

# Happy New Year? For Christians it began with Advent

December 17, 2007

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For some Christians, following a calendar common to Christ's followers through the centuries rather than one dictated by greeting-card companies constitutes an act of radical, counter-cultural discipleship.

## Happy New Year? For Christians it began with Advent

**By Jennifer Harris**

*Missouri Word & Way*

When does the New Year begin? For Christians observing the church calendar, the new year began Dec. 2, with the start of the Advent season.

The liturgical church year is an “orderly way to look at the full scope of Christian themes in a year-long fashion,” said John Baker, pastor of First Baptist Church in Columbia, Mo.

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# Missouri Baptist rift widens when leaders restrict funding for church starts

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## Missouri Baptist rift widens when leaders restrict funding for church starts

**By Vicki Brown**

*Associated Baptist Press*

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP)—A decision by [Missouri Baptist Convention](#) leaders to cut off funding for certain new church starts has set off a firestorm of protest and further widened a rift among conservative Baptists in the state.

Missouri Baptist Convention Executive Board members approved a measure at their December meeting to withdraw funding and other assistance to church plants affiliated with the [Acts 29 Network](#). The regularly scheduled board meeting was truncated due to an impending ice storm.

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# **Bible Studies for Life Series for December 23: Celebrating the Savior's Birth**

December 17, 2007

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**Bible Studies for Life Series for December 23**

## **Celebrating the Savior's Birth**

- Luke 2:1-20

**[By Steve Dominy](#)**

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# **Christian motorcyclists and mudders bring Christmas cheer in Beaumont**

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Kristin  
Bumbera,  
20, who  
finished  
the season  
second in  
points,  
racing ASA  
Late  
Models at  
Houston  
Motor  
Sports  
Park, visits  
the  
Children's  
Village  
with  
younger  
brother  
Boyd, 9,  
who also  
races.

## **Christian motorcyclists and mudders bring Christmas cheer in Beaumont**

**By Analiz González**

*Buckner International*

EAUMONT—Santa Claus on a fire truck led a parade of bikers, 4X4s and hot rods to a crowd of waiting children in front of Buckner Children’s Village.

The crowd from the residential children’s home and the Buckner foster care program rode the vehicles, voted for their favorites and then went mudding on Buckner property hosed down by the fire department with 30,000 gallons of water.



## **Advent: Red Letter Days**

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# **Churches push Advent Conspiracy to teach real giving**

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Sarah Blakeman (left) and sister Elli Blakeman are making their own Christmas gifts by knitting scarves. Their father, Clark Blakeman, joined the Advent Conspiracy last year to focus on relational gifts and donating money to charity at Christmas.

## **Churches push Advent**

# Conspiracy to teach real giving

**By Nancy Haught**

*Religion News Service*

PORTLAND, Ore. (RNS)—The Christmas contradiction gives Pastor Rick McKinley a headache.

Americans will spend about \$475 billion this year on gifts, decorations and parties that many won't even remember next year. They will run themselves ragged—shopping, wrapping and celebrating. And some won't pay off their Christmas debt until March, if they're lucky.



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# **Christmas brighter for children of military families, thanks to UMHB student project**

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Two-year-old Anna Phillips works on painting the interior of a new playhouse built by students at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor.

## **Christmas brighter for children of military**

# families, thanks to UMHB student project

**By Laura Frase**

*University of Mary Hardin-Baylor*



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BELTON—Globs of blue paint drip from 2-year-old Reagan Clark's tiny hands. But before they form much of a puddle, he offers a high five to the blank canvas of his playhouse. He admires his artwork with pride and repeats his mark several times, then he immediately whirls around with a wide grin and fresh paint on his face, ready to go back for more.

Students built and painted four playhouses for four military families from First Baptist Church in Belton. All of the families have young children whose fathers won't be home for Christmas.

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## **For some, happy holidays means no gifts**

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## **For some, happy holidays means no gifts**

**By Michele Melendez**

*Religion News Service*

AUSTIN (RNS)—Scrap the gift lists. Trash the wrapping paper. Blow off the mall.

That's the mind-set of Americans who can't stomach exchanging holiday

presents. They aren't grinchies or scrooges. They just reject what they consider the wastefulness and stress of the season.





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# International students share Christmas joy

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## International students share Christmas joy

**By Laura Frase**

*University of Mary Hardin-Baylor*

BELTON—When Operation Christmas Child sought gifts for children in developing countries, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor international students heeded the call. For the last month, UMHB students from across the globe posted fliers, collected items and wrapped presents for children around the world.

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Li-te (Anastasia) Li experiences a newfound joy in serving others as she assembles boxes of gifts for Operation Christmas Child. Li and her friend Liu Chen (Linda) Tang in the background are both from mainland China. (Photos by Carol Woodward/UMHB)

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## **Who were those ‘wise men from the East’ bearing gifts?**

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## **Who were those ‘wise men**

# from the East' bearing gifts?

**By Benedicta Cipolla**

*Religion News Service*

WASHINGTON (RNS)—They came. They saw. They gifted. That's about all we know of the foreign visitors who traveled to Bethlehem to see the infant Jesus.

The scene ingrained in the public imagination—a stately procession of three kings in turbans, crowns, elaborate capes and fancy slippers, with an entourage of servants and camels trailing behind—isn't from Scripture.

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Stefan Kalipha  
(Gaspar),  
Nadim  
Sawalha  
(Melchior) and  
Eriq Ebouaney  
(Balthasar)  
portray the  
Magi in *The  
Nativity Story*,  
now out on  
DVD. Most of  
what's  
believed about  
the Magi is  
drawn from  
tradition  
rather than the  
Bible, experts  
agree. (RNS  
photo/Jaimie  
Trueblood/New  
Line Cinema)

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**What if Christmas had not**

# come?

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## What if Christmas had not come?

**By BO Baker**

Can you imagine anything more saddening than a Christmas without the Savior? Whether one is a believer or not, we are all involved in the season of Christmas. We purchase gifts to give away. We joy in the sound of music showering down the neighborhood where we live. Expressions of care arriving come so invitingly as we listen to choirs of angels who never seem far away. I'll be honest with you: I like it, all of it. Our cold hearts need the lift that Christmas brings.

Think about it: What if Jesus had not come? What if he had never entered the mind and heart of the Creator-God?

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Suppose the Cross-figure had been little more than a poor grandstander, a radical religionist looking for attention.

Now to be honest, one must add to the story of the birth of a baby from Bethlehem Who introduced him, the touch of miracles that pointed to him, the cross that held him as he gave himself to all mankind, the tomb that lay open because of him, the angels who clung to the battlements of heaven longing to worship the King of Kingdom Come. Yes, all of this, and more. This is the truth that makes Christmas for all of us. Our future hope rests in the fact of the person of Jesus Christ.

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# Finding the â€œspirit of Christmasâ€œ

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## Finding the 'spirit of Christmas'

**By Sam Underwood**

I was listening in (OK, go ahead and call it eavesdropping) on a conversation a couple of people were having in a restaurant. In my defense, it was one of those places where the tables are so crowded together, you might as well be sitting at the table with the ones next to you. I had not paid any real attention to them until one of them gave a heavy sigh and said, "I'm having a hard time getting in the Christmas spirit."