

Editorial: Our hope is hallowed, not hollow

December 10, 2025

I realize Advent has moved on to peace, but I'm stuck at hope. It won't sound like that at first, but keep reading.

I'm a bit of a Grinch about the holidays—any holiday. I humor the holidays, but I don't really get into Christmas until a couple of days before Dec. 25.

Part of humoring the holidays is understanding we will start singing Christmas hymns the first Sunday after Thanksgiving and will sing them through the first Sunday after Christmas. The same songs. Every year.

And those same songs will play. Everywhere. Sometimes as early as October.

Maybe this Grinchiness started when I worked retail in college and had to listen to canned pop Christmas tunes nonstop for hours on end for days on end. Some things are hard to get over.

Or maybe it happened while I was a pastor. Most people don't realize how much work Christmas is for a church staff and volunteers. The staff would love to celebrate with you, but they're likely busy and exhausted from all the extra events and all that goes with them. So, even their celebration can be ... sleepy.

Anyway. Some people love this time of year. I humor it. Grinchy, I tell you.

So, I wasn't prepared to be moved by "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" while we sang it during the modern worship service at our church this last Sunday morning.

I had [a similar experience last year](#) when our choir sang a particular arrangement of “O Holy Night.”

I really don’t expect this to become a holiday habit.

A holy hope

Last year, I wrote that “O Holy Night” has “long been one of my favorite Christmas hymns.” That’s true. Once Dec. 22 rolls around, I really like it. But I may have given the impression I appreciate the song at any time. So, I will clarify: “Let’s not get carried away. The song should inhabit it’s proper setting—Dec. 22 through 24.”

Or maybe just Dec. 24.

“Boy, he is Grinchy, isn’t he?”

“O Holy Night” seized my attention last year because of the arrangement, which I’d heard before but really heard that particular moment in that service.

The same happened this last Sunday morning with “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” this ubiquitous song of longing for the Messiah.

Sunday morning, we sang a modern arrangement of this [old Latin hymn](#), translated bit by bit into English centuries later.

Words of woe: “O come, o come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here.”

Met with the hopeful chorus: “Rejoice! Rejoice! E-ma-nu-el shall come to thee, O Israel!”

To this, [the modern arrangers](#) added: “Rejoice, again I say rejoice, For unto us is born, The savior of the world; Take heart, O weary soul take heart,

For Heaven's on its way, And holy is His name."

And we sing it loud.

Sunday, I saw the words on the screen, and I sang them as I saw them, but the lingering echo wasn't, "Take heart, O weary *soul* take heart," but "Take heart, O weary *world* take heart."

Why should it? Why should this weary world take heart?

Because Emmanuel is on his way. Better still, because Emmanuel is here.

A hollow hope

My jaw tightens at so much of the news. It's hard to rejoice amid the news of this world. It's wearying and disheartening. It's hard to hold out hope, or at least to believe there's much substance to hope. Hope really can ring hollow here.

It's also disappointing to see so many people—especially Christians—putting their hope in worldly solutions. Even Christians place undue hope in policies, money, power and material things.

There is no policy that will make everything all right, no political party, no amount of money, no accumulation. We know this intuitively. Yet, we maintain hope in the world, or we give in to hopelessness, hiding it in hedonism or despair.

"Oh, the noise! Oh, the Noise! Noise! Noise! Noise!"

This is the substance of a world and a people who don't know, don't see or who refuse to believe: "Heaven's on its way, and holy is His name."

A 'foolish' hope

What we hope for is foolishness to this world. What we hope for actually is an inversion of this world. What Emmanuel taught, what he came to do was to turn this world inside out, and nothing will be all right until it is turned inside out.

We can cease firing and sign the treaties, we can cross the aisle and make deals, we can sell all we have and give it to the poor, but until our hearts are inverted—read: converted—by the One whose name is holy, all that activity won't satisfy the true substance of our hope. Until Jesus is Lord and we quit being pretenders, our hope will be hollow.

We can do all the worldly things right, but doing them won't mean everything will be all right. Because the problem isn't in our politics, policies, social positions or pockets. The problem is in us. To fix the problem, we must be turned inside out.

The substance of our hope is beyond the power and money and stuff of this world. The substance of our hope is not dependent on who wins the war. Yes, it would be easier—so we think—if our side wins—whatever side that may be. And we do hope our side wins, thus the fight.

To this world, saying Jesus guarantees what we hope for is abdicating the fight. Or it's militarizing Jesus. Talk about polarization.

But what we really long for, what we really need, is not guaranteed by our side winning. It is guaranteed by Jesus and is kept in his kingdom. To this world, that's hopeless, irresponsible, stupid, weak, naïve, foolish.

A hope fulfilled

Back to peace: Scripture warns against proclaiming peace when there is no peace. This world warns against proclaiming hope when this world thinks there is no hope.

But Jesus really was born. Jesus really did live and teach and heal. Jesus really did die. Jesus really did rise again to live and reign over all things for all eternity. And Jesus said he will come back and restore all things.

No, there may not be peace on Earth right now, but there always is hope—a hallowed hope.

And *that* will make any Grinch's heart grow.

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Editorial: Don't rush past yesterday

December 10, 2025

Yesterday may be gone, but its importance is still alive and well, informing our today and tomorrow. We must reflect on it with a purpose.

Editorial: Being thankful it isn't 'otherwise'

December 10, 2025

Jane Kenyon was a poet and translator. She died young. Already, I am three years older than she was when leukemia took her. How many times in my life I also could have died young.

Her poem "Otherwise" is short. It is a powerful poem, because in simple, spare prose, it makes much of the overlooked and mundane. Through it, Kenyon expresses gratitude for everyday things many of us long since have taken for granted.

Things like getting out of bed in the morning, eating a bowl of cereal, seeing art on the walls of our home. Having a home.

You can [listen to "Otherwise" here](#).

Kenyon knew it could be otherwise, all of it. She knew someday it would be. She wasn't well.

I'm old enough now, I've experienced enough life, I've seen enough things go well enough to know and appreciate, to be thankful it wasn't, it isn't otherwise.

And I'm learning to be thankful still.

Thankful in all circumstances

One of our brothers returned to his home after the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual meeting in Abilene last week. His home is at war. It is otherwise for him. Yet, even in the midst of war, he and his fellow Ukrainians know it could be worse.

In so knowing, they teach us to be thankful in all circumstances.

Another of our brothers posted a video to Facebook last Thursday from an emergency room. On Tuesday, his wife had emergency gall bladder removal. On Thursday, he was back in the emergency room with his daughter after she was in a car accident. He was thankful for a seat belt.

“Yes ... in spite [of] anything, we will be thankful. We need to be thankful. There is so much to be thankful for,” he said.

“Even if it’s hard, even if it’s unsettling, if life throws things at you, we come before the Lord, we pray together, we ask for help, and we thank [him] for things we already have,” he concluded, encouraging those watching to come celebrate with his church.

Our brother teaches me to be thankful amid all circumstances.

Are we thankful?

What about us? What do we take for granted? What, who have we grown so accustomed to in our lives that we have forgotten to be grateful for them, that we fail to imagine it could be otherwise?

We simply don’t see so much of what we ought to be, can be thankful for. Many times because we don’t look through the irritations, the inconveniences, the frustrations common to all of us. More than anything,

that's my problem when it comes to thankfulness.

Lord, thank you that the bad isn't as bad as it could be, and thank you for the good that doesn't have to be at all.

Some of what I'm thankful for

I am thankful for the Baptist Standard staff. Each person loves the Lord and cares deeply for people.

I am thankful for the Baptist Standard board. They are great encouragers, on top of being great leaders in their respective places of service.

I am thankful for our donors, who do far more than help pay our bills. They fuel us to pursue our mission.

I take none of them for granted.

Because I know it could be otherwise.

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Editorial: Church, sometimes we're the problem

December 10, 2025

Editor Eric Black holds a mirror up to the church for self-examination and

points to the cure for the church's ailment.

Editorial: What's the BGCT? Show up to shape it

December 10, 2025

Being a Texas Baptist means showing up to vote, Editor Eric Black contends, encouraging Texas Baptists to participate in the BGCT annual meeting.

Editorial: Religious freedom, not 'guns a-blazing' in Nigeria

December 10, 2025

Editor Eric Black supports and protests portions of Nov. 1 social media posts by President Donald Trump regarding Nigeria.

Editorial: I was hungry. Did you feed me?

December 10, 2025

"I was hungry, and you said it's because I'm shiftless and lazy."

"I was hungry, and you told me to get a job."

"I was hungry, and you said it's not your problem."

"I was hungry, and you looked the other way. Literally."

"I was hungry, and you fed me."

Hunger is in the news, whether we're talking about 42 million Americans eligible for SNAP benefits or 500,000-plus Gazans suffering from famine. By the way, the two situations are not equivalent.

One reason hunger is in the news is because the current political wrangling in the U.S. capital has the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits 42 million Americans rely on in its crosshairs.

This editorial is not about the politics involved, politics I consider cynical. This editorial is about clear biblical teaching on addressing hunger. In short, hunger should not exist among Christians, but it does. When Jesus asks us about that, he's not going to ask which political party is to blame. He's going to ask what you and I did about it.

What does Scripture say?

Most reading this already know what Jesus said about the sheep and goats. But I'm going to paraphrase it anyway.

"When [the King](#) arrives, he will sit on his throne and separate the blessed from the cursed.

“The blessed will be those who, when the King was hungry, fed him; thirsty, gave him something to drink; was a stranger, welcomed him; was naked, gave him clothes; was sick, took care of him; was in prison, visited him.

“The cursed didn’t do any of that.

“The blessed will say, ‘When did we do all of that?’

“And the King will say, ‘You did it to me when you did it for one of the least of these my brothers and sisters’” (Matthew 25:31-46).

I tell you, this passage haunts me and always has.

When Isaiah recorded God’s description of proper fasting, he wrote:

“Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen ...
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” (Isaiah 58:6a, 7).

Twice in Leviticus, God’s law forbids harvesting every bit of food from the land. Instead, God’s people are to leave some for the poor and foreigner (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22).

The earliest church sold what they had “to give to anyone who had need” and “shared everything they had” so “there were no needy persons among them” (Acts 2:45; 4:32-35).

Scripture also instructs us to feed our enemies when they are hungry (Proverbs 25:21; Romans 12:20).

This is just a sampling of how Scripture says God’s people are to respond to hunger.

And hunger is all around us.

Hunger in the United States

If we look at just one number—42 million Americans—we do not have to look far to see a person needing food assistance. Forty-two million translates to roughly 12 percent of the [U.S. population](#), or more than 1 in 10 Americans—or more than the entire population of Texas and Michigan combined.

We have among us in the most prosperous nation in history more people qualifying for food assistance than the population of each of 196 of the world's 233 countries—including: Canada, Ukraine, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Australia, Somalia and many more.

Let that sink in.

The United States, at roughly \$30 trillion, is the world's largest economy by more than \$20 trillion. By itself, Texas is the world's eighth largest economy, at more than \$7 trillion. How can we be so prosperous and so hungry at the same time?

Come on, y'all!

Add to this the fact the United States is so closely identified with Christianity, a faith built on Scripture like I quoted above, that we must face the charge we're not putting our money where our mouth is.

Thank goodness that's not true of all of us.

What is expected of us

This editorial isn't about politics, but I am going to say a word about

politics.

The [U.S. Department of Agriculture's home page](#) this morning, Oct. 29, stated: "Bottom line, the well has run dry." The bold announcement at the top of the USDA home page placed full blame on Senate Democrats for the stoppage of SNAP benefits effective Nov. 1.

Christians, we cannot allow ourselves to be sucked into the current blame game and name-calling between Republicans and Democrats. We as Christians are commanded to live beyond and better than that.

Part of living beyond and better than that is being concerned about hunger without political footballing, being concerned about hunger even when it's not in the news, being concerned enough about hunger to do something about it ourselves.

Examples we can follow

One thing we can do is fast from feeding our consumer economy so we can feed our neighbors. We Christians spend a lot of money on entertainment, creature comforts and the latest greatest, while criticizing our government for how it spends our tax dollars. We can do better.

[A food truck](#) in the Four Corners area of New Mexico posted on Facebook, Oct. 27: "Starting Nov. 1st We will be offering a 4pc boneless wings to kids 15 and under on us! No purchase and *no questions asked*. Kids must be present and limit 1 per child. Just ask for the 'Kid Special' and we'll take care of you" (emphasis added, because Jesus didn't ask questions either)!

A follower responded: "Alright-this is our sign to take care of businesses that take care of community. Let's FLOOD their food truck with support!!!"

Christians have restaurateurs among us. Surely, we can help them help others like that.

When my wife and I were seminary students 25 years ago, we went through a period when money was tight. This is a common experience among seminary students. Thanks to [the Sutherland family's feeding ministry](#), we were able to fill in some food staples. That ministry still operates today. May their tribe increase.

I am thankful for food banks, food pantries, feeding ministries and others doing their part to alleviate hunger. They need our help.

And we need to do more than make feeding the hungry a weekend project. We need to include it in our budgeting, our earning and our spending. We need to make it our way of living.

To learn about hunger and its effects, [view this fact sheet](#). To learn more about ways you can help alleviate hunger, [view this information from the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty](#) or visit the [Texas Baptist Hunger Offering website](#).

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Editorial: No kings? But one.

December 10, 2025

Millions of people joined “No Kings” protests and rallies Oct. 18. Christians do have one King. Editor Eric Black explains how that matters.

Editorial: A shout out to bivocational ministers

December 10, 2025

For Pastor Appreciation Month, I'm giving a shout out to bivocational ministers—men and women. You amaze me.

Editorial: Tony Evans, Robert Morris and restoration

December 10, 2025

Two Dallas-area megachurch pastors who made the news during the last week give us a chance to think about how we respond when pastors sin.

Editorial: There's only one

litmus test for a Christian

December 10, 2025

Remembering Jesus is Lord and we are to obey him will guide our way through these divided, conflicted, testing times.

Editorial: It's safe to say ... or is it?

December 10, 2025

I expect the world to be an unsafe place right now. I don't expect the church to be. But we are. We can change that.