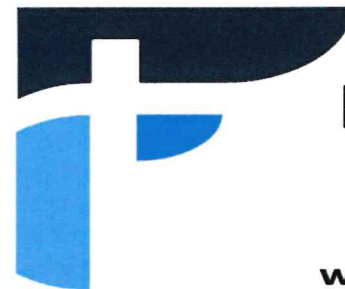


The Fountain  
1023 N Chinowth St.  
Visalia, CA 93291



# THE FOUNTAIN CHRISTIAN CHURCH

[www.thefountaincc.org](http://www.thefountaincc.org)

*Depth in Love, Truth, and Life*



## *The Fountain Christian Church*

### **Office Hours:**

Mon-Thurs 9:00 AM— 4:30 PM

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# God's Glory Not Consumerism

By Pastor Sam Sears

Isaiah 60:13 "The glory of Lebanon will come to you,  
The juniper, the box tree and the cypress together,  
To beautify the place of My sanctuary;  
And I shall make the place of My feet glorious."

It's hard for me to admit how close we are to Christmas this year. Every year since my son was born has gone by much faster than the year before, but it at least felt like there was an easy traceable progression to it. The global pandemic and the lockdown seem to have made things hazy, and as I talk to others, they agree. I'm not sure, when we look back at 2020 and 2021, how we will separate the blurry lines between the two. It may be hard to accept, but decorations are already everywhere.

While I think that the Nativity has earned its spot as the top Christmas decoration, especially when efforts are made to make it more biblically accurate, I have to confess that for much of our culture, it's the Christmas tree that takes center stage. Some even sing "O, Christmas tree, O, Christmas Tree, how lovely are thine branches." While I have seen many Christmas trees that are indeed beautiful, I confess to having some inner conflict when I look at most Christmas trees, and specifically what passes as ornaments these days.

Last year, I was able to spend time discussing myths about Christmas. Some have used out-of-context Bible verses to paint the Christmas tree as a false idol, and I don't know anyone who worships the Christmas tree. There are popular, but dubious, claims that trace the Christmas tree and Christmas itself back to pagan origins, and most of these claims are easily refuted as out right false. A few merely hinge on superficial similarities. Last year, I quoted from Isaiah 60:13 to show that, yes, even God used trees as decorations, so I feel obligated to defend their use.

I personally love the Menorah and recognizing Hanukkah. I'm not genetically Jewish, but I know that Jesus himself celebrated Hanukkah, and it's even recorded in John 10. I also served with some messianic Jewish Christians. We do, however, have a Christmas tree in our home, and I always have complicated feelings when decorating, not because of some pagan association, but because of a different form of worldliness.

I've sometimes held Taz, the Tasmanian devil, or some other cartoon character as a Christmas ornament, and wondered, "How does this celebrate Jesus?" I'm a nerd, and I'm not a minimalist. I have shelves with little replicas of my favorite fictional characters on them. I see no problem with little knick-knacks or mementos that remind us of some of our favorite stories or nostalgic times in our life, as long as they don't become idols. I'm also not suggesting that the little Christmas ornaments themselves become idols, but I do wonder if they belong on the Christmas tree.

This hasn't stopped me from assisting my family in putting up decorations. I even have a tiny little tree-shaped alien, Groot, that I set in the office as

my "Christmas tree." I'm not worshipping them, and the characters do cause me to smile, and I am reminded of my own childhood, and even one ornament, sadly lost over the years, my mom gave me as a child with the Ninja Turtles on it. So, for those reasons, I keep participating; however, the older I get, the more I appreciate the classic, non-licensed character ornaments.

If we must have the best and the latest decorations or gifts, we may be trapped by pursuit of them. We may wrap our own happiness in the temporary and the fleeting and be distracted by the unchanging Joy we can have in Christ. The time we spend, or the items themselves, may be good, but I'd hate to miss the better, long-lasting meaning for temporary enjoyment.

Christmas shouldn't be about companies making money off of our nostalgia or emotional connections. We live in a materialistic and consumer-driven society. I love the design process, and I understand economics, but Christmas should be Heaven invading our world, not our world invading our celebration. The metaphor has its limits, but it seems backwards for us to put so much focus on the temporary, at a time we should be celebrating the eternal. Christmas only heightens that contrast for me.

I have stood at the back of our sanctuary and in the sound booth at night and seen the beauty of our decorations in the church. They are free of all the little temporary characters and feel purer. They feel like a reminder of the beauty we can find within God's creation. God knew the aroma created by each of the trees He designed. He knew that man would look up at the beautiful stars and that the lights would encourage our imaginations. He knew the way light would reflect off metal and catch our eyes. He made us as creatures who recognize beauty, because He did make our world full of it, before we marred it; its remaining beauty points back to Him, the Artist and Creator of that beauty.

This year, as you see decorations go up, I hope they inspire you — not to add some other item to your wish list or another task to your to-do list, but to respond in thankfulness and worship to a Wondrous Creator whose hands make beautiful things.



## When Women Retreat

By Carrie Guy

This past month, 13 of us took a weekend and headed to the Monterey area for a retreat. It was a wonderful time to bond, eat lots of food, make silly jokes, rest, and go deeper with God. We stayed in two houses on an artichoke farm in Castroville. The homes looked like they were Joanna Gaines originals with their farmhouse chic style. The designer and matriarch of the Pezzini Farms family, Jo-Lynn Pezzini, is a beautiful, Christian woman who not only shared her home with us, but also her heart. God has been building a relationship with us over the years and it was wonderful to have to come by in the morning and chat and pray with us over coffee.

This weekend we asked the question, "What are you building," by doing a word and culture study of the stone passages in the Bible? We all took a small stone home with us to remember what God is doing in our lives. We looked at what we are building with and where God may want a spiritual remodel.

I love the time with the ladies to get to know them all. We had an eclectic group who many were strangers when we started, but everyone left as friends. We discovered the value of friendship and just how much we missed it over the past two years. Below is a group photo of the whole group that attended as well as a photo of me with Jo-Lynn. We'd love to have other women join us next time we retreat. We don't have a date yet for the next retreat but let us know if you would like to attend and we can add you to the list. Blessings. – Carrie



## Christmas & Advent

The Christmas Eve Candlelight Service has a NEW TIME. It will start at 6:00 p.m. on Dec. 24 and will last about 45 minutes... and yes, we plan to be back inside this year.

During Advent, our Classic Service will feature the lighting of the Advent wreath, accompanied by the stories of how a few of the best known Christmas carols were written. Come and enjoy the unique history of these favorite songs and enrich your Christmas season.



# December 2021

| Sun   | Mon   | Tue               | Wed              | Thu                         | Fri   | Sat  |
|---|---|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|
|   |   |                   | 1<br>6:00 Awana  | 2<br>10:00 Berean Watchmen  | 3 6:30 Men's Group<br>8:00 Christmas Decorating!      | 4<br>4:00 Drop 'N Shop                                 |
| 5<br>9:00 Worship<br>10:30 Worship  | 6<br>10:40 Prayer Warriors<br>12:00 Women's Bible Study | 7<br>10:00 Staff  | 8<br>6:00 Awana  | 9<br>10:00 Berean Watchmen  | 10 6:30 Men's Group                                   | 11   |
| 12<br>9:00 Worship<br>10:30 Worship<br>11:45 Orientation Class<br>3:45 Caroling | 13<br>10:40 Prayer Warriors                             | 14<br>10:00 Staff | 15<br>6:00 Awana | 16<br>10:00 Berean Watchmen | 17 6:30 Men's Group                                   | 18   |
| 19<br>9:00 Worship<br>10:30 Worship   | 20<br>10:40 Prayer Warriors                             | 21<br>10:00 Staff | 22<br>6:00 Awana | 23                          | 24 6:30 Men's Group<br><br>6:00 Christmas Eve Service | 25<br><b>For<br/>unto us<br/>a Savior is<br/>Born!</b> |
| 26<br>9:00 Worship<br>10:30 Worship   | 27<br>10:40 Prayer Warriors                             | 28<br>10:00 Staff | 29               | 30<br>10:00 Berean Watchmen | 31 6:30 Men's Group                                   |  |

Are you interested in learning more about the ministries here at The Fountain? Would you like to know more about becoming a member?

Join Sam following second service (11:45 a.m.) on Sunday, December 12th for an in-depth look.

Please, call the office(559.732.6623) to reserve your space, and lunch will be provided.



If you would like to join us, please, let us know! We would like to know how many will be coming so that we can plan and best use the opportunity to reach as many people during the time we will be caroling.

But if you haven't signed up, don't let that keep you away, we always have room for more carolers!

## I get to dig deeper, WHILE STAYING HERE!

By Sam Sears

I love digging into the word and engaging our secular culture at the same time. I love worshipping God with my mind. Despite still remembering how many pages I had to read each week, or all the papers I had to write for my M.A. in Apologetics, I have longed to continue my academic training, but I am also committed to staying right here in California and continuing to serve as your senior pastor. Thankfully, I can do both, thanks to an almost entirely online program.

I had been praying and talking with trusted brothers in Christ like DHF's Rick Grace, and my Thursday pastors' group for some time, and things slowly came together. We are selling our house in Ohio, both of our children are in school, and I have of a few years here put into developing staff culture and teamwork. So financially, and time wise it seemed we were ready, but I still prayed and looked at some options. I then asked our Elders to pray about it and give me feedback. In the end the best fit seemed to be at Biola and their D. Min in Engaging Minds and Culture. I applied to only one program and was officially accepted 11/15/2021. We have some time before my program begins.

I'll start JANURARY of 2023 with a large amount of required reading. That might mean my office door, which is almost always open now, will be shut a little more often. I may miss some more Men's breakfasts, and I'll share some mid -week teaching duties with others more often. I will have to attend 2 weeks of in person class each summer. Thankfully I have several trusted folks who could cover those Sundays I'll miss. I'll then have a project to work on in the Fall, and I'll repeat that for 3 years and in the 4<sup>th</sup> year will be focused on a single large project.

I'm excited to learn more about ways I can serve you more effectively. We have over a year to get ready for any adjustments necessary, but I wanted to thank each of you, and specifically the elders for their support!



## Attendance & Giving

November 2021

| Date           | Average In person Attendance | Total Giving |
|----------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| November ..... | 89.....                      | \$21,554.50  |



**The Annual Congregational Meeting  
will be postponed until sometime in  
February 2022!**

**Dear Church Family,**

**Thank you for your sympathy, kindness and prayers. We deeply appreciate your expressions of love and support during this difficult time. Thank you for the beautiful meals, phone calls and other expressions of love. We are so grateful for all of the love and support that you have shown us during this time.**

**With Love,**

**The Douglass Family**



## Birthdays & Anniversaries

December 2021

|                           |                            |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Lois Davis.....1          | Keith Moore.....23         |
| Cody Yale.....1           | Wayne Geis.....25          |
| Bev Coffman.....2         | Larry Lewis.....29         |
| Margy Lauffenberger.....2 | Robert Brooks.....30       |
| Earl Subejano.....5       | Audrey Ray.....30          |
| Avery Joe Sears.....6     | Carl Shane.....31          |
| Jeanita Hendren.....9     | Greg Stowers.....31        |
| Lina Garcia.....10        |                            |
| Les Coffman.....11        |                            |
| Karen Gunning.....11      |                            |
| William Switzer.....11    |                            |
| Samuel Morgan.....12      |                            |
| Dana Switzer.....12       |                            |
| April Kesterson.....14    | Kevin & Sharon Turl.....29 |
| David Saffell.....19      | Sam & Heather Sears.....31 |

*Happy Anniversary!*

## Prayer Concerns

December 2021

Pray for the desire and opportunity to effectively share your faith!

Our Nation and Leaders

Teachers & Students in Visalia. Our Brothers & Sisters at Elim.

### Health

Ana Morales, Ashley Banuelos, Barbara Grant, Bonnie Henson, Cindy Marks, Donna Eastin, Frank Henley, Harold Hoppert, Heather Smith, Jean Lamb, Jeff Rolph, Kevin Guy, Lynnette Johnson, Marilee Douglass, Mary Stemkoski, Pam Shattuck, Pauline Gurule, Rick Hamilton, Fred Wilder, Sandy Zinger

### Cancer

Al Stone, David Thomas, Debbi Bianchi, Hazel Bahrenburg, Jiggy Greene, Jim Shackelford, Joe Grant, Keith Moore, Michael Elder, Mike Brazil, Mike Gunning, Olly Ajluni, Sandra Campbell, Shannan Ajluni, Susan Gardner, Susan Jacquez, Jamie Harp

### Other Needs

Nina Suttles (Vision)

### Military

Andie Richwine – Marine, Brett Boland - Virginia, Jason Mariel - Afghanistan, Matthew Calhoun - Fort Knox, Michael Reid – San Diego, CA, Preston Correa – Marine, Tyler Richwine – Marine