

# PERSPECTIVE

The background of the cover is a vibrant sunset with a bright sun low on the horizon. In the foreground, the silhouettes of the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus are visible. Mary is on the left, looking down at the child. The child is on the right, wrapped in a swaddling cloth. The overall mood is peaceful and reverent.

THE MONTHLY JOURNAL OF MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH

Christ Was Born  
of a Virgin



# Welcome to Mount Vernon!

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## SERMON SCHEDULE

- December 6 ..... *Jesus Is the Lord*  
John 1:19-28
- December 13 ..... *The Coming of Christ:  
Lifting the Veil on Humanity*  
Guest Preacher: Tony Carter
- December 20 ..... *Jesus Is the Lamb*  
John 1:29-34
- December 27 ..... *Jesus Is the Messiah*  
John 1:35-51



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## A Conversation with...

### Pat Knowles Deacon Chairman

Interviewed by Brad Thayer



**Brad Thayer: Where are you originally from?**

**Pat Knowles:** Birmingham, AL—actually Vestavia Hills, a suburb.

**BT: So how did you come to Atlanta?**

**PK:** Mary Anne and I first lived in Atlanta from 1977 to 1980 after a job transfer from Birmingham.

We moved back to Atlanta in 1990 after a series of transfers that took us to Orlando, Oklahoma City, San Antonio, and Houston.

**BT: What do you do for a living?**

**PK:** I work for Hartford Insurance Group in a small specialty niche of the insurance business called surety. This is a type of bond business that guarantees all types of performance obligations for our customers to third parties. The majority of these are performance and payment bond obligations for contractors. I manage the Hartford's surety operations in GA, TN, and AL.

**BT: Tell us a little about your family.**

**PK:** I am blessed to have married the love of my youth, the former Mary Anne Robinson of Birmingham, AL. We began as high school sweethearts 40 years ago and still are today after 36 wonderful years of marriage. We have two children—a daughter and son. Our daughter, Melanie, resides in NYC with a doctoral fellowship at NYU in French. Jonathan, our son, resides here in Atlanta and works as an underwriter of public entities for Travelers Insurance.

**BT: Highschool sweethearts?! Congratulations! Tell us your testimony. How did you become a Christian?**

**PK:** Both of my parents and grandparents were Christians and I attended Vestavia Baptist Church in my youth. A missionary came to our church and during his teaching one Sunday, my heart was strangely warmed, and I knew Christ as my Savior. Over the next several weeks of discussing this with my parents, pastor, and praying, I was baptized on September 30, 1962. I am thankful that He is still at work in me today.

**BT: Praise God! How did you find out about Mount Vernon?**

**PK:** I first learned of MVBC from Mary Anne. She was the teaching leader for Bible Study Fellowship for many years here at Mount Vernon. I was always impressed by how welcoming and encouraging the church was to BSF in particular and outreach in general. We decided to visit one Sunday. Once I walked through the doors and down the aisle on our first Sunday, I knew that God had led us here at this time.

**BT: In the past 4-5 years of being here, what have you come to love most about Mount Vernon?**

**PK:** I have always been impressed by the initial friendly nature of our church. As a visitor, we were made to feel very welcome. I want to encourage our greeters for their wonderful service in this area. As I have visited other churches, I am reminded of how welcoming we are to visitors at MVBC. After being here for a while, I must admit my greatest love for MVBC is seeing how God is working through Aaron's teaching and how much I have grown spiritually over the past few years. Seeing this spiritual growth not only in myself but also in my church family encourages me. What a pleasure it is to be able to see God at work in our church in a mighty and powerful way. It is exciting to be a part of His family at Mount Vernon Baptist Church.

**BT: You are currently the chairman of the deacons, but you also serve in the children's ministry. Tell us what's going on down there.**

**PK:** God has blessed us with a great opportunity to work with His children at Mount Vernon Baptist. Kids are amazing. Jesus teaches us (Mark 10:14) that the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these (the children). That verse directs our efforts this year in leading "Kingdom Kids." We have been blessed with some great church members that want to help equip and train teachers with a "passion for Christ." God wants His children to know His holiness, His great love, and to come to Him. Our goal is to support that in any way possible.

**BT: I love that theme, "Kingdom Kids." As chairman of the deacons, what are your responsibilities?**

**PK:** Mount Vernon Baptist Church is blessed to have 21 active deacons who are faithful to God's call to serve the congregation and staff. As chairman, part of that responsibility includes making sure we clearly understand and communicate the needs of the church with those deacons called to serve in a manner that glorifies Jesus Christ. That manifests itself in some practical (and scheduled) ways such as monthly deacon meetings and Leadership Team meetings. God has placed this body of deacons to serve the brothers and sisters of MVBC. Please let me know how we might better serve you.

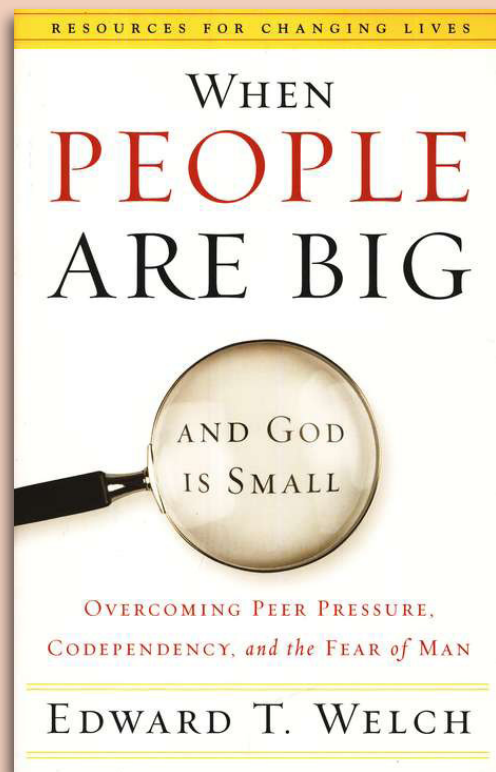
**BT: What are some goals you have for the deacons for the remainder of your term as chairman?**

**PK:** Those of you that prayed for our recent annual deacon's retreat, thank you! Our prayer request focused on our main goals as follows: that each of us be united at the cross of Christ, that we would have a heart for prayer, that we would serve our brothers and sisters at MVBC as Christ has served us, and that we would prepare the way for consideration of an elder leadership structure.

**BT: What are some ways we can be praying for you both as the chairman and personally?**

**PK:** As you can imagine, this is a busy time but I find comfort that God has called me to serve to glorify Christ at this time. Please pray His hand of protection on my family and that I would be found faithful in His service. Pray that I would honor God in all I do in children's ministry, deacon leadership, leadership team, as husband, father, and my job. I would also ask that you pray for the goals of your deacon body. In addition, please pray for us as a congregation of Mount Vernon Baptist Church to be good stewards of what our Heavenly Father has provided and we would give both sacrificially and faithfully at this time.

**BT: Thank you for your time in this interview and, more importantly, for your faithful service to and love for Mount Vernon.**



## WHEN PEOPLE ARE BIG

AND GOD IS SMALL

by Edward T. Welch  
Reviewed by Mark Henderson

If you have ventured into a local bookstore or library lately, it is hard not to see the large self-help section. In some cases, the section takes up multiple aisles, and there is certain to be at least one cardboard cutout of an author promoting a book on the latest strategy to improve one's mental, physical, or even spiritual health. I must confess that after reading the title of this text, *When People Are Big and God is Small, Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man*, I quickly gathered the assumption that this book would probably fit in just fine in the self-help section. I'm thankful I was wrong.

In this text, Edward T. Welch uses scripture to remind the reader who God is. A healthy perspective of other people falls in line behind an appropriate view of God. Some very pointed questions and concerns are raised to show the relevance for any believer who picks up this book, not just the ones who "think" they need help.

I, along with most readers, would not openly confess that I have major issues with peer pressure, codependency, or fear of man. So, I presume that most would not even pick up this book without a recommendation. Welch makes a point to quickly address this topic as a universal problem for all men and women. By walking through several scenarios, Welch encourages us to read on.

Parents, friends, family, and spouses have a big role to play in how we view people. Welch walks through several

extreme situations that have shaped people negatively But he does not assume all situations are so extreme. Welch points out how we are so often hampered from sharing the Gospel with others because of a fear of how it will be accepted. When I read this, I knew this book was for me! So many excuses are given for why we do not share the Gospel. Welch points to our view of God. In light of Jeremiah 17 Welch states,

The Old Testament indicates that we stand at the crossroads between fear of others and fear of God. The road leading to the fear of man may be expressed in terms of favoritism, wanting others to think well of you, fearing exposure by them, or being overwhelmed by their perceived physical power. When there fears are not combated with fear of the Lord, the consequences can be devastating. But when God is given his rightful place in our lives, old bonds can be shattered.

Bonds are as varied as they are heavy in the lives of any us. The hindrance of other people in our lives is a great barrier towards growth and intimacy with God. I would challenge you to read this book, to dig into the scriptural examples, and to work at applying the truths demonstrated in the lives of the biblical characters that we read about.

The issue of how we count other people's opinions of us seems to be a self esteem issue. I dare say that no one is

immune, but the root of this concern is based on our view of God not necessarily our self-esteem. Isaiah 6:1-2,

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.

Reading this passage gives a clear picture that we can not have a big enough picture of God. The fear of the Lord is addressed in His beauty, His Wrath, and His Love. Welch uses Job (an obvious example), Moses, David, Abraham, and Isaac to show how we can learn to fear the Lord more appropriately. A clearer understanding of fearing the Lord and practical application of how to grow in this area are central themes.

Welch states,

Spirituality is back in style. In an age when technology is exploding, we still know that there is mystery. People want to retain a sense of wonder in their lives. To put it more biblically, the knowledge of God cannot be denied; it can only be distorted. When God and spirituality are reduced to our standards or our feelings, God will never be to us the awesome Holy One of Israel. With God reduced in our eyes, a fear of people will thrive.

The focus of the text keeps returning to our view of God and directs us to know Him and fear Him.

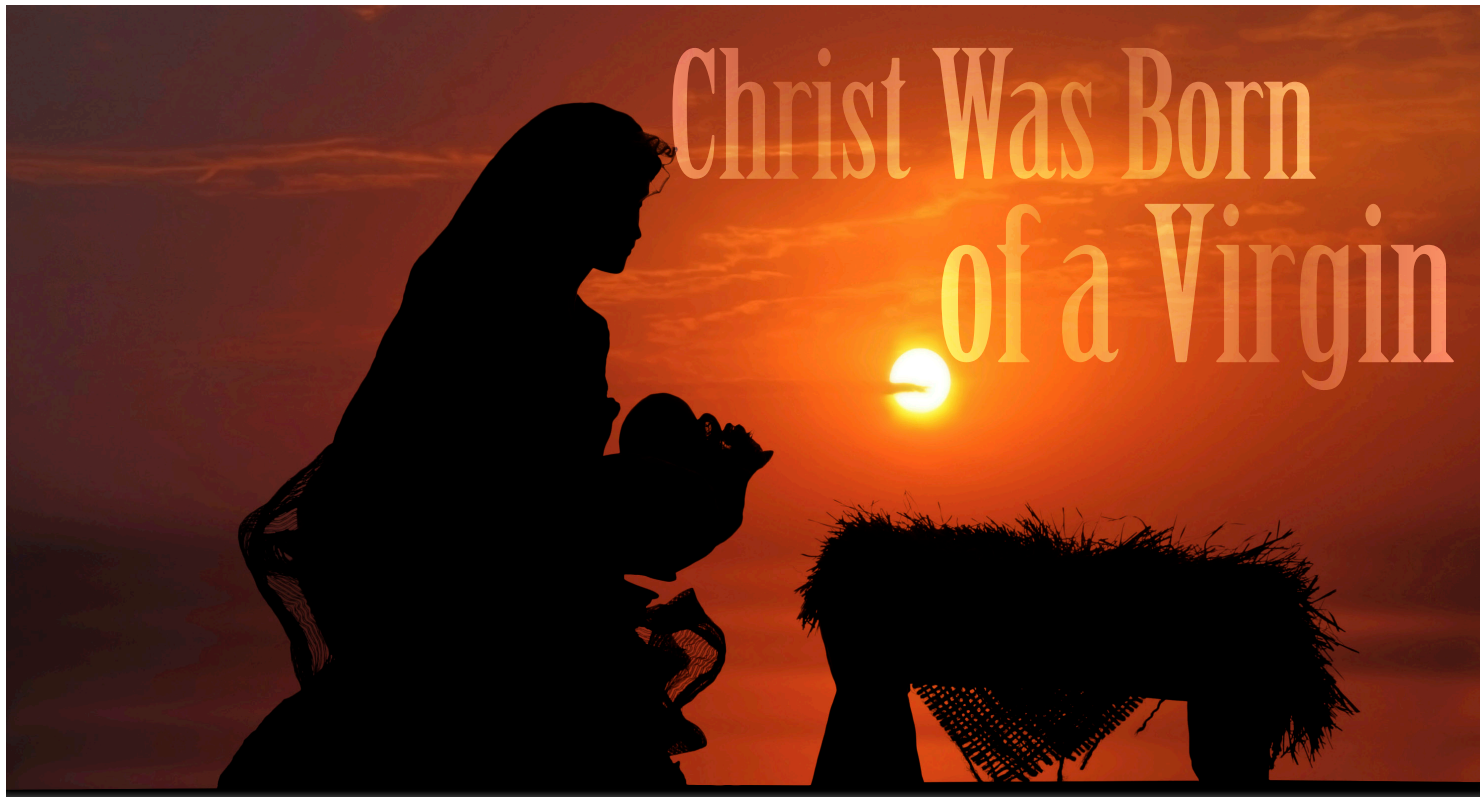
In summary, Welch uses scripture to address a faulty view of God. The challenge to us is to examine our own view of God in light of His Word, not our own feelings. This book leads one to study the scriptures more deeply to know God more. 🙏

**IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION**, the apostle John sees a vision of what worship of God and Christ will be like for all eternity. He hears these words coming from the mouths of worshippers: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased *men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on earth" (Rev. 6:9-10).

What an amazing truth is being proclaimed—through the blood of Christ, men and women from every ethnicity and race were purchased for the glory of God. The question, however, that begs to be asked is do our churches reflect that reality? Putting theological differences aside, sadly Christians have chosen to segregate themselves over all sorts of issues. It may be social and cultural differences. It may be worship preferences. And at times, there is even (intentional and unintentional) racial segregation. Should that be? Does the Bible address this segregation?

These are just some of the questions that will be asked at our next joint Shepherding Group time on **Sunday, December 13**, at **9:15 am** in the fellowship hall. Pastor Aaron Menikoff along with special guests Tony Carter, lead pastor of East Point Church, and Felix Lora, director of Sandy Springs Mission, will have a panel discussion on **"Multiculturalism and the Church."**





December confronts us each year with one of the greatest miracles of all time—the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Consider Phillips Brooks’s “O Little Town of Bethlehem”:

*For Christ is born of Mary,  
And gathered all above,  
While mortals sleep, the angels keep  
Their watch of wond’ring love.  
O morning stars, together  
Proclaim the holy birth,  
And praises sing to God the King,  
And peace to men on earth.*

Jesus is like no other man that ever walked the earth. He was “born of Mary.” It is not enough to say that Jesus taught with authority. Though he did. It is not enough to say that he exorcised demons. Though he did. It is not enough to say that he healed the sick. Though he did. It is not enough to say that he died a gruesome death. Though he did. It is not even enough to say that he rose from the dead. Though he did. The Bible confronts us with the reality that Jesus did not come into the world the way you and I came into the world. He was born of a virgin.

#### What do we mean when we say Christ was born of a virgin?

First and foremost, we mean that this is what the Bible teaches. It was what the prophet Isaiah prophesied: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). Isaiah predicted that something amazing will take place. A son will be born who will reign on David’s throne (Isaiah 9:7). This is the Messiah, the Savior, who Israel had been looking for. An unmarried young woman, a virgin, will give birth to this child and he will be called, “Immanuel” which means, “God is with us.”

This is what we find when we turn to the New Testament. The accounts of Jesus’ birth attest to a miracle. A young woman named Mary is engaged to a young man named Joseph. She is visited by an angel who announced that the sign Isaiah prophesied about is about to be realized: “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:31-32). Mary is incredulous. “How will this be,” she asked, “since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34). The angel’s

answer remains as mysterious as it is miraculous: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). In other words, it will be the work of God. The boy Mary bears will not be Joseph’s son—he will be the Son of God.

The earliest Christians understood belief in the virgin birth of Christ to be a bedrock Christian belief. The apostle Paul emphasized that Jesus was “born of a woman,” seeming to imply she was *not* born of a man: “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5). Isaiah looked forward to the virgin birth as a sign that a savior would come. Paul looked backward to the virgin birth as evidence that a savior had come.

Texts from the second century indicate widespread belief in the virgin birth of Christ. Looking at the writings of Justin Martyr and Ignatius, New Testament scholar J. Gresham Machen, described the virgin birth of Christ as one of the “characteristic Christian beliefs.” A statement of faith known as the “Interrogatory Creed of Hippolytus,” written around 215 AD, asks new believers “Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, Who was begotten of the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary?” The Apostle’s Creed, with roots in the first century, is also clear, “I believe...in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.” As the centuries progressed, faith in the reality of the virgin birth remained constant.

The Augsburg Confession, written in 1530 to represent the faith of the Protestants, reads, “It is also taught among us that God the Son became man, born of the Virgin Mary.” Five hundred years later, our own statement of faith at Mount Vernon still affirms this biblical truth, “Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.”

In other words, Christians have always taught that Jesus was born of a virgin. By this we mean that Jesus experienced a supernatural birth and can uniquely be called “the Son of God.” His birth was the work of the Holy Spirit in Mary. Jesus, who was conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit, existed prior to his birth. Whereas you and I did not exist prior to our conception, the same is not true of Jesus. He has always existed. That’s one of Paul’s points in Philippians 2:6 when he wrote about Jesus, “Who, being in very nature God, did

not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” Through the virgin birth, the Christ who always existed became a man. The Word became flesh.

#### Why should we believe that Christ was born of a virgin?

The simplest answer is because the Bible teaches it. Our faith in God is rooted in his revelation of himself through words. Theologian J. I. Packer described God’s revelation:

*Revelation is a divine activity: not, therefore, a human achievement. Revelation is not the same thing as discovery, or the dawning of insight, or the emerging of a bright idea. Revelation does not mean man finding God, but God finding man, God sharing His secrets with us, God showing us Himself.*

In other words, not only did God *choose* that the Christ would be born of a virgin, God *chose* to make that known to us. He revealed it to us. Christians believe in the virgin birth of Christ not because a pastor told us but because God told us in his Word. More than that, we delight in that truth because we are thankful that God has not remained silent.

We also believe that Christ was born of a virgin because this truth cannot be separated from the gospel. In order to be saved from our sins we need a savior. Not any savior will do. We need a sinless savior.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). This has been called the Divine Exchange. The righteousness of God has become our righteousness. The sinlessness of God has become our sinlessness. Paul’s words here draw our attention to the cross. When Jesus died he died *in the place* of sinners just like us. The spotless Lamb was an acceptable sacrifice for our sins. How do we know Jesus was sinless? In part because the Holy Spirit kept Jesus sinless. We are told that when Christ died, he offered himself as a perfect sacrifice “through the eternal Spirit” (Hebrews 9:14). Because of the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ life, Jesus never sinned. When Jesus was tempted by the devil, we are told he was “led by the Spirit” (Matthew 4:1). Though tempted to sin, the Son of God experienced the work of the Spirit in his life and never sinned.

But more must be said. The virgin birth of Christ reminds us that Christ is not *merely* a human filled with the Holy Spirit. Christ is the God-man, the Word made flesh. The virgin birth tells us that Jesus is both human (Mary was his mother) and divine (he is the only begotten Son of God). As the God-man, Jesus began his life without sin and continued his life without sin. This makes Jesus the exact sacrifice that we need. Who could suffer the penalty we deserve? Only the God-man, Jesus Christ, who was born without sin and continued his entire life without sin.

We should believe in the virgin birth because the Bible teaches it, because we need a sinless savior, and because it fuels our worship of God. The virgin birth of Christ tells us that the sign of God has arrived. The age of the Savior has come. This was no ordinary birth, it was a birth that changed history. Charles Wesley wrote these words we love to sing:

*Christ, by highest heav’n adored;  
Christ the everlasting Lord!  
Late in time behold Him come,  
Offspring of the Virgin’s womb:  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;  
Hail th’incarnate Deity,  
Pleased as man with men to dwell,  
Jesus our Emmanuel.*

These words capture the worship fueled by Christ’s miraculous birth. The heavenly King, the everlasting Lord, took on flesh. With the arrival of Christ the “Immanuel” of Isaiah 7:14 has been fulfilled—God is with us.

#### How can we believe Christ was born of a virgin?

Most of us reading an article in a church newsletter aren’t asking this

question. By the grace of God we simply marvel at what God has done. From the creation of the world to the parting of the Red Sea to glory of God in the temple to the power of the prophets to the birth of the one prophesied to his death, resurrection and return—we see in the Bible example after example of God’s sovereign work. Most of us have come to accept the miracles of God with the same ease we came to ride a bicycle. It was hard to pedal and steer at first but eventually we did it without even thinking. If this is you, praise God.

Some of us reading this article may ask, “How can I believe this?” Like Mary, you may be skeptical. The virgin birth may be as credible in your mind as unicorns and the tooth fairy. “If it can’t be proved,” you insist, “it can’t be true.”

But it can.

The virgin birth of Christ *can* be believed when we see our need for Christ. If we are self-sufficient, we will never believe in a virgin birth, or a perfect savior, or an atoning sacrifice, or a risen Lord. If however, we see ourselves properly, as rebels against God who need God’s forgiveness, then we won’t be surprised to discover that God went to extraordinary lengths to provide forgiveness. We will welcome the truth that God came. We will understand his wisdom in being born a virgin and taking on human flesh. Machen argued that the virgin birth will not be believed by looking only at the manger, we must first look at the cross:

*View Jesus in the light of God and against the dark background of sin, view Him as the satisfaction of man’s deepest need, as the One who alone can lead into all glory and all truth, and you will come, despite it all, to the stupendous conviction that the New Testament is true, that God walked here upon the earth, that the eternal Son, because He loved us, came into the world to die for our sins upon the cross.*

When you have arrived at that conviction you will turn with very different eyes to the story of the virgin and her child. Wonders will no longer repel you.

Do you see? When you become convinced that you need God you may then believe that God has sent an answer to that need in Jesus Christ. How can you believe in the virgin birth of Christ? Repent and believe the Good News. The words of the great hymn writer, William C. Dix, bear repeating—in our lips and in our hearts:

*What Child is this, who, laid to rest,  
On Mary’s lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,  
While shepherds watch are keeping?*

*Why lies He in such mean estate,  
Where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here  
The silent Word is pleading.*

*So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh,  
Come, peasant, king to own Him.  
The King of kings salvation brings;  
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.*

*This, this is Christ, the King  
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary!* ☩

~ Aaron Menikoff



Mount Vernon Baptist Church presents

# Gloria...

let the nations rejoice!



a musically diverse,  
multilingual celebration  
of the birth of Jesus Christ

850 Mt. Vernon Highway NW  
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featuring  
the Mount Vernon Worship Choir  
with full orchestra  
&  
Pianist David Carnes

December 13, 2009

6:00 pm

\*Free admission. Childcare will be provided.

## Mount Vernon Dialogues: A Series of Theological and Cultural Discussions

### Audio Available

CDs for Dr. Haykin's talks on "What Does Islam Have to Do with Christianity?" and "Does 'Baptist' Matter?" are now available at a discounted price of \$5 for both. Please fill out a sermon audio envelope found in the pew rack, write "Haykin Audio" on the envelope, and place it in the offering plate on Sunday morning. Your CDs will then be available in an envelope with your name on it at the church office.



## Ski Trip

### Youth.

We will be returning to the mountains of **North Carolina** for a weekend of skiing, Bible study, and fellowship. We will leave **January 29** and return **January 31**. This year we are going to be adding a little more to the trip with a visit to Asheville's own "**Fun Depot**."

The cost is \$140 for skiers and \$75 for non-skiers. Registration is due December 20. Please contact **Jacob Hall** if you have any questions or to sign up!





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