



Current

A Taft Avenue Publication

December 2011 | Vol. 13 | Issue 11

*Equipping the church to reach the world
for the glory of God through Christ*

Christmas once more...
for the first time

TABLE OF CONTENTS

God & Man: a Sovereign Gift	2
Church Camp Talkin'	5
Meet the Staff: Pastor Andrew	6
In Mission: Christmas with the Neighborhood	8
Ministering in London: John and Deanna Hayes	9
Mission to India	10
Unlikely Wrapping Paper	11

God & Man: a Sovereign Gift

By Pastor Bob



Mary and Child by Andrea Mantegna

The incarnation, birth of Christ, deity inhabiting humanity, has fascinated the people of God from the beginning of God's promise. We hear faint echoes of it in Genesis 3: the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. But how? Can a man crush this supernatural being, the enemy of our souls, the devil, and still be a man?

The echoes are gone in Matthew 1: the crusher is born, from the lineage of David, and also the lineage of God – He is Immanuel, God with us. Read this chapter and stand in amazement as God becomes man, and still retains all of His goodness, infinities and rightness. He is not diminished, not diluted or unempowered – He is fully God. Because of our fragilities and temptation to understand without mystery, we are tempted to focus on one of His natures at the expense of the other. The current drift in America is to diminish His deity, maybe because the humanity of the Christ seems safer? This Christmas season, as we think about our perfect Savior and His coming, let's refocus

again on His absolute, awesome and powerful sovereignty. Yes, He came, suffered, wept, endured hardship. And YES, He was, is and will always be equal with His Father in power, glory and perfections.

The list of Bible verses which I have referenced below is not complete. There are many, many more texts which speak of God's control. However, this list should still be convincing to us: God is sovereign over all. They do not negate the biblical teachings about Satan's influences or the choices we make which are fully our responsibility. However, God's providential care cannot be ignored nor forgotten, especially in light of the troubles we face. Somehow, God's sovereignty works so that He is never contingent on our actions, and we are fully responsible for our choices – there is no one to blame but ourselves. Yes, there is tension in fully grasping how God administrates this arrangement, but we can still rejoice in His control and love (Romans 8:28). *All references ESV*

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”
Colossians 1:15-20

“But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.’” Hebrews 1:8

All the attributes of God, listed below, are therefore fully applicable to the Son.

God Is Sovereign Over . . .

Whoever has the most power:

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will (Proverbs 21:1).

Ordinary events in our lives:

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. . . . Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” (James 4:13-15).

Salvation:

“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy (Romans 9:15-16).

As many as were appointed to eternal life believed (Acts 13:48).

Seemingly haphazard events:

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD (Proverbs 16:33).

Life and death:

See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand (Deuteronomy 32:39).

The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up (1 Samuel 12:6).

Disabilities:

Then the LORD said to [Moses], “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?” (Exodus 4:11).

Jesus’ death:

Jesus, [who was] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men (Acts 2:23).

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief. . . . (Isaiah 53:10).

All evil:

Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it? (Amos 3:6).

I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things (Isaiah 45:7).

Everything, everybody, every event:

Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases (Psalm 115:3).

All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?” (Daniel 4:35).

As we await our Savior’s coming this Christmas, let us celebrate the truth that this all-powerful God did not leave us in our helpless estate, but rather became one of us so He may know the particularity of existing as the man Jesus. God was in control—even as the Son became a baby!

Hallelujah our Savior has come!

Church Camp Talkin'

By Laura Baxter



The best part of Church Camp, for me, is the talking. Sitting in the dining hall, and talking. Walking along the pathways, and talking. Watching paintball, or crazy gym games, and talking. Eating apple donuts, drinking tea in the snack room, and talking. Playing Catchphrase, and talking.

And it strikes me how much we really are a family, how much we really need each other, how much we can help each other. Overwhelmed by teenaged boys? There are family members who have been there, and will pray for you. Need “marginal legal advice”? There are family members who are glad to opine. Need cupcakes for your next party? Need an adventure camping guide? Need a geek coach? Need a baby holder? We have family members who can do all those things, and much more.

God has given us these varied gifts and interests, so that we can build each other up, and glorify Christ. Think about what gifts you might have. Don't forget to share your needs as well. Now that we are down from the mountain, let's continue to ask how we can be the body of Christ together.

Meet the Staff: Pastor Andrew

By Ingrid Chung

Ever wanted to find out who the man pastoring our youth is? Read below!



Andrew & Katie Koetsier

So, how did you end up coming to Taft Avenue?

I was finishing up my Master of Theology (Th.M.) at Talbot and began looking for a church ministry. I interviewed for a youth director position and felt God leading me to come serve here with my wife Katie. Taft Avenue is my first full-time ministry position . All my other ministry involvements were volunteer.

How long ago did you come?

Spring 2009. In the six months since I started at Taft Avenue, Katie and I were married and I graduated from Talbot with my Th.M., and Katie started her Master's program in Spiritual Formation at Talbot . It was a crazy time!

What are some particularly memorable moments?

Over the years, seeing students grow in their desire and practice of sharing their faith, and through that, to own their faith. Understanding their faith in Jesus as having an impact on their own personal lives. Moving them from just part of growing up in the church to something that grounds them in who they are in Christ and what they do.

Also, growth in unity. A lot of youth groups struggle with cliques, and I'm encouraged to see our youth group grow in realizing that they're all in the same body of Christ.

What do you love most about your job?

The number one thing is that I have a front row seat to see God change the hearts of students and turn them towards Him. In the last few years, we've had a number of students come to know the Lord for the first time, and many more who have truly begun to seek to live out their faith.

What's a challenge in your job?

Students today have an ever-expanding list of things that demand their time and attention. Sometimes, the biggest challenge is helping them understand the need for Christ's impact on every aspect of their lives. This can mean making difficult decisions, like not doing some things they want or not hanging out with some friends for the sake of their growth in the Lord. Living for Christ as a teenager is hard.

What do you do when you're not pastoring youth? What do you do for fun?

This fall, I began teaching at Biola University. So, on Monday nights, you can find me teaching there with about 40 college freshmen. I love sports, both playing and following my favorite Michigan teams. I enjoy spending time with my wife as we share life and ministry together.

Favorite books? Music?

Biographies: Recently, Bonhoeffer's biography by Eric Metaxas, *Team of Rivals*, and an expansive biography on Abraham Lincoln and his presidential cabinet by Doris Kearns Goodwin. Bonhoeffer because his life gives me insight into a life lived out of deep conviction and commitment to Christ regardless of the pull of circumstances. Goodwin gave me insight into leadership and leading imperfect people with various strengths in one common purpose.

Music: Recently, I've been digging a lot of Switchfoot and Jon Foreman, its lead singer. I would also be remiss if I didn't mention Coldplay, my all-time favorite secular band. In my musical heart, I think I'm British.

What's one thing you're looking forward to this year?

Being a dad! Katie and I are expecting a new addition to our family in June. We're thankful for the gift of new life and pray that we point the little one to the direction of his/her Heavenly Father.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Engaging in reaching the lost with the gospel. In particular, Katie and I would envision being involved in training and equipping pastors and leaders to plant churches among the unreached. We don't know if that mission will take us across the ocean or keep us closer to home.

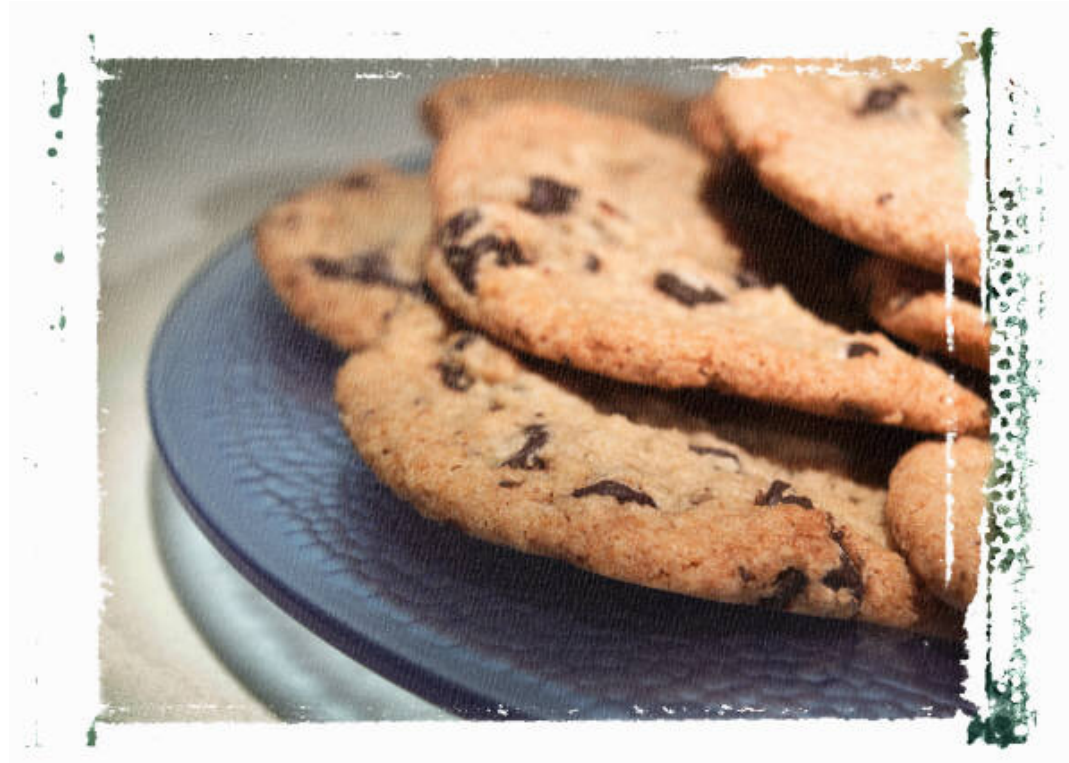
Any final words for your reading audience? Encouragement, benediction?

Wherever you are in your walk with Christ, I would challenge you to not be content to simply survive. Rather, my prayer for you is that in your walk with Jesus, you would thrive.

Thanks for interviewing!

Christmas with the Neighborhood

By Ingrid Chung



In the birth of Christ, God came to dwell among us for good. Where do we dwell? How can we carry on this “good news” in presence and proclamation among those we live with? Come, join other Taft Avenue’rs as we venture into our neighborhood to share the story of “God with us” through song: carol with us Sunday, December 18 and Wednesday, December 21. Dinner first, then caroling. We will also invite them to our Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services. Bake a batch of cookies for carolers to bring and come sing this wondrous news!

Ministering in London: John and Deanna Hayes

By Bill Petersen



John and Deanna's first two days in South Africa were spent training local pastors and lay leaders from several churches in the township. This was particularly noteworthy, since local churches have a history of dividing when they have a conflict and therefore don't frequently serve together. These trainings focused on working together to meet the needs of the community.

In a place where fifty percent of the men are HIV+ and marriage is frequently not embraced, you can imagine the destruction of the families and how that affects each generation. Breaking these cycles of destruction and despair is key, thus the heavy emphasis on children and youth. Please pray for these things and for their mission team who lives and serves in South Africa. The daily battles are both physical and spiritual. Pray for the mighty hand of God to intervene.

Prayer requests

John and Deanna's leadership meetings with InnerCHANGE, CRM leaders and ministry partners when they return to London. Pray that they would hear God's voice clearly in every decision that is made.

On November 19, Jamal and Yolanda got married! Pray for the anointing of Jamal and Yolanda's marriage and that their trust in God would transform them into one flesh.

Please pray for Alexandra's friends, who are cutting themselves. Please pray that they can meet with a youth worker trained in counseling "cutters" and that God would intervene in Jennifer and Allannah's lives and bring them peace and joy again. One highlight was Alexandra bringing the girls to church a couple of weeks ago. Pray that God's heart will dwell in theirs.

John and Deanna thank you so much for your prayers.

Mission to Orange, India and the World

By Steve Hicks



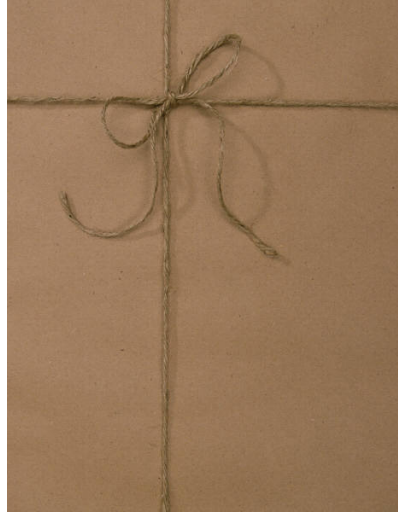
By now, you will have heard many stories from our returning India team. Stories of salvation, of churches being planted, and God using indigenous villagers to be pastors and leaders in their communities. For the past four years, we have been partnering with the Leadership Training Center (LTC) in Siliguri. While that relationship will continue, a new, indigenous team has been established in India for us to partner with. Called the "Shalom Adivasi Society" (SAS), this team is composed of pastors and evangelists who are connected with LTC and who live among the Adivasi people. The primary purpose of this new team is to work directly with TACC in the Adivasi villages near Siliguri. This is a wonderful change, in that we

now have people with whom we can directly communicate, and who are familiar with our work and what we are trying to accomplish. Though SAS is connected to LTC, their primary responsibility is to work with TACC and the Adivasi.

As we approach the Christmas season, please remember to pray for our supported missionaries throughout the world. Ask God to bless their ministries, and that He would comfort those who are not able to be with their loved ones. These are dedicated folks. It would be good if you would send one an email, letting them know that you are praying for them, and appreciate them. *Check on our website under Missions >> Missionaries for email addresses.*

Unlikely Wrapping Paper

By Ingrid Chung



Well—
they were told
a gift was on its way
and being of proper breeding
they sought
shiny wrapping paper
bow with finesse
impossible to miss.

Too preoccupied looking for sheen
they missed
the cloak of a teenage girl
passing by that busy morn
the cry of a baby
from a not-too-distant cave
the unmistakable scent
of two turtledoves
offered up
on an altar
that other day.