Through the Eyes of Zechariah

A dramatization points us to Advent.

Page 4
Chancellor's Message by Dr. Ligon Duncan

As Christmas approaches, it is popular to fixate on the contemporary expressions of the holiday, especially as they relate to what some might categorize as a “war on Christmas.” Let us remember, though, that in reality, the true war dates back to the primeval, the primordial, the outset of humanity.

While indeed more than 2,000 years ago a baby boy was born in a situation besetting a peasant in some obscure corner of Palestine, that first Christmas was portended thousands of years before it ever occurred, back at the very dawn of human history. That is why I called my sermon series at First Presbyterian Church in Jackson last December “An Ancient Christmas.” We studied olden prophecies of the venerable Hebrew prophets who spoke out of the misty past about a Christmas to come, but before we did that, we began at the beginning.

Specifically we directed our attention to Genesis 3:15, where God says to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Recall that the apostle Paul picks up on this passage at the very end of Romans, applying it to the victory of Jesus over Satan.

This truth was not lost on the early church fathers. For 850 years, since at least the time of Irenaeus, the great early church father who studied under a man who studied under the apostle John, Genesis 3:15 has been called “the first Gospel.” It’s the Gospel set forth in the context of Moses’ prophecy that records God’s curse on the serpent but which contains a promise to believers.

That is why, in the Incarnation, Jesus humbled Himself and came lowborn a child, becoming a man who walked with us and among us, and living a life without sin that He might be a sacrifice for us so that we might have eternal life in heaven with the Father. So if there is any “war on Christmas,” that war was actually won before the beginning of time as we know it.

In his article “Through the Eyes of Zechariah” on page 4, Bill Fullilove (one of our newest RTS professors) casts some insight into the reality that the challenge of applying ancient truth about Christmas to contemporary times is nothing new. By extension, each of us faces the challenge of applying the ancient gospel to ever-changing cultural contexts. Whether it be alumni like Trey and Kiki Adams and Lisa Repair (page 10) serving as missionaries in Thailand, or a Northerner like David Irving journeying to Jackson to become an RTS student (page 14), the challenges are many.

As we face them, though, let us rejoice in the truth that the war in the heavenlies is already over — praise be to God through His incarnate Son.
TRAVEL

Dr. James Anderson will teach a “Worldview Apologetics” series at Christ Covenant Church, Matthews, N.C., Dec. 9-12.

Dr. Robert Cara will speak at a marriage retreat for First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, S.C., Feb. 14-15, at Bonclarken, Flat Rock, N.C.

Dr. Jim Coffield spoke at the Cru Men’s Retreat, Orlando, Fla., Nov. 1; was keynote speaker at the MNA Disaster Relief Conference, Orlando Nov. 15; and spoke at a marriage conference at Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church, Chattanooga, Tenn., Nov. 22. He will speak at the Gulf Coast Presbyterian Retreat, Panama City, Fla., Feb. 10.

Dr. Ligon Duncan will preach at the 28th annual Jacksonville Pastors’ Conference at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla., Jan. 23.

Dr. John Frame was a plenary speaker at the annual Evangelical Theological Society meeting, Baltimore, Nov. 19-21, presenting a paper titled “Inerrancy: A Place to Live.”

Rev. William Fullilove will speak at two winter retreats — Raleigh Fellows (Jan. 2-5) and Chattanooga Fellows (Jan. 17-19) — on “How to Find Your Vocational Calling.”

Dr. Mark Futato will speak at the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship Evangelism Conference, Johnson City, Tenn., March 6-9, on “Christ in the Psalms.”

Dr. Michael Kruger moderated a session on New Testament Canon at the ETS meeting in Baltimore, Nov. 19-21.

Dr. Sam Larsen will speak at the annual missions conference at Faith Presbyterian Church, Watkinville, Ga., Feb. 22-23.

Dr. Andy Peterson will be the keynote speaker at the Immersive Learning University Conference, Charleston, S.C., Jan. 27-30, on “Big Data, Business Analytics and Immersive Learning.”

Dr. Scott Swain will deliver the paper “The Radiance of the Father’s Glory: The Doctrine of Eternal Generation and Biblical Reasoning” at the ETS meeting in Baltimore, Nov. 21; and teach a course on “Humanity, Christ, and Salvation” as part of Cuu’s Institute of Biblical Studies, New York City, Jan. 6-10.

Dr. Don Sweeting will speak at the Fellowship of Evangelical Seminary Presidents, Sr. Petersburg, Fla., Jan. 8-11, on “American Seminaries in Global Theological Education.”

Dr. Derek Thomas will speak at the Banner of Truth U.S. Ministers’ Conference at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College, May 27-29.


Dr. Andy Peterson will give a weeklong series of lectures titled “Biblical Counseling” for the CETS ministry in Asia, Mar. 17-21.

Dr. Richard Belcher will teach on “Prophet, Priest, and King” at a conference in Monterrey, Mexico, Jan. 22-23.

Dr. John Currid and L.K. Larson contributed the chapter “Narrative Repetition in 1 Samuel 24 and 26: Saul’s Descent and David’s Ascent” to D.M. Gumer and B.L. Gidl’s book, From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis (Hendrickson).

Dr. John Frame has completed Systematic Theology Volume II — The Beauty of Christ (Old Testament) (Reformation Heritage Books, due spring 2014). Dr. Guy Waters contributed the chapter “From Dispersion to Joy: Resources from Acts 15:1-35 for Global Presbyterianism.”

Dr. Robert Cara wrote “Word-Study Fallacies” for the January 2014 issue of Tabletalk magazine.

Dr. Bruce Baugus is editor and contributor of China’s Reforming Churches (Reformation Heritage Books, due spring 2014). Dr. Gay Waters contributed the chapter “Confidence in a Cup” to Moor’s book, From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis (Hendrickson).


Dr. Douglas Kelly has completed Systematic Theology Volume II — The Beauty of Christ (Christian Focus Publications, Nov.) and wrote the article “The Millennium,” for the December issue of Tabletalk.

Dr. Reggie Kidd wrote “Fly, Kessie, Fly! Leading By Letting Go” for the July/August issue and “I Know Why The Prisoner Sings” for the September issue of Worship Leader magazine.

Dr. Peter Y. Lee contributed to the Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary (Baker), edited by Dr. Tremper Longman.


ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dr. Michael G. McKelvey has been appointed assistant professor of Old Testament at RTS-Jackson and will begin on Jan. 1, 2014. The pastor of Crosspoint Church, Asheville, N.C., Dr. McKelvey has taught Old Testament courses as a visiting lecturer at RTS-Jackson since 2008. He received a Doctor of Philosophy in Theology (Old Testament) from the University of Aberdeen, an M.Div. from RTS and a B.S. in business administration from Mississippi College.

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Through the Eyes of Zechariah

This dramatization points us to Advent.

My name’s Zechariah. Let me tell you my story, now that I can talk again . . . .
A year ago, I was just an ordinary Jewish priest, serving in the temple, and the Lord gave me an amazing honor. We cast lots to see who God would choose to go into the temple and burn incense before Him. And the lot fell to me!

So as everyone was worshipping outside, I went in. Now as you go in to burn incense, you’re doing the ceremony, but you’re praying the whole time. As priests, our job is to pray for the nation as a whole, especially praying that Messiah will come. But I was praying for my wife, and myself too. You see, we have never had children, and now we’re too old — or so we thought — and this is a really rough world if you don’t have kids.

And I about had a heart attack, because an angel of the Lord appeared to me. Really. Nobody believed me at first. I mean, this kind of stuff doesn’t happen every day. But there he was, standing just to the right of the altar where we burn incense.

And any of you who think angels are cute, cuddly things, let me tell you — you really don’t want to see an angel. I’m pretty sure I’ve never been so scared in my life.

But he said not to be scared. Gotta admit, I’m not sure I ever obeyed that command.

And he said that my prayer had been heard. Naturally, I thought he meant my prayer for Messiah, and I started to rejoice. But then he said, “Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.”

Now I’ve got to say, I didn’t believe him at all. I mean, who would? Biology is pretty unforgiving. I stammered out something about “How in the world can this happen? I mean, we’re old.”

And he said his name was Gabriel. Gabriel. Oh, Lord. Gabriel, the angel who had brought visions to Daniel. I’m just a normal old priest. What am I doing talking to Gabriel?

He told me that since I didn’t believe, I wouldn’t be able to speak until it happened. Honestly, that may sound harsh, but really it wasn’t. I’m just so grateful he didn’t take the promise back. I was worried that I’d messed the whole thing up. But he said the promise would come true, though I’d be mute until then. And I was.

As you can imagine, I’ve had plenty of reading time, what with being mute and all. And I’ve been trying to figure out what it all means.

You need to understand the rarity of things like this. I mean, it’s easy to read the Scriptures and think that miracles are going off right and left, all the time. But that’s really a trick of recording. You don’t record in the Scriptures all
the years and decades and centuries without miracles. You record the high points, so when you read through, it looks like miracle after miracle after miracle. But in reality, there are long, long periods where we know by faith that God exists, but we’re not seeing Him act in supernatural ways. We’re just living and farming and hoping and praying.

So I spent months searching the Scriptures to try to understand what this might be. As you can imagine, my very first thoughts ran to our patriarch Abraham, but as I searched the Scriptures, I found another time: the great prophet Samuel. Hannah, Samuel’s mother, struggled for so long, unable to have a baby, and God gave her the blessing of Samuel. And he went on not just to become a great prophet — one of the greatest ever — but also to be the prophet who prepared the way for our people Israel to have a king. He was the one whom God used to anoint David, the king of the Jews, the house in whom we still hope, for the Scriptures say that Messiah will come from David’s house.

And now he’s telling us that we will have a son. Why? Is God going to do something similar again? Could our baby prepare the way for a king? Could He somehow prepare the way for the Messiah to come from David’s house?

It gets even more amazing — our young relative Mary came to visit. And she showed up pregnant. You can imagine what I thought, and I was getting ready to rebuke her, but my wife Elizabeth stopped me short. (She usually knows when to tell me to simmer down and listen.)

Mary said that Gabriel had appeared to her too! This is what he said to her: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of his father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

She asked the obvious question, telling him she was a virgin: “How could this happen?” And he answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy — the Son of God.”

And Mary said that the angel told her that we were expecting a child, and that’s why she’d come, because this is all so confusing and bewildering.

But she swore she was still a virgin, and I believe her. But what do we make of all of this? Elizabeth swears that the baby in Mary’s womb is going to be the Lord. I don’t really get it. It’ll be a baby that’s really a human. But there is no human father, and it’ll be a baby that’s really the Lord, the God of Israel. What is God doing?

We don’t understand, but we’re waiting to see. Does God mean to finally save us? Is Messiah finally going to come? You know, it occurs to me that you’re waiting too. That’s what Advent is — waiting for the day you celebrate the birth of Mary’s baby.

But might you be waiting for more than just a celebration? Might you be waiting for God to do something great in you during this next month? Do you believe He will?

See, God wants you to see what it means that He came to earth, incarnate, as Mary’s son. Do you understand how that upends everything? Do you understand that He’s calling you to a different life, a better life, an eternal life — in the work of this young boy to come through Mary? Would you pray that God would do amazing things in you in this next month, in the power of the Messiah, Jesus the Christ?

I’m just a normal old priest. 
What am I doing talking to Gabriel?

Rev. Fullilove is an RTS alumnus and a newly appointed assistant professor of Old Testament at RTS-Atlanta. Contact him at bfullilove@rts.edu.

**Bonus Digital Content**

Read the full-length version of this article by accessing the digital version of this issue at rts.edu/site/resources/M-L.aspx.
What Makes Her Great

Psalm 48 reveals three enduring truths about the church.

My high school senior class trip took me to Nashville, Tenn., the country music capital of the world, with all the obligatory stops: the Country Music Hall of Fame, Opryland, the Grand Ole Opry and the guided bus tour of the homes of the stars. During that tour we were ushered through the gate of a palatial home with a swimming pool in the shape of a guitar. Being clueless about country music, that home was nothing more than a curiosity. I had no recollection of which star lived there.

Later, in college during the dark days of disco, I fled to the safe harbor of country music, learning about one of the greatest of the greats, Webb Pierce. He succeeded Hank Williams as host of the Grand Ole Opry and was famous for his sequined suits and silver-dollar-lined twin Cadillacs. And he had a swimming pool in the shape of a guitar! I had been at his mansion and regarded it as a mere curiosity, but knowing what I now know, it would have been a pilgrimage!

The experience of many people with the church is similar. We come and go with interest, perhaps even enthusiasm, without intentional awareness of what makes the church great. Psalm 48 reminds us about the church’s great God, great salvation and great story to tell.

A Great God

In verses 1-3 we are told that the church has a great God. Zion and Jerusalem had been chosen by God as “the place for His name to dwell” (Deuteronomy 12). There David brought the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle, and eventually Solomon built the temple there. It was God Himself in His city who was to be praised: “Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of the whole earth . . .”

All the promises and praises of Zion and Jerusalem in the Old Testament have found their reality in the church of Jesus Christ. Through Him we “have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . and to the assembly (ecclesia) of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” (Hebrews 12:22-23a; cf. Galatians 4:26).

This means that the church’s greatness is not found in the grandeur of its building, the quality of its music, the eloquence of its preaching, the warmth of its fellowship or even the scope of its outreach. The church’s greatness is in the greatness of its God, Israel’s God, the creator of heaven and earth and the redeemer of His covenant people through Jesus Christ. This is why we can make the audacious claim that the church of Jesus Christ is the “joy of the whole earth,” because “God is in the midst of her.”

A Great Salvation

Verses 4-8 tell us that the church also has a great salvation. They describe ancient armies assembled in war against Jerusalem only to be struck with sudden panic and flight, such as when the Assyrians besieged Jerusalem in the days of King Hezekiah (2 Kings 19). God allowed such attacks to humble His people so they would repent of their sins and turn back to Him. But lest there be any mistake about His nearness and power, when it came time to save, He saved suddenly and decisively.

Ultimately salvation was not found in God’s work for earthly Jerusalem, but in Jesus Christ living, dying and rising as the true temple of God to constitute His church as a new temple (John 2:21; Ephesians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:4-5). On this basis the church fathers, the Protestant Reformers and the Westminster divines believed there was no ordinary
possibility of salvation apart from the visible church (WCF 25.2). While salvation is in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone, God normally gives that grace through the church. In it we receive the preaching of the Word, the sealing of baptism, the sustenance of Communion and the loving care of Christ-appointed undershepherds. Professing Christians who willfully or by neglect disassociate themselves from the visible church refuse the principal means by which God administers saving grace to us. The church is great because it has a great God and a great salvation.

**A Great Story to Tell**

Finally, in verses 9-14, we learn that the church is great because it has a great story to tell. As a psalm sung by pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem for the high holy days, it would have reminded them of all that God had done in Zion. We can almost picture from verse 12 a guided tour around the city: “walk about Zion, go around her, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels.” At each place, God’s acts in salvation history would be remembered. Was this mere nostalgia? No, it was praise with a purpose — “that you may tell it to the next generation” (v. 13b). Israel’s story was to be given away to the next generation. God’s past faithfulness is not a history to be worshiped, but a story to be told.

While we can often be history worshipers, we can also be history haters. We can be like the children of Dust Bowl farmers in Nanci Griffith’s *Trouble in the Fields*, who complain about the cooling rain, not realizing it had saved their parents. We carry the heirlooms of our heritage to the trash bin like an adult child clearing the house of his late parents, not knowing trash from treasure because we haven’t troubled ourselves to learn the stories.

This contradicts much of contemporary church practice. Each generation clings to its preferences and patterns, demanding its own peculiar expressions of the faith. Studies show the dismal retention rate of this generational segregation. But what if the church’s intention was to give itself away to its covenant children by telling the stories of God’s faithfulness?

Besides the next generation, the story also is to be told to the nations. The desire of the Psalms is that God’s praise would reach “to the ends of the earth” (v. 10). God the Father promised God the Son the nations as His inheritance (Psalm 2:8). All nations are being gathered to the mountain of the Lord through the proclamation of God’s faithfulness so as to become a “house of prayer for the nations” (Isaiah 2:2-3; 56:7). The church has “a story to tell to the nations.”

No matter how wonderful our home church’s programs and ministries, its greatness is ultimately in none of those things. The church is great because it has a great God, a great salvation and a great story to tell. Psalm 48 binds together the centrality of the church and its mission. Theologian Leslie Newbigin has rightly pointed out that an un-missionary church and an un-churchly mission are both monstrosities. But if we maintain that the church and its mission are inseparable, we will see the realization of Paul’s prayer: “To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever” (Ephesians 2:21). 

Rev. Glodo is associate professor of biblical studies at RTS-Orlando.
How did God call you to accept the chancellor position at RTS?

I loved my work and the congregation at First Presbyterian; I could have seen myself spending the totality of my public ministry there. When the call came from RTS, I wrestled with what to do. After committing myself to prayer, I reached out to people I respect and regard the counsel of, and the almost-universal response was “You have to do this — God has prepared you for it.”

Inside the congregation, my elders were so sweet and dear to me as I wrestled through this. To a man they said, “Ligon, we don’t want you to go, but we really think the Lord may be calling you.” One of them gave me a Scripture — “I cried unto the Lord and He set me free” from Psalm 118:5 — and I felt like until I had that Scripture, the Lord had not set me free to say yes to RTS.

For more than 20 years you have fulfilled the role of a pastor and scholar. What significance does the pastor-and-scholar model hold for the vitality of the church and its gospel mission?

I’m thankful to both First Presbyterian and RTS for allowing me to fulfill that role, because the church has been generous to allow me to serve RTS, and the seminary has been generous to allow a pastor to come in part time to serve as a scholar on a wonderful faculty. This is not something unique, though; it is part of the Reformed tradition. Presbyterians, both British and American, were at the cutting edge of the formation of theological seminaries as a way of preparing men for the ministry. They knew that pastors had to be deeply rooted in biblical truth, not only in order to preach the Word, but to defend the faith and help their flock under the assaults of unbelief and infidelity.

What challenges does the U.S. church face?

I think we face the twin challenges of defeatism on one hand and the disengagement that comes from that, and anger and a negative engagement with the culture on the other. I think almost all evangelicals recognize that the
culture is not going our way right now. That leads some to want to give up, pull up the drawbridges, fill up the moats with alligators and huddle in their little corners, while it makes other people angry, lashing out at this culture gone awry.

Both responses, though, underestimate the sovereignty of God and the power of the gospel. One of the great challenges of the church today is to accept just how big a challenge we face from the cultural headwinds of our times, and yet not despair — having confidence in the gospel and that God’s Word is still true. We’ll need an attitude to the world that “You can’t hate us enough to stop us from loving you.” We’ll continue to proclaim the gospel, be absolutely faithful to God’s Word, not budging one inch, but also not standing still in our mission.

Q: What about the other challenges facing the global church?

For one, the expansion of Christianity in the global South is real, but the need for theological education there is urgent and pervasive. That’s another place where RTS has a lot to offer. I want RTS to be the system of theological seminaries that provides the theological ballast for the mission movement in the global South.

Also, engagement with Islam is something we’ve had our eyes on at RTS for some time. We’re the only seminary I know of that requires in the Master of Divinity curriculum a course on Islam, because Islam is going to be the great challenge of the next 50 years on the global front, and increasingly here in the Western world, when you look at the birth rates of Islamic populations and the declining birth rates of Western and Anglo populations. We need to know how to engage Islam with the gospel, understanding it theologically and culturally, and knowing how best to love our Muslim neighbors and reach out with the gospel to them.

Q: How do you see seminaries contributing to the future health and growth of the church? What difference can one school make?

Seminaries in general and RTS in particular have enormous resources to leverage for the health and well-being of the church. They can do things that local churches do not have the resources to do. There are many things a candidate for ministry can learn in a local church better than anywhere else, such as how to do funerals, weddings and baptisms, for example. But if you want an evangelical scholar to be able to defend the integrity of the Old Testament from the attacks of liberal scholars, then you must have people who can engage in the front ranks of the appropriate disciplines. We can amass resources, distribute learning and cultivate knowledge that will serve all churches well.

RTS has had a huge impact in this area. For example, there’s a billionaire in another country who is planting churches and hospitals and is engaged in university education, all because of the influence of an RTS graduate who taught him the truth of God’s Word. There’s no way to calculate the effect in his nation due to the influence of RTS. That’s the kind of story we want to tell over and over — it only takes one graduate and one person. It’s a picture of the kind of contribution RTS can make to the future health and growth of the church. M.
Trey and Kiki Adams and Lisa Repair

are living proof that God is sovereign over every circumstance, even a bathroom break. After all, the closing of the deal on the three RTS-Jackson students (now alumni) serving together for two years as missionaries in Thailand took place in a women’s restroom on campus.

“I remember having a conversation with Lisa during a break in Dr. [Derek] Thomas’ systematic theology class,” Kiki recalls, “when she said, ‘I think I’m going to come to Thailand.’ That was the beginning of our [missionary] relationship — in a bathroom.”

All along, Trey and Kiki had been recruiting their classmate to join them while the couple prepared to go to Bangkok to work with the Presbyterian Church in America’s Mission to the World. The three served together in Thailand for more than a year and a half, and while Lisa has just returned stateside now that her mission term is complete, Trey and Kiki continue on with MTW, with Trey as team leader for the work in Bangkok.

If the adage is true that the way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time, then the task of reaching a city the size of Bangkok with the gospel is about as big as an elephant can get. Bangkok boasts a population roughly equal to New York City, only spread out over approximately twice the square mileage. Trey and Kiki live and minister outside the city center on the edge of Bangkok’s borders.

“A lot of our people are country Thais who moved into Bangkok to find work,” Trey explains. Trey and Kiki serve at New City Fellowship Church, working to help raise up indigenous Thai eldership in the church (a young Thai currently serves as pastor). “I’m still learning what it takes here in Asia to plant and grow healthy churches over the long term,” Trey admits. “But I want to see this church grow strong and self-supporting so we can start planting Bible studies and perhaps a church in other parts of the city as this church grows and is able to support that.”

The roots of Trey and Kiki’s calling to Asia lie in Trey’s ministry with Campus Outreach while in college, during which he went on a summer mission to Thailand in 2001. “I was already thinking about Asia a lot,” he explains. “I had a God-led interest in what was happening on this side of the world. Thailand was a good fit for me — I love the culture and the language, and the food definitely, but also saw myself moving toward church planting in my philosophy of ministry.”

As Trey connected with MTW and participated in various ministry internships, he and Kiki met and married. “God used the process of short-term missions to open me up to the possibility that He was calling me to be a missionary,” says Kiki, whose given name is Kirsten — she acknowledges that any effort to lose her childhood nickname “just doesn’t work, especially in Thailand, because Kirsten’s just way too hard [for Thais] to say.” Originally planning to go to China, Kiki’s direction changed after marrying Trey. “We chose Thailand,” Kiki continues, “based on how we saw we could fit into what [MTW was] already doing there, and the way we saw our spiritual gifts and personal talents being used in

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Kiki and Trey (above) first recruited Lisa (right) to come to Thailand on a summer mission internship while the three attended RTS-Jackson together.
the country."
The couple recruited Lisa to join them because they saw qualities in her that they thought would be adaptable to Thai culture. "She fits well in the fun-loving sense," Kiki observes, as Trey explains that Thais are a "very laid-back, fun-centered culture — if you're having a meeting, you'd better have fun, some games, some light-hearted things." Trey also notes Lisa's gentle spirit: "In the West, we like straight talk, but this is a very non-confrontational culture, and a gentle, humble spirit really goes a long way with Thais."

As missionaries, Trey and Kiki have also learned to adjust to the nationalistic spiritual climate in Thailand. "Growing up Thai, you grow up a Buddhist," Trey says, "and being Thai is about revering the nation, the king and Buddhism. There's a sense with people that if they turn their back on Buddhism, then they've turned their back on being Thai."

The Buddhist belief in karma, that what one does in this life is received in a subsequent life, also complicates the ministry process in Thailand. "Growing up Thai, you grow up a Buddhist," Trey says, "and being Thai is about revering the nation, the king and Buddhism. There's a sense with people that if they turn their back on Buddhism, then they've turned their back on being Thai."

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The process by which Thais come to faith in Christ follows a much slower pace than Americans typically observe. "When we first came to Thailand," Kiki says, "I asked Thai Christians [to give] their testimony, and over and over I heard stories like, 'I had Christian friends who invited me to their Bible study, and I started coming for a few years, and then I started going to church, and then a couple of years later something happened in my family, and my Christian friends were really supportive and loving to me during that time, and that's when I really started to see how the body of Christ worked, and then I became a Christian.' The Holy Spirit seems to be using a long-term, body of Christ-focused way of bringing people to Christ."

With that in mind, the work of New City Fellowship takes on a more communal focus. "Family here is so important," Kiki explains. "If you lose your family you have nobody else to rely on — you lose all your security and support all at once. So seeing the church act as a family is a shocking and countercultural thing that people are drawn to."

As such, according to Trey, "fellowship is just as much part of our evangelism as anything else. We'll always have the proclamation of the gospel, the preaching and teaching of Scripture through personal, life-on-life evangelism. But there's also the witness of the people of God being together and living together." This happens through initiatives such as holding as many fellowship lunches as the
church’s budget will allow, as well as through acting like family when people go into the hospital, for example.

Kiki tells a story about the death of the brother of one of the church members. “She’s the only Christian in her family,” Kiki explains, “so by going to the funeral with her, she had people to sit with who weren’t bowing to the monks or participating in the Buddhist aspects of the funeral. That way she wasn’t isolated and alone, and her family saw that we care for her.”

A more formal program started by the Thai staff at the church has also borne fruit. In an effort to help single-parent women (or those with absent husbands) in local slum communities to better care for themselves and their children, the church launched a business to employ the women and at the same time evangelize them. The women make and sell handbags and purses with Thai materials and patterns — “girl things,” Trey says with a smile. “It’s been an amazing avenue for us to reach into the lives of these women, and also it’s a way for our church to become more and more self-sustaining. Thailand is less than 1 percent Christian, so you have to find creative ways to support the church here.”

During her time in Thailand, Lisa led a weekly Bible study with the women working at the business. “I [would read] from my Bible in English, but I [spoke] in Thai with them, and I’m really grateful that [was] possible, even though most of the time I probably sounded like I [was] 4 years old!” she says with a laugh. “They won’t say that they’re Christians,” she continues, noting that most of the women in the study have yet to come to faith in Christ, “but I still [saw] the Lord increasing their understanding, and I [saw] lights go off — it [showed] on their faces that they [were] making connections.”

With her two-year stay complete, Lisa has returned to Jackson temporarily while waiting to discern God’s next step for her, affirming that “the call to ministry service is a bedrock that will never change.” As for Trey and Kiki, the call to continue long term in Thailand with MTW remains — after many fits and starts in language study, Trey recently preached his first sermon in Thai, and Kiki is in the planning stages of launching a counseling ministry that would directly put her degree from the Marriage and Family Therapy program at RTS-Jackson to work.

Whether in a restroom in Jackson, halfway around the world or somewhere in between, God keeps these three missionaries in the palm of His hand.

Fun, food and family-style fellowship are essential elements of Thai church culture.

Keep up with Trey and Kiki’s ministry in Thailand by joining their open Facebook group named “Hold the Rope for Trey and Kiki in Thailand.” Lisa blogged during her time in Thailand at lisatoasia.blogspot.com.
David Irving didn’t literally worship a 4.4-pound metal plate, but at one point he came to see that it had dominated his attention. The Dartmouth College student-athlete had devoted much of his life to success in discus throwing, as well as its track-and-field cousins known as the shot put and the hammer throw. A rash of failure in his chosen athletic pursuits led him to a crisis of faith that eventually brought the New Hampshire-native Ivy Leaguer to an unlikely destination: the Deep South and RTS-Jackson.

Standing 6-foot-8 and weighing, as he admits with a smile in his voice, “far north of 250 pounds,” David would easily be mistaken for a football tight end or a basketball power forward. In fact, he did play both sports in high school, but track was always David’s first love.

“It was a family thing for me,” explains the 2011 Dartmouth graduate, whose father was a track captain and record holder at the University of New Hampshire. “It was cool for me to do something my dad had done, and done well. I grew up doing the track meets — it was something my dad and I really shared and loved. He was also one of my major coaches in middle school and high school.”

David also received a moral, churchgoing influence from
his family, so when he arrived at Dartmouth in the fall of 2006, he was a bit of an anomaly. “I was not really interested, in God’s providence and through my parents, in the partying and drinking culture that is such a central part of Dartmouth student life,” David notes. He would have described himself as a Christian then, but through the influence of a Bible study to which he’d been invited and began attending regularly, he realized his need for a Savior, coming to faith in Christ as a sophomore.

Not long after, David faced the challenge of not reaching his athletic goals, having failed to place in any of his three events at the Ivy League championships his junior year. “I had thrown all my personal capital eggs, if you will, into the track basket, and that basket broke,” he admits. “So it was a tremendous experience for me to see the need for Christ to be supreme. I really learned that Christ is Lord of my life, not this metal plate I threw around.”

As a senior, when David bounced back athletically, making second-team All-Ivy in the discus, a weightier calling began to crystallize. Joshua Drake, a former fellow student at Dartmouth and a former student assistant at the church they both attended while in college, had begun attending RTS-Jackson. “When it came time that I thought God might be calling me to ministry and go to seminary,” David says, “there aren’t too many people leaving Dartmouth to go to Reformed seminaries, so Josh was obviously a first point of contact. So that’s how I heard about RTS.” David began his RTS studies with Summer Greek in 2011, and he is now in his third year, projecting to complete his degree in the spring of 2015.

David’s acclimation to Southern life appears complete, having married Sarah Grafton Peaster, a Mississippi native, in June. Alongside his RTS studies, David serves as a pastoral intern at Raymond Presbyterian Church, whose pulpit supply minister is Bebo Elkin, an RTS alumnus and a founding father of Reformed University Ministries. “I want to pastor a local church somewhere, baptize people, marry them and bury them, and love them, and stay at the same place as long as I can, if God would choose to do that,” David declares.

He has come to that conclusion in the context of a variety of ministry endeavors, besides his current internship, while at RTS. These include coaching football, basketball and track at a local Christian school, and particularly an internship at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson as part of the Christian Medical and Dental Association (which has campus ministries similar in concept to the aforementioned RUM).

“At the Medical Center we’d have a large-group meeting on Tuesdays where we’d have lunch for students, sing a few songs and have a speaker, either a local pastor or a doctor who’s an elder at a local church,” David explains. “I had opportunities to preach and teach there, and also do some discipling and small groups. I was glad to get some experience in campus ministry and to have opportunities to teach and lead small groups. That was my first consistent opportunity to meet with people one-on-one, so that was a great experience.”

David’s ministry experiences come on the heels of his leadership opportunities at Dartmouth. Along with co-captaining the track team, he also served as editor in chief of the Dartmouth Law Review (one of the few student-run law journals of its kind) and as president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes chapter. Through it all, both in college and seminary, David has learned valuable lessons about leadership.

“The more time I spend in seminary and go on pastoral visits, the more I think that pastoral ministry and preaching boils down to this: Do I know God’s Word well enough to really apply it to this situation, to this organization, to this individual, and can I do it in a way that’s Christ-exalting and not David-exalting?” he observes. “The more time I spend reflecting on the supremacy of God’s Word and Christ in the Word, and then seeking to humbly live as a servant of Christ, the more I’m convicted that people don’t need me, or my ideas and thoughts. They need Christ and His Word.”

As David continues his RTS education, he takes on matters much heavier than any discus, shot put or hammer he threw in high school or college.
RTS-Charlotte inaugurates Dr. Michael Kruger as its president.

Celebration in the Carolinas

Dr. Kruger (fifth from left) is joined before the inaugural service by nine of the men who had speaking roles in the service: (from left) Steve Wallace, Rod Mays, Tom Hawkes, Dr. William Barclay, Dr. Ligon Duncan, Dr. John Oliver, Richard Ridgway, Dr. Shelton Sanford and Carlton Wynne.

October 20 marked an evening when RTS-Charlotte went uptown — that is, to Uptown Church in the heart of the Queen City. As twilight descended, sunlight slanting through the stained-glass windows of the classic church building, the RTS family joined in celebrating the inauguration of Dr. Michael Kruger as the fourth president of the Charlotte campus.

In his inaugural remarks, Dr. Kruger turned to 1 Corinthians 1:18 to outline his vision for RTS-Charlotte, where he has served as professor of New Testament for 12 years and academic dean for seven years. The native North Carolinian spoke from the pulpit of Uptown, where he serves part time as the pastor of teaching, about the need for RTS to maintain a “historic, realistic and optimistic” view of the message of the cross of Christ.

Dr. Kruger followed an array of guest speakers ranging from the statesmanly demeanor of RTS-Charlotte professor emeritus Dr. John Oliver to the steady stream of dry witticisms from RTS-Atlanta professor Dr. Derek Thomas. Dr. Thomas turned especially serious, though, in his charge to

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Dr. Kruger greets well-wishers outside the church before the late-afternoon service on October 20.
Over the last year or two, God has impressed on my heart a foundational verse that embodies my hopes and dreams for RTS-Charlotte. Some of you have heard me talk about it before because it is a verse I have spoken on in a number of different occasions. It is a verse all of you know: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Paul lays out a vision in this verse that can be captured in three words: historic, realistic and optimistic.

First you will notice that Paul is historic. At this center of Paul’s declaration is that we have a message: “the word of the cross.” Paul’s message is not about religion or philosophy or an idea, but about a historical event: the crucifixion of the Son of God, who died on the cross for sinners. It is a true event. It really happened. And Paul is declaring it. That is the message of the gospel, and that is what we are committed to at RTS-Charlotte.

But this is an unpopular message. Our world doesn’t want to hear about a cross, because at the center of the cross is a message about our sin and God’s holiness. And the world wants nothing to do with that.

So in addition to being historic, Paul is also realistic: “the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing.” It is seen as absurd, outrageous, ridiculous, offensive, silly, foolish.

Paul therefore knows that as Christians, we have to be ready for the onslaught against the truth of the gospel. And that is my vision for RTS-Charlotte. Our purpose is not just to have a message, but to protect, to guard, to honor, to proclaim that message; not change, nor improve, nor modify that message. Thus, one of my central goals for RTS is biblical fidelity. We will remain truthful and faithful to God’s Word.

But Paul is not just historic and realistic; he is also optimistic.

He realizes that the resistance of the world could lead to pessimism. It would be easy for that to happen. But Paul’s message has a positive reminder: this message “is the power of God.”

And this is my desire for RTS, to send forth our students into a hostile world with hope, confidence, joy, optimism and courage. Why? Because they bear the most wonderful, most powerful, most life-changing message imaginable. It is a message that can literally change the world.

Do you want to change the world today? If so, you will need something mighty, powerful, earth-shattering, groundbreaking — something that can penetrate the halls of the academy and the darkened hearts of men. There is only one thing that can do that: the word of the cross.

And it is the combination of factors in this verse that is so powerful: a commitment to the historic truth of the cross, a realistic approach to defending the truth to a hostile world, and an optimistic, joyful spirit about what God will do in the future.

That is an exciting vision. I ask you to join us as we move forward with it. There is much work to be done, and you can help. Pray for us. Support us. Come take a class with us.

As Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Pray that the Lord would send workers into the harvest.”
Adopting a New Name

One graduate’s story illustrates the RTS Virtual Campus’ new identity as RTS-Global.

While RTS is committed to residential theological education, the seminary is also committed to providing alternative educational models as our world continues to grow and change. The flexible options provided in recent years by the RTS Virtual Campus allow students with work and travel restrictions to experience Reformed graduate theological education.

Effective June 1, RTS has responded to the needs of non-residential students worldwide by making some significant changes to its Virtual campus and its operations. In terms of degree programs, RTS will offer two additional Master of Arts degrees fully online, in biblical studies and theological studies, to go with the Master of Arts in Religion online program. Also, RTS will now offer a significant percentage of the Master of Divinity degree online.

Reflecting these changes, the Virtual Campus has now become two groups: RTS Global Education (U.S. and International) and RTS Distance Education. Dr. Andrew Peterson, who had been president of RTS-Virtual, will now head up RTS-Global, which will oversee the aforementioned online degree programs. RTS Distance Education, headed by executive director David John (who had been director of media for RTS-Virtual), will serve residential students taking online courses as part of their degree programs.

The story of a recent graduate of what is now RTS-Global effectively illustrates the concept of adoption of a new identity. In 2005, U.S. Air Force physician Aaron Hartman and his wife, Rebekah, had been married two years when they started talking about adoption. “My wife is an occupational therapist,” Aaron explains, “and one of her patients was born with cerebral palsy, and the girl was going to get put in a foster home. Becky asked me what I thought about adopting her, and I said, ‘I don’t know about this.’ Anna had all kinds of issues — she didn’t crawl or walk.

“But then I read James 1:27 about true religion meaning taking care of orphans, so we prayed about it. She was going to foster care, so I thought if I didn’t like it, I could always give her back, right? That was really my mindset. But we had her for about six months and fell in love with her and ending up adopting her. My heart was changed. She’s the first person I’ve ever been able to love truly without expecting anything in return.”

The connection between the Hartmans’ adoption experience and God’s adoption of His children hit home later, after Aaron had left the Air Force and returned to his native Virginia to begin a family medical practice. “My wife was in the kitchen reading a blog post from a woman who was lamenting that adoption was God’s Plan B, saying that His plan for her was to have biological children. All of a sudden it hit me — I looked at my daughter playing on the floor and thought, ‘No, this is the ‘A’ plan. This is how God chose before the foundation of the world to make His family.’

Aaron and Rebekah adopted a second child, and Aaron launched into deeper study on the doctrine of adoption, writing his M.A.R. thesis for RTS on the subject. “It made the gospel more real,” he explains. “God adopts people who are without hope and chooses to make them His children. It’s countercultural what He does for us.”

Aaron’s thesis has been published in book form, with purchasing information available at tinyurl.com/ln3fa53.

Along with the two children they have adopted, the Hartmans have a biological child of their own.
Dr. Guy Waters has been appointed an associate editor of the *Reformed Theological Review.*

**CAMPUS EVENTS**

**Charlotte**

The Harold O.J. Brown Lecture Series
Rev. Mark Dover, senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church, will present lectures at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. on Feb. 11.

**Jackson**

Spiritual Life Conference
Rev. Brian Hobig, pastor of Downtown Presbyterian Church, Greenville, S.C., will be the speaker at the conference to be held March 5-6. Session 1 on Wednesday will be in the chapel, Session 2 will be a lunch seminar on “Having a Heart for Ministering to Jackson While in Seminary,” and Session 3 on Thursday will be a lunch seminar on “Looking Backward From Campus Ministry.”

**Orlando**

OnePassion Preaching Conference
The Institute of Expository Preaching with Dr. Steven J. Lawson’s OnePassion Conference, “Preaching With Precision and Power,” will be held Jan. 28-30. There will also be a public lecture on Jan. 29 at St. Andrews Chapel, Sanford, Fla. Dr. Lawson (D.Min. ’90) is senior pastor of Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, Mobile, Ala., and president of OnePassion Ministries. For more information, visit rts.edu/orlando/onepassion.

Preview Day / Spurgeon Lecture
Preview Day will be March 10, with the Nicole Institute of Baptist Studies hosting the second annual Spurgeon Lecture at 7 p.m. by Dr. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Seminary, Louisville, Ky. Contact Tim Trouten (ttrouten@rts.edu) to sign up for Preview Day.

President’s Forum
On March 12, Dr. Dan Sweeting will discuss “Trends in Global Christianity” with Dr. Tim Tennant, president of the Florida Dunnam campus of Asbury Theological Seminary.

Kistemaker Lectures
Dr. Kevin Vanhoozer, professor of systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, is the speaker for the annual Kistemaker Academic Lecture Series at RTS-Orlando, March 18-19. Dr. Vanhoozer will present four one-hour lectures, at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. on both days, and a community lunch with a Q&A session on the 19th.

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Dr. Kruger, pointing a gentle finger directly at the new president as he exhorted, “I want you to be a president who is passionate about one thing,” referring to the apostle Paul’s “One thing I do” discourse about the gospel as recorded in Philippians 3:13.

The inauguration also provided a speaking opportunity for RTS chancellor-elect Dr. Ligon Duncan, whom Dr. Kruger had invited to give the inaugural sermon before the chancellorship had entered the picture. Preaching from 1 Timothy 1:3-5, Dr. Duncan laid out Paul’s philosophy of ministry, explaining why truth matters and how truth works in the Christian life. “Deviant doctrine destroys,” he warned his listeners. “It creates a spiritual desert.”

RTS Board of Trustees chairman Richard Ridgway and chief operations officer Steve Wallace performed the official investiture, as witnessed by board members Biff Bracy, Granville Dutton (who celebrated his 89th birthday the week after the event) and Collie Lehn. Several local pastors with RTS connections also participated in the service, including Dr. Shelton Sanford, one of the key figures in the founding of the Charlotte campus.

“What a blessing [RTS-Charlotte] has been to the Carolinas and to the entire country,” declared Dr. Sanford during the call to worship. “May it continue to be so under the leadership of Dr. Kruger.”

Dr. Kruger’s wife, Melissa, helps lead the Women of RTS program at the Charlotte campus.
TAKE5 With Don Sweeting is now available in the app store for iPhone, iPad, Android and Google play. Take five minutes today to develop a deeper mind for truth and a heart for God with Dr. Don Sweeting, president of RTS-Orlando. You will find these five-minute podcasts to be rich with theological truth that is practically applicable to everyday life. If you prefer, listen online at rts.edu/takefive.