

Opinions

Everybody has one...

The Greatest Story Ever Told

No story can match the Christmas story. Mary was just an ordinary girl, but she was special in the eyes of God. She was someone God knew he could choose to enter the world as the baby Jesus. Mary and husband-to-be Joseph followed the leadership of God and were willing vessels to be used of God.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem and placed in a cow's trough. This young couple had to sleep in a barn because the town was crowded and there was no room for them in the inn.

They were poor people and had a new baby. The conditions were less than ideal for the care of a mom and a newly delivered baby.

God took care of them. Even when an evil king was paranoid by the birth of Jesus, God directed them to relocate to Egypt for a period of time.

Jesus grew up and at the young age of 12 was confounding the religious leaders with his knowledge and wisdom.

This young man would grow up to be the greatest man who has ever lived. He was different. He was a man, but He was God in the flesh. Yes, he hurt just like we hurt, bled like we bleed, and was tempted as we are tempted, but He was God.

John the Baptist recognized Him as the lamb of God. The disciples recognized they were living in the presence of deity.

No one else has ever lived the way Jesus lived. He healed the sick. He gave the blind sight. He enabled the lame to walk. He raised the dead. He fed masses of people with a few loaves of bread and fish. He was the greatest teacher who ever lived.

More books have been written about Jesus than any other person. The Bible is the best-selling book of all time. Every week billions of people worship him publicly and privately.

Jesus loved like no other person, but he had great opposition. Sadly, most of the opposition was from the religious crowd of his day. They weren't satisfied until they convinced the political leadership of that day to execute Jesus publicly on a cross. His execution was brutal, humiliating, shameful, and repulsive. The way Jesus was treated fully exposed the wickedness of mankind and the literal cruelty of religion.

See *Mollette*, page 5A

Guest Editorial

By Dr. Glenn Mollette

This Christmas Day

All Things New

Wayne Fowler



I pray a prayer this Christmas Day
From deep within my heart.
Peace on earth goodwill to men
May wars all end, never start.

I forgive someone this Christmas Day
It's something I must do.
Since You forgave me of my sins
Then I forgive others, too.

I give a gift this Christmas Day
It comes on wings of a dove.
To God, neighbor, and enemy too,
The gift I give is love.

I welcome morning this Christmas Day
The children squeal with glee.
Their gifts are but a moment in time
The eternal gift is Thee.

I believe it's true this Christmas Day
The place of peace, no strife.
It's where You are who say You are
The way, the truth, the life.

I rejoice with joy this Christmas Day
For treasure held in jars of clay.
The cradle, cross, and empty tomb
None can take this joy away!

I worship a King this Christmas Day
Who came from heaven for this:
To invite you now to come to Him
Exchange your life for His!

I sing a song this Christmas Day
Of hope renewed for men.
O Come Emmanuel like before
Come soon to us again.

From Your Commissioner

Gratitude. That's the word that keeps coming to mind as I prepare to step down as your Commissioner. I'm filled with immense gratitude for the trust you placed in me, for the support you've shown, and for the incredible things we've accomplished together. As I reflect back on my 24 years of public service with Union County, not as your Commissioner,

but as one of you, a proud member of this community, I can't help but feel a profound sense of gratitude for the incredible journey we've shared. When I took on this role, I envisioned a County where every resident felt heard, empowered, and supported. While we may not have achieved everything we set out to do, I am confident that we made significant strides towards those goals. We tackled issues ranging from improving our parks and recreation to advocating for more and better materials recycling, and throughout it all, your thoughts and voices were at the forefront of our decision-making.

We are neighbors. We've laughed together at our social events. We've supported each other through personal and professional challenges. We've worked tirelessly to make a difference in our community. There have been tough times too. Moments when we disagreed; when projects didn't go as planned; when the weight of responsibility felt heavy; but we always found a way forward, together.

Notice, I've used the term, "We." A true legacy isn't built by one person – it's built by a community who cares and is united in purpose. Each of you has contributed to the legacy we leave behind for generations to come. Every employee effort, every volunteer hour, every innovative suggestion to make Union County a better place to live, work and play, every act of kindness towards a fellow resident – these are the building blocks of our shared legacy.

Next week, I will speak more specifically about the folks who make up Union County Government and about how they have worked so hard to help make Union County the incredible place it is today.

Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



Genuine Connections

How to Avoid Feeling Taken for Granted and Build Genuine Connections

By Yonatan Hambourger and Tzali Reicher

Have you ever felt like you were giving so much in a relationship, yet receiving little in return?

You do, do, do for the other person, whether it's your partner, friend, or family member, but there's no acknowledgment, no gratitude, no recognition. It feels like you're just going through the motions, trying to make things work while the other person seems oblivious to your effort.

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone – many of us experience this sense of imbalance in our relationships at some point or another. Of course, this is not just a modern-day phenomenon. If we take a step back and consider ancient wisdom, particularly the teachings found in the Torah, we can find insights that are still relevant today.

See *Hambourger*, page 5A

Echos from Sinai
"Torah for Everyone"
Rabbi Yonatan Hambourger



Letters to the Editor

A Fed Bear is a Dead Bear

Dear Editor,
I am writing in response to the concern about the rising number of bear sightings in Union County and the increasingly common encounters between bears and humans. While it's understandable that many people are fascinated by these magnificent creatures, it's crucial to emphasize the importance of maintaining a safe and respectful distance from wildlife. The phrase "A Fed Bear is a Dead Bear" serves as a stark reminder of the dangers that come with feeding bears, either intentionally or inadvertently.

When humans feed bears, even in seemingly harmless situations like leaving food in garbage bins or feeding them with corn, it can have deadly consequences for the bear population. Once bears become accustomed to human food, they lose their natural fear of people. This behavioral change can lead to bears approaching homes and cars, putting both the animals and humans at risk. The ultimate result is often tragic for the bear – if it becomes too habituated to human food, it may be killed.

See *Steele*, page 5A

The Perfect Christmas Gift

Dear Editor,
As we approach Christmas Day when many folks celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who came down from His glorious throne of grace to be born of a virgin girl named Mary and laid in a manger in a stable, I have gotten to pondering that God could have come down as a fully grown man of 30 years old and arrived in style riding in a chariot with an army of angels at His beck and call if there was any trouble a-brewing in Bethlehem. Jesus could have danced his way to Rome to tell Herod that he was no longer in charge of anything, that God required his soul that very night. Jesus could have set Himself up as King over all for peace on earth to reign forever. A happy ending, like a Cinderella story.

See *Combs*, page 5A

Take A Hint

Dear Editor,
To the ladies who carried their petition all over town for years to get residents to sign... Take a hint.
It took you years to get 4,000 signatures. The population in Union County is over 27,000. Apparently that isn't what the majority wants.

It isn't just the officials, or you would have gotten the signatures in just a few days. Get over it!

Linda King

Becoming Older

"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" — Proverbs 23:7

There is no objective "old" – if you have labeled yourself as old, then so be it. You are old, in that case. Do you call yourself "decrepit" too? Calling yourself names is negative in all aspects. So who are you today? And who are you becoming at this very moment?

Setting positive goals for ourselves helps us remain active and vibrant. We aim high, shoot high, and sometimes actually score exact hits on what we have planned. We mark out that specific attained goal to demonstrate to ourselves that we have been successful. We might even sigh a "hooray" or an "attaboy," which is a positive form of self-congratulations.

Many of us do multiple activities each day that are worthwhile and positive. What is sad is that we don't reward ourselves for all the things we have achieved on that day. Some folks

See *Ashurst*, page 5A

Successful Mental Health
Dr. James Ray Ashurst
PH.D.



We Need a Miracle

Let me preface this article by telling you it is not meant to be religious in nature. I am simply relating the facts to you as told by my mother. The reason for my telling the story is our time frame. We are celebrating Christmas and yet the world seems to be spinning out of control. And we seem to be deeply divided in this country. The world needs a miracle and we need some good news. So, my gift to you is this story of a miracle that was witnessed by the staff at a nursing home where my mother worked.

For 50 years my Father has been a minister and has served churches in Georgia, Tennessee and Alabama. After my siblings and I moved out of the house my mother went to work at a nursing home in Dunlap, Tennessee. She enjoys serving the elderly. She has a kind heart and is a good listener. So, she was well received by the residents in the nursing home. The story has three characters. Miss Cora was a little old lady who loved everyone. Mr. Brown was a man who couldn't talk and was confined to a wheelchair, and Mrs. Jones was confined to bed and was blind.

Miss Cora was a kind and gentle lady that had been a resident at this nursing home since her husband had died. She was short in stature and always had a smile on her face even when she was in extreme pain. Cora kept a Bible on her nightstand and was constantly reading it. When she wasn't reading her Bible she would visit the other residents to find out about their prayer concerns. Then she would quietly go back to her room and pray for the other residents. It was easy to see her faith because you could hear it in her testimony and you could feel it through her prayers.

But, Cora did not try to push her faith over anyone. She was quiet and unassuming. She would listen to your beliefs and smile. All she wanted you to know was that God loved you so much he sent his son to die for you. She believed this was God's gift to mankind and she lived this belief every day. She never worried about wars, economics or climate change. Each day before mother left work Cora would smile at her and say, "I'll be going home soon and I'll get to see Jesus. If I am not here when you come back to work you'll know where I have gone."

Most of the time Mom worked the evening shift, but, her schedule was changed so the next day, Christmas Eve, she worked the morning shift. Over the past few weeks Cora had become weak and Mom knew her time would come soon. So, she went by Cora's room before leaving

See *Cummings*, page 5A

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Mistletoe

Around this time of year mistletoe is a popular decoration in people's homes. You'll see it hanging above doorways for use by romantically inclined couples. Nowadays you can buy plastic mistletoe at stores to put up in your house. Let's talk about the effect that mistletoe can have on trees in the nature.

The origins of hanging mistletoe come from Norse mythology and Celtic Druids. According to Norse mythology the mistletoe berries brought the Norse god Baldr back to life.

You can find mistletoe outside on trees year-round as it is an evergreen plant. Usually in December it will become more noticeable because trees are bare after dropping their leaves. If you see a green bundle of leaves in the branches of tree around this time of year, chances are that it's mistletoe. In the plant world mistletoe is considered a parasitic plant. Mistletoe will send its root, called the haustorium, into the bark of a host tree. The mistletoe will take nutrients and water from the host tree.

Mistletoe is usually found in the southern United States, because it is susceptible to freezing temperatures, ranging from Virginia over to Texas and down to Florida. It can infect more than 105 different species of trees. Some trees often infected by mistletoe are maples, buckeyes, birch, hickory, oaks, and a whole bunch more.

Mistletoe can be shaded out by surrounding branches. Therefore, fast growing trees that can cover mistletoe from above will have success in preventing infection.

Mistletoe creates a draw for water and nutrients on the tree. Mistletoe will pull these things to itself away from the roots of the tree. This process can lead to a lot of stress on the tree, especially in a drought. Mistletoe tissue will have 1.6 times more nitrogen, 2.3 times more potassium, and 2.5 times more phosphorus than the host tree tissue. During times of drought mistletoe water and nutrient uptake from the tree will increase while the rest of the tree is in decline. Research has shown that moderately infected trees can have a 66% mortality rate after a severe drought period. Mistletoe is able to pull water from the tree more effectively than the tree can pull the water up from the ground.

Mistletoe infections can be very common. Trees that are taller than surrounding trees and trees that are not densely packed in with other trees are most likely to be infected. Infections will begin at the top of the tree and move downward and inward over time. Advanced symptoms on the tree of infection can be branch dieback.

See *Williams*, page 5A

Watching and Working
Jacob Williams



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Yet in 1974, at the height of the Watergate scandal, Congress unnecessarily and unlawfully complicated the presidential power of impoundment with passage of the Impoundment Control Act of 1974 (ICA). The ICA is unconstitutional, as it violates the President's Article II authority.

In the fifty years since, America's national debt and Washington's spending habits have soared out of control.

With a ballooning national debt, an out-of-control deficit, soaring interest payments, and crushing inflation, returning fiscal sanity is key to getting our country and our economy back on track. The President's constitutional power of impoundment is essential to carrying out this mission for the American people.

That's why I introduced legislation to repeal the ICA.

Rolling back the uncon-

stitutional Impoundment Control Act is one of the most effective ways Congress can help President Trump in the fight to deliver the spending cuts and government efficiency that the American people overwhelmingly voted for last month. As you may know, Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, the incredible pair gearing up to lead the forthcoming Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), have emphasized the importance of impoundment in achieving their core mission of government efficiency.

In short, I believe President Trump – or any President for that matter – has the constitutional power to decline the Swamp's spending spree. The goal of my efforts is to not only defend President Trump's use of impoundment, but to remove the unconstitutional roadblock that the ICA presents.

Mollette...continued from Page 4A

The story of Jesus does not end at the cross or his burial. The story of Jesus doesn't end at all. Three days later the stone was rolled away from his burial tomb and he emerged alive as the victorious Son of God who conquered death, hell, and the grave. He spent time with his followers teaching and equipping them before his departure into heaven right before their very eyes.

As he ascended into heaven, the angels told the disciples, "Why do you stand here gazing up into heaven. This same Jesus shall come again in like manner." From that day forward the disciples became the greatest group of missionaries of all time. Everywhere they went they told the story of Jesus. Everyone who heard the story and believed the story was forever changed.

Do you believe the story? Have you heard this story? Maybe you've heard it many, many times. Possibly, you never grow tired of hearing the

story. It's an old, old story but it's the story that gives us hope. This story of Jesus keeps us going, looking forward to better times and better days.

The story of Jesus is the story of life, peace, hope, and forgiveness of all of our sins. It's the story about heaven and seeing our loved ones again. It's the story that often turns houses into homes, lifts drug addicts out of ditches, gives people a sense of direction and purpose in life.

Do you love the Christmas story? Do you love who this story is about? The story is about Jesus. If you don't know him, ask him right now to come into your heart and life and he will.

A heavenly host of angels proclaimed to shepherds watching their flocks, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11

May the greatest story ever told become the greatest story you know personally.

Hamburger.. continued from Page 4A

relevant to how we approach our connections with others. A recurring theme emerges. The message is simple but profound: intentionality in relationships matters. And just as importantly, we need to recognize the difference between meaningful, committed love and a shallow, transactional relationship.

Take, for example, a passage in the book of Leviticus. In Chapter 26, G-d speaks to the Israelites, reminding them that everything in life is a gift from Him. He challenges them not to view the blessings in their lives as mere chance or coincidence but to understand them as intentional gifts. The text says: "If you... approach me with keri, I will respond with a fierce keri."

Now, keri is a Hebrew term that can be roughly translated to "happenstance" or "coincidence." It is rarely used in the Torah, and in fact, appears only seven times, all in this section. In essence, G-d is warning us against approaching life with a mindset of randomness, as if our experiences are simply the result of luck or fate. This way of thinking reduces life to a series of isolated, disconnected events, where we see no meaning behind them, and we fail to recognize the deeper connections at play.

When we apply this lesson to relationships, it becomes clear that a relationship rooted in keri lacks depth and consistency. If you are constantly taking your partner, friend, or family member for granted – assuming that everything that happens between you is just a coincidence – you are, in a way, disengaging from the very essence of what it means to build a lasting, fulfilling connection. Relationships based on happenstance are unstable, unpredictable, and shallow. There's no real commitment, no intention behind the actions. It's all about what happens at the moment without consideration for the long-term bond you're trying to create.

To bring this into a more contemporary context, there's the old joke told about the fellow who's late for an important appointment, driving around the block for the umpteenth time looking for a parking space.

In desperation, he cries out to G-d, "If you give me a parking spot right now, I will make a large donation to charity!" Just as the words leave his lips, a spot becomes available, and he says, "Never mind, G-d. I got this one covered!"

The problem with this mindset is that it creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. A person's lack of recognition of the Divine guiding Hand distances him from a deeper spiritual connection. Life is reduced to a series of random events governed by cause and effect rather than understanding that every moment – every green light, every

obstacle, every bump in the road – can be a custom-sent message from God, meant to guide us, teach us, and grow us.

This is where spiritual sensitivity comes into play. Just as your phone must be turned on to receive a text message, your spirit must be tuned in to the messages G-d is sending you. If you're not open to receiving those messages – if you're too busy chalking up everything to chance – you miss out on the deeper lessons meant to be learned. And when you miss those messages, your relationship with your Creator, and with others, will remain distant and superficial.

So, how do we cultivate that spiritual sensitivity in our daily lives? It starts by slowing down and paying attention. One practical step is to take a few minutes each day to reflect on everything that has happened to you. Did you face any challenges? Did someone offer you unexpected kindness? Did something fall into place that seemed to happen just at the right time? Instead of brushing these things off as coincidence, try to see them as intentional moments sent your way, part of a greater plan designed to guide you.

In relationships, this kind of mindfulness is crucial. When you begin to view your interactions with others through the lens of intentionality, you stop taking things for granted. You begin to notice the little things – the way your partner listens to you, the effort a friend puts into staying in touch, or the patience your family member shows when you're feeling stressed. These may seem like small gestures, but when you view them as intentional acts of love and care, they take on a whole new meaning. And the more you recognize and express gratitude for these things, the more your relationships will deepen.

The wisdom from the Torah teaches us that nothing is by chance; everything has purpose and intention behind it. And if we embrace that mindset, not only will we deepen our relationship with our Creator, but we will also cultivate stronger, more meaningful connections with those around us. So, take a moment each day to reflect, to be grateful, and to engage intentionally in your relationships. You'll be surprised at how much richer and more fulfilling life becomes when you approach it with purpose and sensitivity.

We wish you all of G-d's blessings during this holiday season, next year, and always!

Yonatan Hamburger is a rabbi and writer serving spiritual seekers of all persuasions on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. Tzali Reicher is a rabbi and writer serving communities throughout the regional South. You can reach them at y@tasteof Torah.org.

Cummings...continued from Page 4A

work. Miss Cora smiled, patted Mom's hand and said, "It will be over soon."

When Mom came back to work the next morning a young orderly met her and said, "You should have been here last night." A nurse working the night shift fussed at Mom for not being at work. Mother explained that her schedule had been changed. The nurse looked at her and told her she'd missed two miracles. Miss Cora had died at 4 a.m. The nurse was with her when she passed, and as she was attending to Cora the nurse heard singing. So, she walked into the hall, and there was Mr. Brown walking down the hall singing "Jesus Loves Me." Then the nurse felt a tug of her arm, and there was Mrs. Jones. Her eyes were shining and she asked, "Do you see that?" as she pointed down the hall toward Cora's room. The nurse asked Mrs. Jones what she was seeing. The elderly lady replied, "I can see them as well as I can see you. I can see

Jesus and Cora walking down the hall."

By the time Mom got to Mr. Brown and Mrs. Jones' rooms the miracles had passed. Mr. Brown was once again mute and confined to a wheelchair. Mrs. Jones could no longer see and was bed ridden. However, one nurse and three other staff members all witnessed Mr. Brown singing and walking. They also saw Mrs. Jones walking around looking at things she hadn't seen in years. After these events, when my mother worry about something, she would think about those miracles that occurred in a nursing home in Dunlap, Tennessee.

As we think about all the bad things going on in this world we should remember that God loves all of us. He cares about what we are experiencing. He loves us even though we may be unlovable. Isn't that the reason for this season? So, we should celebrate God's love for us during this time of year.

Ashurst...

continued from Page 4A

feel that they don't deserve to reward themselves for attaining daily goals. Whether it is vacuuming, cleaning the sink, washing clothes, or repairing the lawn mower, all of these deserve patting ourselves on the back. We deserve such accolades in life. We are not self-glorifying but rather solidifying who we are becoming day in and day out.

Don't compromise yourself – you're all you have. (John Grisham)

Williams...

continued from Page 4A

die-back, reduced tree growth, increased stress, and in massive infestations, tree death.

Early intervention is critical when dealing with mistletoe infection. If you simply remove the mistletoe shoot it will mostly likely grow back, so repeated removal would be necessary. Pruning tree branches that are infected is an effective method of removing mistletoe. Remove the branch at least 14 inches below the point of infection. Ethephon is as chemical application that is a plant growth regulator that can be used to control mistletoe. Whenever you apply any chemical, read the label before application.

Control of mistletoe on old and socially significant trees can be important. Having a mistletoe infection does not necessarily mean that death is imminent for a tree, but mistletoe can have an impact on the tree's ability to thrive. If you have any questions about mistletoe contact your local Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Steele...

continued from Page 4A

man presence, it is typically euthanized as a safety measure.

Feeding bears also disrupts the natural balance of the ecosystem. Bears are wild animals that should be foraging for their own food, maintaining their role in the environment. When they rely on human-provided food sources, they often grow unhealthily dependent, leading to negative impacts on their health and survival.

It's time we remind ourselves that bears are not pets, and their natural behaviors must not be disturbed. Everyone can contribute to bear safety by securing trash, avoiding the temptation to feed bears, and encouraging others to do the same. By doing so, we can ensure that both humans and bears coexist safely, and that these majestic animals can thrive in their natural habitats.

Some fun facts about black bears:

The estimated black bear population in central Georgia is around 300 bears. The state of Georgia's overall black bear population is estimated to be around 4,100.

Black bears are the only bear species found in Georgia. They were nearly wiped out in the 1930s due to unregulated hunting, illegal harvest, and large-scale habitat loss.

Black bears are hunted each fall in Georgia; season dates for firearms are Oct. 19, 2024, to Jan. 12, 2025, for Union County.

It's illegal to kill a female bear with cubs or bears under 75 pounds.

Property owners can petition the Georgia Wildlife Commission department to remove a bear that's a clear and immediate threat to their property.

Sincerely,
Robert Steele
Union County Resident

Combs... continued from Page 4A

God had a perfect plan in place when He humbled Himself lowly to be born and laid in a manger surrounded by various animals, shepherds, angels and later wise men, who came seeking the baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes, helpless as a babe but still God full of love and grace. Jesus came into this world born among the poor, not the rich and famous, not of any notability, but a humble servant that one day would save the world from its sin.

Yes, the birth of baby Jesus has stood the test of

time, and down through the ages, millions of people continue to receive Him as their personal Savior who will one day come back from heaven and make everything right, and there will be peace on a new earth and a new heaven.

If you don't know Jesus as your Savior, what a wonderful Christmas gift it would be if you would receive Him into your heart. He's waiting for you to believe upon His Name and become a child of God, your only hope of living in heaven when He returns.

Frank F. Combs