school students are invited to join us for prayer as we lift up our students, leaders and the MSM ministry.

### **Putting a Ring on it This Christmas?**

Start fresh with the Foundations community of newly married and engaged young adults in the new year. Foundations meet on the first and third Sundays of every month at 9:00am in Room 256.

### **Calvary Equip** **New Semester Begins January 10**

Calvary Equip provides opportunities to learn faith-enriching practices. You will be equipped to live out what you are taught and engage more fully with what God is doing in and through His church in this place. A full list of classes being offered this semester is at [calvarygr.org/equip](http://calvarygr.org/equip).

### **Blessed2Bless Prayer Gathering** **January 8 | 10:00-11:30am** **Room 215 (Entrance C)**

Gather for inspiration and prayer as we take steps of faith into our neighborhoods, workplaces, families and friend groups.

## third sunday of advent - joy



On this third Sunday of Advent we light the **joy** candle. Part of the rhythm of Advent is seeing ourselves as we truly are, sinners in need of a Savior. Just as Israel longed for a Messiah, we long for God's Spirit to break upon us in a new way. When we experience His stirring in our lives, we are filled with joy. Once we were separated from Him, and through Jesus He made a way for us to be restored to the Father. For this we rejoice, though we still long for the Second Coming when *all* will be restored and made right. Living fully in the now and the not yet is the role of the Jesus follower.

**Advent Guides Available:** Advent is the beginning of the Christian Year. It is a time of waiting in hopeful expectation for the birth of Jesus. A church-wide Advent Guide is available for you to pick up at the back of the Sanctuary. This week we're reading *Son of Laughter* in the Jesus Storybook Bible (Luke 1:5-25, 36-45, 57-80).

*grace*  
BEYOND

**COMMITMENT SUNDAY TODAY**

As a part of this morning's service we are celebrating our Grace Beyond journey. Grace Beyond is a journey of faith that started with a building project. On paper, it seems like it was about renovating our building to facilitate new ministry opportunities. On a heart level, what we've experienced is God remaking us as a people. He continues to make us into followers of Jesus who walk obediently and give generously, trusting He will be with us along the way with His abiding presence and faithful provision.

We are so glad you could be here today to celebrate this season with us. Later in the service we will be taking a pledge offering. This is a chance for you to respond as God has led you in prayer. If you are making an initial pledge commitment or extending your pledge through April 2019, pledge cards are available in this bulletin to facilitate your communication of God's direction for your giving. The total amount of pledge commitments received today will be announced on January 7. Thank you.