



ACORN

Seeds for Growth

I Am Your Servant, Lord

Even at a very young age, Mary, mother to the Messiah King Jesus, was well on her way to becoming God’s fully devoted follower. How do we know this? Out of all prospective women God could have chosen, God selected to bestow His special favor upon her to conceive, birth, and to nurture the Messiah in His growing years. Certainly the angel’s announcement was right on target when he said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28)! Furthermore, we marvel at her response, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true (Luke 1:38).” Her response, and the follow through for the remainder of her earthly life, evidenced faith, love, and trusting obedience.



Are you willing to put it all on the line, knowing that God has highly favored you by sending His Son into your life to save you, befriend you, and to lead you? Are you willing to pray, “I am your servant, Lord. I am willing to be and do whatever you ask of me. I will accept not only the privileges and joys you have in store for me, but to shoulder the challenges and to bear even the heartaches you may plan, so that your purposes might be fulfilled in and through me.” Will you take a few moments to read Luke 1:26-56 and then to sincerely respond in prayer as Mary did? And then, you will follow Him as devotedly as God enables you, for the remainder of your earthly life?



~ Pastor Paul

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The mission of Oakwood is to...

Transform ordinary people into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Oakwood is a member of the Evangelical Free Church of America.



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Christmas at Oakwood



This Christmas season we will focus on the gift that's worth everything! It's a gift that's worth giving, waiting for, receiving, and appreciating. It's the greatest gift ever purchased and the greatest gift that can be received. As we consider each of the messages in my series, may we all use them as an opportunity to deepen our gratitude for this gift – and may we share it with a friend by inviting them to worship beside us at Oakwood during the month of December. ~ Pastor Paul

Christmas Eve Bonfire Service

An outdoor service under the stars—Saturday, December 24 @ 6:00 PM

A candlelight service filled with Christmas music. Wear your jeans and bring your own lawn chair and a personal flash light (for reading lyrics)

The service will be located just east of the Teen Center

Ushers will be available to guide you to our location

Contingency plan will be in the worship center (but not a candle light service)



Christmas Day & New Year's Day Services



We will have a family Worship Service on **Sunday, December 25 and Sunday, January 1 at 10:30 AM**. There will be childcare for children birth through 4 years old. All other children will be with their families in the Worship Service. There will be no education classes for youth or adults.

Sunday, January 8 we will resume our regular schedule with Education Classes for all ages at 9:15 AM and our Worship Service and TreeHouse ministry at 10:30 AM.

Opportunities to *Serve The Church & World*

Christmas Eve Help Needed

We need help with our Christmas Eve Service. Can you give some time to help with setting up, taking down or refreshments? If so, please contact the Church Office @ 969-2303.

Be An Angel

You can help supply the Pregnancy Care Center with items needed for babies and their mothers. Please take an angel from the tree in the lobby and purchase the item written on the back. Place the unwrapped gift under the tree by December 25. Pregnancy Care Center is supported through the Missions giving of Oakwood Community Church.



Metropolitan Ministries

We are collecting non-perishable food for Metropolitan Ministries' Christmas food distribution effort. These items can be put in the box in the lobby through Sunday, December 18.



Their most needed items are canned fruit, boxed cereal, beans, and yams.

They can also use donations of crib and stroller toys, make-up, jewelry, watches, sports clothing or hats.

Voting Results



The Members unanimously approved the Proposed 2012 Budget and the recommendation for Bob Mendenhall to serve a second term on the Deacon Team.

Year End Giving

To assist you in your year-end planning we would like to pass along the following reminder: According to IRS regulations, any checks credited toward your 2011 taxes must be dated on or before December 31, 2011 and postmarked by December 31, 2011. If you prefer to hand deliver, it must be in the church office by December 30. Please contact the office before coming by as staff schedules the week of Dec. 26-30 are not their normal work schedules.

New Women's Study Beginning

Just for Joy is beginning a new Beth Moore study entitled, *James Mercy Triumphs*. We would like to invite you and your friends to join us beginning January 4, in this exciting new journey. We will be learning about the man called **James** and what it means to **live out our faith**. Please be praying that God would use this to draw us closer to Him and to each other. We will begin registration on December 11. We will also be showing the promotional video in the church Lobby. The accompanying workbook will be fifteen dollars plus three dollars toward the video series, but as always do not let the cost determine your participation, God will provide.

If you have questions about this study, please contact Sissy Saunders @ 926-9506.

Prayer 2011

Oakwood is focusing on prayer in 2011. Pick up your copy of the December Prayer Guide focusing on Advent from the Information Center or check it out on our website. May this guide help you focus on the birth of our Lord and guide you in prayer during December.



Missions Communications

The Oakwood family, through the Missions Commission was able to bless our supported missionary families with a monetary Christmas gift. Below are replies from our missionaries.

Thank you for sending such wonderful news. Please give my Christmas greetings and gratitude to my dear Oakwood family. I am truly thankful to represent all of you here in the Czech Republic. It is such a privilege and an honor. With much love and prayer—Colleen Darlington

This is great news. We are thankful and are so encouraged by Oakwood's generosity and care. Don & Ellen Harris

Thank you so much Oakwood Missions Commission...you all are such a blessing. I have some big news, but will wait till I get my newsletter together. Have a wonderful Christmas! In His love—Roy and Debbie Garren

Dear friends and colleagues on the MisCom,

Thank you so much for this sweet and encouraging gift. All four of us will enjoy the blessing of sharing in this gift of love and affirmation. Oakwood is so dear to us, and we so value your faithful service to our missionaries, our church, and our King. In His joy, thankful for all things, Pete, Mary Ellen, Nathan and Abbie Kluck

Thanks for sharing the good news with us. Oakwood's support is a huge blessing to us and our ministry to college students. Thanks again, John and Kerri Schneider

Dear friends. Thank you very much. Blessings, Dave Hawes

Wow! That is SO generous!!!! And will be very helpful for our Christmas travel expenses! Going to go to Ohio - last Christmas in my parent's home of 52 years as they are planning to put it on the market! With grateful hearts, Bob & Ellen Hargrave

Thanks for the wonderful news. Those special Christmas gifts sure are a big help. Thank you to everyone on the mission commission for thinking of us and, especially, for your prayers. Blessings, Jerry & Mildred Petersen

THANK YOU SO MUCH! You are such a blessing to us. May the Lord continue to watch over and bless the Oakwood Church family! -Roy & Rita Pallatt

Dear Missions Commission, Hooray! You've made us really happy. Things are a little tight this Christmas and this money will be a nice blessing for all of us. We especially thank you knowing that your own finances are not all so abundant of late. Thank you for being so generous to us!!! Dave and Jen Cox

Encourage our missionaries

As you have read, the missionaries appreciate the gift Oakwood has sent. This is also the season many of them will not be with families. Many of them are in countries that celebrate Christmas differently than the US and some live in cultures that do not celebrate at all. Sending an e-mail wishing them a Merry Christmas would be a great encouragement for them. You can find all the e-mail addresses on the Oakwood website at www.oakwoodfl.org. Just go to the Missions link under Ministries and you will find them there. Also, if you send a note to Jerry and Mildred Petersen and Roy and Debbie Garren, you may want to wish them a Happy Anniversary as well. They both celebrate their wedding anniversary on December 29!

Prayer Request

From Don & Ellen Harris—Don is doing well in his recuperation from prostate cancer surgery. Please continue to pray for his full recovery and to regain strength.



Christmas Party & Lock-In

All PowerHouse students are encouraged to join us for our annual Christmas Party, Sunday, December 18, 5:00 PM. Bring a white elephant gift for the gift exchange.



Lock-In—will be December 30 from 7:00 PM to December 31, 7:00 AM. Watch for more details.

PowerHouse Schedule

Dec 18—Christmas Party

Dec 25—No PowerHouse morning classes
No PowerHouse evening meeting

Dec 27—PowerHouse Work Day @ 9:00 AM—pizza will be available for lunch

Dec 30—PowerHouse Lock-In—watch for details

PH Food Bag Fundraisers

PowerHouse teens can raise money for summer mission/conference trips by participating in our monthly Food Bag Fundraisers on the third Sunday of each month. Our next Food Bag Prep fundraiser is December 18, right after the Worship Service.

Teens can raise extra funds by helping shop for the food and/or helping with delivery of the food bags to the medical clinics. Shopping for the next fundraiser will be Friday, December 16. Meet at the Save-A-Lot on Bearss Ave at 5:00 PM if you want to help. For more details contact Sandy Clarke at 931-0668.

Drivers needed for Food Bag Ministry

Our PowerHouse students have a monthly fundraiser assembling food bags that are distributed to medical clinics in Tampa, Lakeland and Haines City. We are in need of people who can help with delivery of these food bags, especially to Lakeland and Haines City. The food bags are assembled on the third Sunday of each month, and need to be delivered on the Monday or Tuesday following assembly.

If you can help with delivery or would like more information, please contact Sandy Clarke at 813-931-0668.





The Christmas Wreath—by Bethany Macklin

It hardly seemed possible. After 13 moves in 15 years and much fervent prayer, we finally purchased our first house. True, we'd barely squeaked into our humble home in the escalating California economy, but this house was something to call our own.

Finally, we had somewhere to put down roots, somewhere to actually plant all those Mother's Day roses that had followed us around, house after house, year after year, in their cramped mismatched pots.

And Christmas was coming! Walking into each house we rented over the years one of my first thoughts was always, *Where will we put the Christmas tree?* I loved celebrating Christmas! Nevertheless, deflated by the temporary nature of our stay in each rental, we'd never purchased Christmas lights to hang outside or a wreath for the door.

Finances were tight that first Christmas in our new home, and I made a commitment to God to joyfully make the most of our limited resources. As I scrambled and scraped to personalize it for the holidays, I longed to splurge on one thing—a wreath for the front door. It was our way of hanging out a shingle to say, *we live here*; we aren't just passing through.

While out grocery shopping one afternoon, I saw the perfect wreath. As I picked it up to admire it, my pledge to faithful, careful stewardship rose in my mind, as did a phrase from Hebrews 13:5—*Be content with what you have*. Holding the wreath, I weighed its symbolic significance against the pressing value of 12 dollars in our strained finances. Although it was inexpensive, I just didn't have the cash to buy it. Suppressing the inner rumblings of discouragement, I set the wreath down and purposefully walked away.

Throughout the following week, I tried to ignore the rise of disappointment each time I saw a house bedecked with Christmas finery, the inevitable homey wreath hanging familiarly against the front door. *If God wanted me to have a wreath, I'd have one*, I thought, trying to console myself. *In the grand scheme of things eternal, it isn't important anyway. After all, it's only a wreath.*"

A week later, my husband came home from work, arms bulging with Christmas goodies from his clients. As our kids descended upon him, rummaging excitedly through the various gift bags in search of kid-friendly treats, I noticed some greenery peeking out from under one of the bags hanging on his arm.

"One of my clients gave us something I thought you might like," he said casually as he struggled to free it from the handles of the bag still on his arm. With a smile, he carefully laid a wreath on the kitchen table. It was the one I'd admired a week earlier!

I snatched it up with a cry of delight and joyfully praised God for it. I recounted the whole story for our children who tore themselves away from their goodies long enough to finger the wreath with wonder and a newfound appreciation.

The following afternoon, after several satisfying hours of creative effort, I hung it proudly on our front door, again praising God, whom I recognized as the true source of the treasured gift.

As I stood admiring it, I basked in the abounding blessings of obedience. I reflected on how easy it would have been to give in and buy it that afternoon, and then rationalize the small purchase. I remembered prior experiences of running ahead of God instead of waiting for his provision and the inevitable misery that had followed.

Gratitude to God welled in my heart as I savored the infinite sweetness of receiving my heart's desire from his hand instead of forcing it with my own—even for something as inconsequential as a Christmas wreath. Throughout that holiday season, our special wreath served as a visual reminder of God's personal provision and loving care for our family.

"O LORD, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him?" (Psalm 144:3-4). Why does God go to such lengths to provide such insignificant items for us? They carry no deep theological weight of glory; they save no souls; they don't seem to further any ministry.

Yet, he provides them all the same. And he often produces them in such delightful, unexpected ways—as a parent surprising a beloved child with a special treat.

Perhaps that's just it. He's a father—a tender, compassionate father who knows exactly how to make each of his children feel really loved. And he doesn't need a reason to lavish his love on us, he just does it—freely, intimately and often when we least expect it. The apostle Paul sums it up well in Romans 8:32: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" And I have a beautiful Christmas wreath to prove it.

Bethany Macklin is a freelance writer, speaker, and Christian leadership trainer (bethanymacklinministries.com). She writes women's Bible studies including "Anchoring in God's Attributes: A Safe Harbor." Bethany lives in Northern California with her husband and their two children.

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He will be called
 Wonderful Counselor,
 Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father,
 Prince of Peace.
 Isaiah 9:6

Our Staff

Lead Pastor - Dr. Paul B. Phair
 Director of Ministries - Dave Dorsey
 Director of Worship Arts - Andrew Reilly
 Coordinator of Youth Ministry - Dr. Paul B. Phair
 Coordinator of Children’s Ministry - Dave Dorsey
 Office Manager - Martha Dorsey
 Secretary - Mary-Lynn Reilly

Office hours:

Tuesday - Friday, 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Worship:

Sundays - 10:30 AM

Calendar at a Glance

December

Dec 18—Compassion Offering
 PH Food Bag Fundraiser
 Dec 24—Christmas Eve Bonfire Service
 Dec 25—Christmas Day Family Service



Jan 1—New Year’s Day Family Service
 Jan 8—Board Meeting
 Jan 15—Compassion Offering

The Oakwood ACORN is a bi-weekly E-newsletter from Oakwood Community Church, published to keep our church family and friends informed about events and people at Oakwood. Articles may be submitted via e-mail to Office@oakwoodfl.org. Article deadlines and publication schedule is:

Deadline	Publication date	News for dates including...
Dec 30	Jan 4	Jan 7—Jan 20
Jan 13	Jan 18	Jan 21—Feb 3

Do you know someone at Oakwood with a noteworthy achievement? Send the information to Office@OakwoodFL.org and we’ll include it in a future article.

If you have received this email in error or want to be removed from our e-newsletter distribution list, please hit the reply button and