



News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

-- FEATURES

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80-197

Christmas in Bethlehem
Production for Masses

By Norman Jameson

BETHLEHEM, Israeli Occupied West Bank (BP)--Christmas pilgrims to Jesus' birthplace will have more trouble finding room in the inn than his parents did 20 centuries ago.

Had Mary and Joseph had to contend with the 30,000 visitors expected Christmas Eve in Manger Square, Jesus may have been born in a tour bus.

There are only 40 hotel rooms in Bethlehem, according to the Israel Government Tourism Administration in New York. Fortunately, there are 6,000 hotel rooms in Jerusalem, just six miles away.

Of course if Jesus had not been born in Bethlehem, there would be no crowds there at Christmas. But he was, and that fact is the magnet for the iron-spirited crowds that crush the bleak little hamlet of 15,000 people annually.

It's conceivable that everyone who responded to Caesar Augustus' decree that all the world should be taxed and made their way to the city of David could have been housed in the church building that now covers the traditional site of the stable where Jesus was born. The huge Church of the Nativity was begun in the fourth century by Helena, mother of Roman Emperor Constantine. It was enlarged and restored by the Crusaders.

The church entrance was shortened and narrowed long ago to keep disrespectful Turks from galloping their horses through the building when they controlled the holy places.

Inside is the underground Grotto of the Nativity, a candlelit enclave that has bruised many a pilgrim's knees and endured the instamatic illumination from countless cameras. The site is garrisoned by priests who allow brief moments for the religious to pray. Bless you children, next group please. Those tourists who are merely curious bemusedly watch the pilgrims as they would those who still consider the great European cathedrals places in which to worship.

Returning outside to Manger Square, foot traffic flows past the fruit trucks and tour buses to a convenient row of gift shops where the sacred experience can be etched indelibly in mind with olive wood carvings, candles and key chains.

A Christmas Eve service is held just outside of town in the famous "Shepherds' Fields," where, under cover of night, Bethlehem's dark streets shineth with a peace that quiets the commercial blare.

At 11:45 p.m. comes the midnight mass in the Basilica of the Nativity, broadcast live around the world. A post office is open to enable pilgrims to have their mail stamped with the special Christmas postmark.

They then shiver aboard their waiting buses to Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa, convinced that had there been a manger, they would have seen Bethlehemas the shepherds did that night.

The next morning Bethlehem residents clean up, stock up and prepare for the next groups who will come to be near the birthplace of Jesus on his birthday; the Orthodox, whose Christmas is Jan. 6-7, and the Armenians, who will be there Jan. 18-19.

Bless you children, next group please.



BAPTIST PRESS

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Smith, Hogue Issue
Evangelism Challenge

By Jim Newton

ATLANTA (BP)--The president of the Southern Baptist Convention and the denomination's evangelism director warned Baptists against basking in the success of the denomination's growth, and issued a challenge for Baptists to make evangelism their top priority.

Both C.B. Hogue, evangelism vice president of the SBC Home Mission Board, and Bailey Smith, president of the nation's largest Protestant denomination and pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., cited recent statistical reports projecting a 16.5 percent increase in baptisms last year in Southern Baptist churches.

For the first time in 19 years, said Hogue, not one area of Southern Baptist organizational life recorded declines in membership.

Speaking to state Baptist evangelism directors meeting in Atlanta, Hogue praised Smith's church in a suburb of Oklahoma City for being the first congregation in the denomination to baptize more than 2,000 converts in a single year, and commended state evangelism directors for record baptisms in many states last year.

Warning against complacency in the midst of success, Hogue cautioned Baptists not to forget the ups and downs, and the "natural ebb and flow of the tides of history."

"We are in danger of riding the crest when our euphoria over the success of the past glows in its brilliance; and at that very point, we are in danger of falling into the waves with a resounding splash," Hogue said.

He warned Baptists against trying to take credit for what is happening, saying the credit belongs to God, not men.

"It is a monstrous waste to bask in the thrill of our success and not capitalize on its workability," Hogue added.

He challenged Baptist evangelism directors from across the nation to lead an effort to increase baptisms by at least 10 percent each year during the decade of the 1980s.

If that happens, the number of baptisms recorded last year, about 430,000, will double by 1987 to about 840,000; and by 1989 will almost triple to an estimated 1.2 million, Hogue said.

Smith, in another address to the state evangelism directors, said he believes this is the most exciting and fruitful hour in history to win people to Jesus Christ.

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"Never have the alternatives and options been so clear and distinct as they are now," Smith said.

Smith said the same approaches that worked in the 1950s will still work today. "People aren't harder to reach today, sometimes we may just be lazier," he said.

He warned, however, that if the message is changed, the methods won't work.

Calling for a clear presentation of the gospel, Smith stressed that Jesus is the only way to salvation.

"There are a lot of ethical teachings that somehow intertwine and overlap in all the faiths of the world, but there is only one who is savior and redeemer," Smith said.

"We might teach Shintoism, and patriotism, and Buddha as an example; or the thoughts of Mohammed who taught many of the same things Jesus taught," Smith said. "But none of them provide salvation."

"The world doesn't need a philanthropist, because the problem is not poverty; the world doesn't need a nationalist because the problem is not patriotism; the world doesn't need a teacher, because the problem is not ignorance," Smith insisted. "The world needs a savior because the problem is sin," he proclaimed.

Smith and Hogue were the opening speakers for a three-day meeting of evangelism directors of Baptist state conventions.

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(Newton, a veteran Southern Baptist journalist, is newly appointed news editor at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.)

Foreign Board Hires Two;
Upgrades Another Staffer

Baptist Press
12/11/80

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--A new candidate consultant and associate area director were named and the position of coordinator of auxiliary personnel upgraded in December as the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board moved nearer completion of its reorganization plan.

Norman N. Burnes III, Southern Baptist missionary recently in Greece, will be candidate consultant for the Atlantic states, and Joe W. Bruce, missionary to Honduras, will be associate to the director for middle America and the Caribbean. Wendy Purcell, who came to the board in August as coordinator of auxiliary personnel, is now responsible for screening journeyman candidates and helping with missionary selection.

Beginning Jan. 1, Burnes, 43, will work with missionary candidates in the Atlantic region, including Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, from their initial contact with the board until they are appointed.

He and his wife, the former Kathryn Batten, have been missionaries in Jerusalem, Israel, and Athens, Greece. They had been transferred to France but had not served there when he was named to the new position.

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A native of Rome, Ga., Burnes is a graduate of Mercer University and Southeastern Seminary. He has been pastor of churches in Virginia and North Carolina.

Bruce, 36, will be stationed in Guatemala City, Guatemala, to serve as a liaison between missionaries in middle America and the Foreign Mission Board under Donald R. Kammerdiener, director for middle America and the Caribbean. He is on furlough in Nashville, Tenn., and will begin his new duties in June.

Bruce and his wife, the former Shirley Plumlee, were missionary journeymen in Chile and Ghana, respectively, several years before their appointment as missionaries to Honduras in 1971. He is a native of Clarkton, Mo., and a graduate of Union University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He was a pastor in Texas before his appointment.

Purcell handles selection duties for journeymen, two-year overseas volunteers. She also participates in missionary selection, working especially with women candidates.

Born in Clovis, N.M., Purcell is a graduate of Eastern New Mexico University and Southwestern Seminary. Before coming to the board, she was secretary to Russell H. Dilday Jr., Southwestern Seminary's president. She also was a missionary journeyman in Salisbury, Zimbabwe.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

Seminary Enrollments
Show Healthy Increase

By Norman Jameson

Baptist Press
12/11/80

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--1980 fall enrollment at Southern Baptists' six theological seminaries in all degree and non-degree programs rose 4.8 percent, or 445 students, to a new high of 9,695.

Growth in degree granting programs, as reported by the seminaries to the Association of Theological Schools, rose 9.6 percent to 9,033.

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary showed the largest percentage increase in a comparison of enrollment figures produced by the seminaries. Its enrollment increased 8.5 percent to 1,348 students in all programs. That includes 1,017 students in graduate programs and 331 in associate and non-degree programs.

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., rebounded from two years of decreasing enrollment and showed the largest numerical increase of 129. That brought its total enrollment to 2,299, including 1,874 in graduate degree programs and 425 in Boyce Bible School, diploma and non-credit courses.

Marvin Taylor, statistician for ATS, said 194 reporting seminaries in the United States and Canada showed a growth rate of 2.4 percent. Enrollment at Southern Baptist seminaries accounted for 18.2 percent of the 49,611 students counted by ATS. In 1979 SBC seminaries accounted for 18 percent of the total.

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, continues to be the largest seminary in the United States, and likely the world, with enrollment of 3,684, including 147 diploma students, an increase of 3.4 percent over 1979.

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ATS does not gather statistics worldwide, but Taylor believes the largest five seminaries in the United States—four of which are Southern Baptist—are also the largest in the world. Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., is second. The average seminary enrollment in the U.S. is 255.

Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., increased 5.8 percent to 590 students which includes 132 in non-degree, diploma or continuing education training.

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., increased 2.6 percent to 1,246 students, including 151 in non-graduate degree courses.

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., increased five percent to 528, including 90 in non-graduate degree work.

Females accounted for 1,624, or 16.8 percent of the total enrollment in the Southern Baptist seminaries, a decrease of 36 from last year. Women account for 21.8 percent of seminary enrollment overall, up .7 percent from 1979, according to ATS figures. That compares to just 10.2 percent in 1972.

The educational outreach of Southern Baptist seminaries is more than doubled through their cooperative Seminary Extension Department in Nashville. In the 1979-80 school year, it coordinated diploma course work for 10,554 students in home study and in 397 centers in the U.S., Puerto Rico, Cuba, England, Mexico and West Germany.

Home study students during 1979-80 lived in 48 states and Washington, D.C., plus 15 foreign countries. They signed up for 15,919 courses. Seminary Extension enrollment is compiled separately from enrollments in the six theological seminaries.

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Couple Packs Years'
Events in Single Day

Baptist Press
12/11/80

BARNWELL, S.C.(BP)--Douglas and Cathy Storey made professions of faith, joined the church, had a church wedding and were baptized—all on the same day.

Though they say it is no "big deal" the events of that single day trace the pattern of life over many years for most people.

Storey had attended Mount Olivet Baptist Church for as long as he can remember but had never made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Cathy describes herself as a nominal but inactive Catholic.

Their pastor, R.C. Johnson, was "surprised and delighted" when they made a profession of faith and asked for church membership on the morning of the day they were to be married. Though they promised to be at the baptismal service later that afternoon, Johnson admits he didn't expect them.

They were married at 5:30 that afternoon. The pastor hurried from the wedding to conduct a baptismal service in nearby Hurricane Creek. He hardly believed their promise to be there too, but there they were.

After being baptized together, they began their honeymoon trip from the baptismal site.

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