



The Gift That Keeps on Giving

By Dr. James C. Carter, Associate Minister

The Christmas season has arrived once again. This annual event presents to the people within our culture the opportunity to give and/or receive gifts. Perhaps the idea of exchanging of gifts can be traced back to the three wise men who came to visit the Christ child, and they brought gifts to Him. We recall that they brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Each gift that the wise men brought was material. Material gifts are not lasting. They have a limited life span. Gold cankers. Perfume's sweet smell departs in a single whiff of wind. Material gifts are only temporal. In fact, everything material shall pass away. The Spirit is the only thing that is eternal.

The material or tangible gifts that we share are only expressions of our love. In other words, we use material gifts to say to those whom we love, "I love you." The gift is only a token of the love we share. Love cannot be weighed nor measured. We cannot access a value of our love. So the gifts that we give on special occasions are a one time expression on birthdays, anniversaries, or at Christmas time each year. The gift that we gave last year cannot be counted for this year. This fact should remind us of our finiteness.

Where may we find a gift that keeps on giving? There is only one source. That one source is the Everlasting Father. The Almighty God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). The prophet Isaiah the eighth century prophet wrote, "...For a child has been born for us, a son is given to us;..." (Isaiah 9:6 NRSV). God's gift of His only Son is the gift that keeps on giving.



– See Giving, page 2

Inside this issue:

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Church News | 3 |
| Dr. James O. Ellis Scholarship | 4 |
| The Christian Year | 5 |
| Championship Rings | 7 |
| The Perfect Gift | 8 |
| A Visit to the Jail | 9 |
| Birthdays and Anniversaries | 10 |

Special points of interest:

- *The Christian Year*
- *Dr. James O. Ellis Scholarship*
- *God Gives The Perfect Gift*
- *A Visit to the Jail*
- *Jonathan Edwards and Central High School*

God gave His Son; and the Son gave his life that the world might be ransomed from sin and eternal death. God's only begotten Son who once came and "tabernacled" among the people continues to reside with and within us. Having Christ within us gives hope during our darkest hours. Christ within the believer is the believer's hope of Glory (Colossians 1:27).

Presently, we are experiencing some dark days. Our youth are dying in the streets, schoolrooms, and even in our homes. Our young men and women are dying on battlefields. It seems that there is a great falling away for genuine faith in God.

These ills within our society that were mentioned above are a great challenge to Christian believers. Christian believers must not lose hope. The gift of Christ who once was sent from God is still available to us even during these dark days. He is the gift that keeps on giving. Christ will help us throughout these dark days. We can depend upon God. Christ is the ever shining light that no power can extinguish. Christian believers are challenged to become more forceful and appealing to the lost, through carrying the message of salvation and hope to the whole world. Our Lord Christ is the gift that keeps on giving, generation

after generation throughout endless ages. At this Christmas season, let us make a stronger resolve to get the word out that God's gift to the world on the first Christmas morn was Jesus the Christ who is the gift that keeps on giving.

"God gave His Son; and the Son gave his life that the world might be ransomed for sin and eternal death."

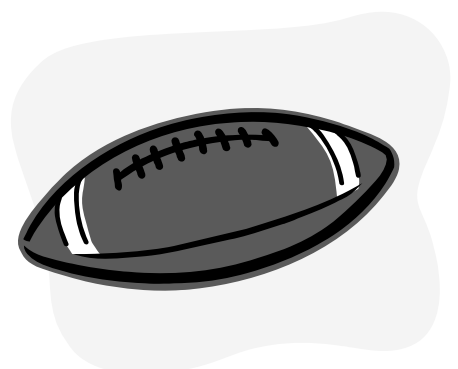
Congratulations to Jonathan Edwards

We congratulate **Jonathan Edwards** a team member of Tuscaloosa's Central High School Falcons for winning the State Class 4A football crown. The Falcons defeated Deshler 34-7 at Legion Field in Birmingham, Alabama on Thursday, December 6th. The fete gave Central its first football championship since 1995. Jonathan grabbed his 15th interception of the year in the

final minute of the first half. He ran into a pack of defenders after returning the ball 15 years and then he suddenly pitched the ball through the air to his teammate Travon Lawson.

Jonathan is a member of the Crusaders, Youth Choir, and Ushers. Hats off for a job well done!

Central High School adopted the theme *Central Taking Over (CTO)* throughout the year.



Church News

Remember our bereaved families during this Christmas season.

Bro. Lester H. White was funeralized on November 17, 2007 with **Rev. Richard L. Morgan** officiating.

Funeral services for **Sis. Irene O'Rourke Berry** were held on November 19, 2007 at First African Baptist Church. **Dr. Willie Clyde Jones** was the eulogist.

Special prayers for **Sis. Shonta Jackson** and family in the passing of her mother, **Mrs. Janice Jackson** of Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

.....

We solicit your prayers for the following persons on our sick list, also to those serving in the military and their families:

Sis. Mary Braxton - at home

Sis. Mary Hall - at home

Sis. Ida Hobson - at home

Sis. Melnee Johnson - out of town

Bro. Julius Richey - DCH Regional Medical Center, Tuscaloosa

Sis. Dorothy Smith - at home

Sis. Naameka White - California

Sis. Hazel Eubanks - at home

Sis. Marie Hester - at home

Sis. Julia Howard - at home

Bro. Edward O. Jones - at home

Sis. Mary White - nursing home

Sis. Norma Whitfield - retirement home

To add or remove someone from the prayer list, please call the church office at 758-2833 or contact the church secretary, **Sis. Irma Mason**

.....

Congratulations!

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph (RaShika Christian) Perez are the proud new parents of a new baby girl, born on December 19, 2007 at 7:00 p.m. **Kennedy Alexys Perez** weighed 7 pounds and 4 ounces.



Dr. James O. Ellis Scholarship

Sis. Audrey Ellis will accept applications in March 2008

Purpose: To provide an educational opportunity, beyond high school, to a deserving young person who desires to pursue a college education or prepare himself/herself for a specific trade/vocation.

Guidelines: The amount of scholarship awarded to one student each year is \$1,000. In the event no student applies, two \$1,000 scholarships will be awarded the next year for eligible applicants.

Criteria for Scholarship

- A. Be an active member in good standing with **First African Baptist Church**
- B. Have a "B" average
- C. Be accepted at a two-year or four-year institution
- D. Submit an official high school transcript
- E. Complete a scholarship application form
- F. Apply for the scholarship by May of each year
- G. Be active in Sunday School, Red Circle/YWA, or Crusaders

Evaluation Points

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|-----------|
| A. | Church Involvement | 25 points |
| B. | Community Involvement | 25 points |
| C. | District Involvement | 25 points |
| D. | Academic Record | 25 points |

In Jesus We've Got Everything!

The greatest man in history.

Jesus had no servants, yet they called him master.

Had no degree, yet they call him teacher.

Had no medicines, yet they called him healer.

He had no army, yet kings feared Him.

He won no military battles, yet he conquered the world.

He committed no crime, yet they crucified Him.

He was buried in a tomb, yet He lives today.

Feel honored to serve a leader who loves us!

Jesus.

The Christian Year

The Christian Year is a cycle of 12 months, which is divided so that it reminds us of the life and work of Jesus Christ. The Christian Year begins near the end of the calendar year with Advent. The seasons generally accepted are Advent, Christmastide, Epiphany, Lent, Eastertide, Pentecost, and Kingdomtide.

Seasons of the Christian Year **Advent**

This season begins four (4) Sundays before Christmas Day. The word means “coming” and is a season of expectation, hope, and celebration of the past, present, and future comings of Jesus to the world. The focus of the entire season is the celebration of the birth of Jesus the Christ in His first Advent, and the anticipation of the return of Christ the King in His Second Advent.

Historically, the primary sanctuary color of the Advent is **Purple**, the color of royalty, to welcome the Advent of the King. The color purpose is also the color of suffering used during Lent and Holy Week. This points to an important connection between Jesus’ birth and death. The color **Blue** is the contemporary or alternate color used by some denominations dur-

ing this season.

Traditionally, many congregations light in sequence the candles on the Advent wreath representing each of the four Sundays.

Christmastide

Christmas Day, December 25, is the first day of Christmastide and this season lasts for 12 days ending on January 6 (Epiphany). The carol “Twelve Days of Christmas” refers to this season. This is one of the highest points in the Christian Year as we celebrate God’s gift of His Son to the world. One may think of red and green as Christmas colors, but **White** is the Christmastide color to show great joy, purity, and high celebration.

Epiphany (manifestation or appearance)

Epiphany Day is January 6. The season starts then and continues until Lent. Often referred to as The Season after Epiphany. It is a time for remembering the various times and ways Jesus was revealed to humans, particularly to the Gentiles (non-Jews) through the Magi (Wise Men) who represented other nationalities. Even though Jesus was a Jewish baby, His smile and His love were for

them too. God loves all people. Scriptures that tell of God’s manifestation to humanity through Jesus Christ include, Jesus as a boy in the temple, the changing of water into wine at the wedding of Cana, healing and forgiving, visit of the Wise Men and Jesus’ baptism by John.

Epiphany Day is **White** but the rest of the season is **Green**, for growth of love among all God’s people.

Lent

This season begins on **Ash Wednesday** and last for 40 days, not counting Sundays. It ends with Holy Week which includes **Palm Sunday**, **Maundy Thursday**, and **Good Friday**. During this period Christians spend extra time thinking about their lives, their mistakes and planning how they can return God’s love by helping others. It is a time of fasting, sacrifice, and preparation.

Purple is the appropriate color for the season symbolizing royalty and penitence. The color for God Friday is **Black** to show grief and sadness for Jesus’ death on the cross.

— See *Christian Year*, page 6

Lent

This season begins on **Ash Wednesday** and last for 40 days, not counting Sundays. It ends with Holy Week which includes **Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday,** and **Good Friday.** During this period Christians spend extra time thinking about their lives, their mistakes and planning how they can return God's love by helping others. It is a time of fasting, sacrifice, and preparation.

Purple is the appropriate color for the season symbolizing royalty and penitence. The color for God Friday is **Black** to show grief and sadness for Jesus' death on the cross.

Note: *Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. Traditionally, the ashes come from the burning of the palms used the previous Palm Sunday.*

Holy Week is the last week in Lent, and it has become a tradition to trace the activities of Jesus that led to the cross of Calvary.

Palm Sunday begins Holy Week and is a reminder of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The people along the roadside waved palms and shouted "Hosanna" the Hebrew word for (save now). Many churches today bless the palms and distribute them in the form of crosses to be worn by the worshippers.

Maundy Thursday lifts up the event of the Lord's Last Supper that was celebrated in the Upper Room at the time of the Jewish Passover.

It is the basis for the establishment of the sacrament of Holy Communion. The Lord's Supper was the last meal that Jesus shared with His disciples before going to Calvary. "Maundy" comes from a Latin word meaning "commandment" (see John 13:34). The significance of God's love for humanity comes forth in this act. Therefore, the new commandment requires persons to love one another just as God loves all persons.

Good Friday: *Most authors agree that the term "Good Friday" evolved from God's Friday." Services in most churches last about three hours, since generally the seven last word of Jesus are used. The Seven Last Words are found in the following Bible texts: Luke 23:34; Luke 23:43; John 19:26-27; (Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46); John 19:28; John 19:30; Luke 23:46.*

Eastertide

Easter Sunday commemorates the glorious resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is the other highest point of the Christian Year. Easter has been described as the oldest festival of the church. It truly is the key to Christianity, since it emphasizes the redemption of humans. Joy and celebration engulfs the season as the Christian Church rejoices in the fact of the resurrection. Jesus appeared to His friends, and they knew His death was not final.

This season lasts for six (6) more Sundays after Easter. This color is **White.** The cross is the central symbol of the Christian

faith. There are many symbols based on nature in the Spring-time that show us that beautiful new life can spring from something that seemed to be dead.

Pentecost

Pentecost is the birthday of the Christian Church and reveals the descent of outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the believers in the Upper Room (See Acts 2:1-4). Pentecost is the seventh Sunday after Easter. The season extends to the last Sunday in August. The liturgical color is **Red** which is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, witness, zeal, power, loyalty, and love. Prominent symbols include cloven tongues of fire and the descending dove.

Kingdomtide

Begins on the last Sunday in August and continues until the beginning of Advent. The color **Green** is for growth and the symbol is a cross with a crown. During this period special emphasis is placed on the Kingship of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The symbol is a cross and a crown.

Recipe of the Month

Sugar Plum Pudding

2 cups flour
1 ½ cups sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon nutmeg
1 cup chopped prunes, cooked
¾ cup butter
1 cup buttermilk
1 ¼ teaspoon soda (add to buttermilk)
2 eggs beaten

- a. Sift dry ingredients together,
- b. Cream sugar and butter
- c. Add eggs
- d. Add dry ingredients alternately with buttermilk and fold in prunes
- e. Bake at 325 degrees until done, approximately 25 minutes

Glaze:

¾ cup sugar
½ cup buttermilk
½ cup butter
1 teaspoon vanilla
Melt butter in pan
Add sugar and buttermilk
Cook for 1 minute (boil)
Remove and add vanilla
Pour over hot cake

Championship Rings for Central High School

The spirits are still high and the adrenaline is still flowing strong as the Central High School Family reflects on our perfect season end and relish over the sweet 4A Championship victory. This is a historical moment that we all will cherish and retell for generations to come. Though the memory will remain clear in all of our minds, the championship ring will be a special memorabilia to last a lifetime for each player.

Unfortunately, our program cannot financially afford to supply every player with a championship ring. Therefore, we are seeking the support of loyal fans and businesses to help us reach our goal of seventy-five rings for the players involved. The cost of each ring is **\$300.00**. Please help us capture this special moment by donating to our Championship Ring Fund. An outcry of support will show our players just how special this achievement to Central Football Supporters. At the beginning of the season, these young men made a commitment to me and their fans. They have delivered! As a result, I am determined to make sure that I show them how much their hard work is appreciated by securing each of them a championship ring.

Throughout the season we never felt like we were in the game alone. Your support in the stands was overwhelming and greatly appreciated. It really was the encouragement that we needed to keep our heads in the game. Now, I ask that you keep that support with me in this final stage of our perfect season. Please donate to our fund.

Checks should be written to the Central High School Championship Ring Fund. A handwritten or typed note should accompany the donation. Please state the amount of the donation in this note and specify if it should be used towards a specific player's ring. Any excess funds for one athlete will be deposited into the general championship rings total and used for any player in need of a ring. You may drop donations off at the school or mail to the following address: Central High School, Championship Ring Fund, 905 – 15th Street, Tuscaloosa, AL 35401.

– **From Melvin Pete, Head Football Coach, Central High School**

For additional information or to make a donation, please see Sis. Irene Smith

10 Reasons To Believe God Gives The Perfect Gift

1. ***God loves to give gifts.***
Long before we took our first breath, our Creator showed Himself to be a great giver of everything a man or woman could ask for. Today, He still wants to give us the desires of our heart (Psalm 37:4). Yet His best offer is so priceless and so perfectly suited to our needs, many think it's too good to be true.
2. ***It's described in the Bible.***
The Bible describes a wonderfully mysterious gift that goes far beyond anything we've ever received. But does God offer to give us the desires of our heart as a reward for good living? No, the Bible refers to this spiritual package as *salvation* and calls it "the gift of God" (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9).
3. ***It cannot be earned.***
God's perfect gift of salvation comes not by merit but by mercy, not by trying but by trusting. "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8-9).
4. ***God paid for it Himself***
God gave us the freedom to accept or reject Him; our first parents walked away from Him. God revealed a plan of rescue whereby an innocent victim would die on behalf of the guilty. He did what can only be explained by love—He sacrificed His Son to pay for our sin (John 1:29; Hebrews 10:5-10).
5. ***It comes with a proof of purchase***
The receipt we hold for His payment is the record of history. Jewish prophets predicted a Messiah who would deliver His people from sin (Isaiah 53; Daniel 9:26). The Gospels tell us that He healed the sick, raised the dead, and give hope to the world (Luke 24:1-7). Eyewitnesses of the risen Christ died at the hands of enemies rather than deny they had seen Him alive.
6. ***It was wrapped with care.***
The Lord visited a young woman named Mary and miraculously wrapped Himself in her womb. When all seemed lost, God wrapped His gift in the reports of witnesses who told of a resurrection from the dead. For a final touch, the Creator gave His gift a colorful bow of diversity—people from every nation whose hearts have been changed by His love (Revelation 5:9).
7. ***God offers it by grace.***
The apostle Paul described the difference between Adam, who spread death to all his descendants, and Christ, who brought life to all who trust Him. "If by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many" (Romans 6:15).
8. ***It can be received only through faith.***
God comes only where He's invited. The One who wants us to share the happiness of His eternal family knocks gently at the door of our heart, waiting for us to welcome Him into our life (John 1:12).
9. ***It's available to anyone willing to receive it.***
Most of Jesus' best friends were fishermen, not scholars. One was a tax collector. One had been possessed by demons. One sold her body for a living. What they had in common was their willingness to accept the gift of God.
10. ***It inspires gratitude.***
Those who've been saved from a burning building know what it means to live with a deep sense of gratitude. Those who know they've been rescued by God's grace from the fires of judgment live out their gratefulness to God.

A Visit to the Jail

By Sis. Diana Bibb

On November 29, 2007, I had the opportunity to participate in the NABD jail ministry mission with members from other churches in our local district for the third month. Upon our arrival at the jail, we gathered in the courtroom for prayer and to receive our cellblock assignments. However, on this particular afternoon, we were asked if we would allow the female inmates to join us in the courtroom for a “real” worship service. Of course we were happy to accommodate the women in whatever way we could be of service.

The women were led into the room and almost filled it up. Some were smiling while others looked sullen. I saw expressions of sadness as well as indifference. After Rev. Johnny Lewis and Sis. Thompkins greeted the audience; we sang hymns and had prayer before being blessed with words of encouragement from Rev. Moss, and another minister who was visiting for the first time.

From where I was seated, I had a clear view of all the women. I scanned the room looking for a change in facial expressions. And, ‘what to my wandering eye should appear’...gestures of praise and words uttered in adoration to God Almighty.

I had taken some handouts and was allowed to share them with the women. We ended our worship service with a song and prayer. As the women walked out of the room, we were allowed to shake their hands and wish them well. They all left smiling and rejoicing and thanking us. We, however, were the ones most grateful because we had shared the ‘Good News of Jesus Christ!’ I supposed the most accurate description of that afternoon would be to say we had a ‘hallelujah good time’!!!

Rev. Lewis is very appreciative for First African’s quick response to his request for each church in the district to purchase 20 Bibles to be given to the inmates. Our next visit will be on the afternoon of December 20th at 1:00 at Metro Jail.

Memorandum

From: New Antioch Bethlehem Women’s Convention
To: Pastors and Missionary Presidents of the New Antioch Bethlehem District

We trust that you had a happy Thanksgiving and that your Christmas will be a joyous one.

Please remember to participate in the following events of our NABD Women’s Convention:

December 20, 2007, the annual jail ministry at both the County and Metro jails at 1:00 p.m.

December 26, 2007, the annual Mass Christmas Service at the NABD Religious Center at 10:00 a.m. Please bring a liberal donation to help the Relief Committee to continue to reach out to the needy.

January 14-18, the Annual Session of the Mission-Study Leadership Training Course, at 6:30 p.m.

Come let us fellowship, share our love, and study together in the above activities!

Yours in Christ,
Sis. Edna E. Thompkins, President
Dr. Vernon Swift, Moderator

Greetings and Belated Good Wishes

FIRST AFRICAN BAPTIST CHURCH

2621 Stillman Boulevard
 Post Office Box 1578
 Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35403
 Corner of Stillman Boulevard and T.Y. Rogers Jr. Avenue

Phone: 205-758-2833
 Fax: 205-758-7572

The Friendly Church on the Corner

We're on the Web

www.firstafricanchurch.org

Church Calendar

- December 20 Annual Jail Ministry (1:00 p.m.)
(County and Metro jails)
- 23 Christmas Concert
(Children & Youth Choir) and
Church Breakfast – 8:00 a.m.
- 25 Christmas Day
- 26 Annual Mass Christmas Service
(NABD Religious Center) –
10:00 a.m.
- 29 Ministers & Deacon's Union
meeting
(First African Baptist Church)
- 31 Annual Watch Night Services
- January 7-11 Week of Prayer
(First African Baptist Church)
- 14-18 Annual Session of the
Mission-Study Leadership
Training Course – 6:30 p.m.

- December** 1 Maresha Watts
- 3 Minnie Washington
- 3 Kalen Carter
- 6 Ruby Petagrew
- 7 Jean Wells
- 10 Keira Ellis
- 11 Dorothy Smith
- 14 Manley Knox
- 15 Julia Howard
- 18 Charles Carter
- 23 Laura Cameron
- 30 Terry Tucker

- January** 5 Terrell Byrd
- 5 Linda O'Rourke
- 6 Chastity Showell
- 13 Virginia Williams
- 14 Enoch Cameron
- 14 Lillie Lawson
- 14 Frank White Jr.
- 17 Ida Hobson
- 20 Danquel Watts-Williams
- 20 RaShika Christian Perez
- 23 Minnie Dyes
- 24 Jason Watson
- 25 Donald Lawson

Happy Anniversary

- December** 20 Bro. & Sis. Willie & Mary Kemp
- 23 Rev. & Sis. J.C. & Willie M. Carter
- January** 6 Bro. & Sis. Tim & Danielle Datcher
- 8 Rev. & Sis. Oscar J. & Shana Rivers

*Merry Christmas to all and a
 Happy and Prosperous New Year!*