

# REDEEMER

R E P O R T

DECEMBER 2012

## THE NESTORIAN THREAT TO CHRISTMAS

BY KATHY KELLER

*[Author's Note: In 1972, when Tim and I were students at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, he wrote an article entitled "Hermeneutical Nestorianism." Although I haven't seen this article in 40 years (it may still exist at the bottom of a closet), I remember it vividly and have drawn on it for this piece.]*

At Christmas we often sing of "Emmanuel, God with us" in praise of the incarnation of God as the man Jesus. The angel announced this startling news, and throughout the Gospels Jesus confounds, confuses, and infuriates his hearers by claiming, in word and deed, al-lusion and action, to be none other than God himself.

Although fully divine, Jesus was fully human as well. Had he not been, his life and death would have no redemptive

value whatsoever. That God himself passed the death sentence on our sin and disobedience, then came to suffer that sentence himself, after having lived a perfect, sinless life, trading his reward for our punishment is the Gospel in its most concise form. For his sinless life to matter, and be sufficient to earn God's favor, he had to do it as a man, not a divine being for whom nothing was very difficult.

This is not easy to comprehend, and yet it is the heart of the mystery of salvation. It is no wonder that the early Church worked hard to protect this truth from variants that would have tilted the nature of Christ into one of two heresies: Nestorianism (and several other related heresies) taught that Jesus was fully human, and though

certainly specially anointed by God, was not fully God as well. On the other hand Docetism (and several other similar teachings) taught that Jesus was fully God, but only masquerading as human, not really subject to the sorrows, temptations, and trials of human beings.

Docetism seems to have run its course—we don't hear many people today insisting that Jesus was God and only appeared to be human. But the family of Nestorian views is another matter. It is the preferred stance of the modern world—Jesus was a fully human being, and although given special gifts and grace by God, he was still just human, a first century Semitic man of his time, limited and even (some assert) flawed.

While I am accustomed to  
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## IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO DONATE TO HIS TOY STORE!

It's not too late to donate a new toy to HFNY's His Toy Store, our Christmas outreach to families in need. Use our Amazon Wishlist at [hfny.org/wishlist](http://hfny.org/wishlist) and send a toy straight to our office!

We must receive all toys by

Thursday, December 6. After that, we will send the toys to our 10 His Toy Store sites in Brooklyn, Washington Heights, Harlem, South Bronx, Coney Island, and the Lower East Side.

We are expecting to provide toys for 1,500 families (or

4,000 children) in need, some of whom have been affected by Hurricane Sandy. Through His Toy Store, families in need have an opportunity to connect to a local church, where they can find community.

Visit [hfny.org/HTS](http://hfny.org/HTS) to learn more!



# 2012 GOSPEL & CULTURE CONFERENCE: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

BY JOANNA STEPHENS

**W**restling God. The image isn't an easy one to hold in one's mind for long, individually or corporately. As believers, we often tend to shy away from God when he challenges us. Yet on November 2-3, nearly 500 people convened at St. Bart's Cathedral in midtown to dive deep into the implications of that difficult encounter. The Center for Faith & Work's second annual Gospel & Culture Conference entitled "Wrestling God. Work Re-Imagined" began with participants attending various cultural events throughout the city as "GLIMPSES" of God's glory and ended with a commission to participate in making his kingdom a reality here on

Earth, in the face of struggles and brokenness along the way.

My conference experience began with my GLIMPSE—a performance of Puccini's *Turandot* at the Metropolitan Opera Friday night. It's a story of unrequited love, struggle, perseverance, and ultimately victory through sacrifice, all set to music that portrays these themes with incredible emotional

power. Our group came away stunned by the beauty God enabled us to experience through the arts. And yet the conference had just begun, and built intensely on those themes the following day at St. Bart's.

The next day opened in prayer and a half hour corporate devotional, reading and meditating on the scripture of



*CFW 2nd annual Gospel & Culture Conference*

the weekend: Genesis 27-32, recounting Jacob's life of struggle and yearning for blessing. Complemented by high choral music soaring overhead, this was one of the most unique and powerful aspects of the conference; before diving head-first into programming and plenaries, it was amazing to sit still together and witness a whole cathedral full of people quietly

waiting on God, seeking his Spirit's wisdom and blessing for the day.

The morning proceeded with talks from Tim Keller and theologian Vincent Bacote about God's design to bless us in the midst of trials, pointing to Christ's completed work and the Spirit's power. This was interspersed with spotlights on various practitioners from both inside and outside the Redeemer community recounting their own experiences wrestling God in their careers. I was amazed at the breadth of sectors represented and appreciated the candor with which the practitioners spoke of their own faith and work struggles.

There was something incredibly special about hearing and sharing those hardships together in community and discussing the implications on our own lives during the break-out sessions that followed. It was also wonderful to take these struggles and offer them to God in prayer and worship throughout the day.

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## REDEEMER REPORT

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

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Kathy Keller  
Heather Klein

Hunter College Auditorium  
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Services at  
10:30AM & 6PM

W83rd Ministry Center  
150 W. 83rd St.  
(between Columbus & Amsterdam)  
Services at  
9:15AM, 11:15AM, 5PM, 7PM

Metropolitan Pavilion  
125 W. 18th St.  
(between 6th & 7th Aves.)  
Services at  
9:30AM & 5PM

# DIACONATE MERCY FUND SPECIAL OFFERING

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**O**n **Sunday, December 9** at all services on the **East Side** and **Downtown** and **Sunday, December 16** at the **West Side AM** services the Diaconate will receive our annual Special Offering. We rely on your prayer support, and invite you to partner with us by giving to the Mercy Fund. In addition to prayerfully considering contributing to this vital ministry of mercy, please encourage those congregants around you who are in need to contact the Diaconate for help. Our Mercy Fund is available to members and regular attendees of Redeemer.

We on the Diaconate continue to marvel at our Lord's ongoing and unfailing mercy,

which brings healing, provision and spiritual growth. The Mercy Fund enables our deacons and deaconesses to model Jesus' compassion for his sheep and continue to meet the concrete and visible needs of those in our church family.

As we approach this Christmas season, we are thankful that the birth of Jesus gave us hope and promise of relief in the midst of this broken world. God displays his abundant mercy and faithful love to us through his son, Jesus Christ. It is Christ's never-ceasing intercession on our behalf that comforts us, transforms our hearts and strengthens us to face of the hurricanes of life such as physical illness, jobless-

ness, social and spiritual hardships.

"I thank you both for all you have done for me in Jesus name. I have never felt so cared for as I have during this awful time of unemployment and confusion. It has changed my perspective on many things."

- *Diaconate Care Recipient*

And if you are a Redeemer member or regular attendee with a financial or other practical need, please call the Diaconate Helpline, (917) 719-0259. For more information, visit [www.redeemer.com/diaconate](http://www.redeemer.com/diaconate).

Thank you in advance for your partnership.

## HOPE FOR NEW YORK: 2012 IN REVIEW

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**A**s we at Hope for New York reflect on this past year, we are deeply encouraged by how God has used our affiliates to extend Christ's love and bring shalom to New York City.

We partner with 39 organizations that serve the poor and marginalized all over the city—from Bushwick to Chinatown to the South Bronx. These organizations serve populations including at-risk youth, the homeless, vulnerable women, those living with HIV/AIDS, and the elderly.

Our mission is to strengthen the work of these organizations by providing them with vol-

unteer and financial resources. In fiscal year 2012 our volunteers gave over 41,700 hours in service to our affiliates. Due in large part to the generosity of Redeemer congregants, we distributed over \$1.2 million in grants in 2012.

Also because of your generosity, we have been able to mobilize hundreds of volunteers to assist with Hurricane Sandy relief efforts to support our affiliates who are serving those affected by the storm, particularly in lower Manhattan. We have also deployed hundreds of volunteers to devastated parts of Staten Island, the Rockaways, Coney Island and Long Island.

In addition, Hope for New York has pledged to give up to \$100,000 toward Hurricane Sandy Relief efforts. The ramifications of this storm will be massive and long-lasting, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable in our city, and we continue to work with our Hope for New York affiliates, community and church partners towards long-term recovery.

In the coming year, we look forward to reaching new neighborhoods and populations by expanding our affiliate partnerships. We will also continue to deepen our commitment to

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# LAUNCHING THE DOWNTOWN CONGREGATION AND THE HURRICANE

BY JOHN LIN

After two years of planning and praying, the Downtown Congregation launched our first Sunday worship services on October 21st with both morning and evening services! With more than 600 attendees at each service and 70 children in our Children's Ministries, it was an absolute joy to gather for Sunday worship for the first time!

For the many Redeemer members and attenders who live in the area, this marked

an important step towards becoming a Downtown community where people can explore Christianity, work for the flourishing of the city and serve those in need.

Soon after our first worship services, our congregation was quickly challenged by the devastation of Hurricane Sandy. It has been great to see so many members of our congregation immediately working to serve those who were directly affected by the storm.

From opening up our homes to others within our congregation, serving in evacuation centers and shelters, checking in with elderly neighbors, and helping to bring relief in heavily affected areas like Staten Island and the Rockaways, Downtown congregants have jumped in to serve.

I pray that for months and years to come, our congregation will continue to serve those in need in the city and work for its prosperity and peace.

## THE LONG LASTING EFFECTS OF HURRICANE SANDY

BY ABRAHAM CHO

Shortly after Hurricane Sandy stormed through the city, New York Magazine ran a striking cover photo that captured the "tale of two cities" that New Yorkers were experiencing. Lower Manhattan enshrouded in an eerie darkness; Upper Manhattan alive with the energy for which this city is famous. (You can see the photo at <http://nymag.com/news/features/hurricane-sandy-2012-11/>.) At street level, residents of uptown neighborhoods felt grateful—and guilty—for being spared as people suffered immensely, all just a few subway stops away.

On my walk home one night after volunteering at an evacuation center, I began to wonder to myself what it would take for me and my family to find ourselves staying at one of these centers. I was amazed at how

many layers of relationships we would have to go through before we would hit the cement of a cot in a school cafeteria.



*Storm surge reaches Roosevelt Island*

We weren't just well-off materially, we were well-off relationally. But this, apparently, wasn't the case for the people I met that evening.

It was then that I saw how the impact of poverty runs much deeper than lacking material goods. Poverty so often means the lack of access to support, resources and the dignity of belonging. I saw that Sandy didn't create poverty and vulnerability. It actually exposed the hidden vulnerability of the poor that was always there—I just didn't have eyes to see.

But I'm beginning to see. I see that all that we are doing as a church in disaster relief—collecting emergency supplies, sending volunteers to hard-hit areas, distributing relief funds—is important, timely and good. But more importantly, I'm beginning to see that while loving the poor may begin with occasional volunteer responses, it must lead to a lifestyle of continuous love for neighbor.

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# CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SCHEDULE

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*Please make note of the special service details in December.*

## **EAST SIDE CONGREGATION**

### ***Sunday, December 16***

Lessons and Carols at the  
9:45AM, 11:30AM, & 6:00PM services

## **WEST SIDE CONGREGATION**

### ***Sunday, December 9***

Lessons and Carols at the  
9:15AM & 11:15AM services

### ***Sunday, December 16***

Lessons and Carols at the  
5:00PM & 7:00PM services

## **DOWNTOWN CONGREGATION ADVENT OBSERVANCES**

### ***Sunday, December 2***

at the 9:30AM & 5:00PM services  
in the South Pavilion

### ***Sunday, December 9***

at the 9:30AM & 5:00PM services  
in the South Pavilion

### ***Sunday, December 16***

at the 9:30AM & 5:00PM services  
in the South Pavilion

### ***Sunday, December 23***

at the 9:30AM service *only*  
in the South Pavilion  
\*Limited childcare provided

### ***Monday, December 24***

services at 5:00PM & 10:30PM  
in the Carriage House  
\*No childcare provided

# WHAT IF THE CHRIST CHILD WAS BORN INTO YOUR FAMILY?

BY LYN COOK, ES COMMUNITY GROUP DIRECTOR

Scripture reveals how the birth of Christ upended the lives of many. Mary prayed to the Father when told she would be the mother of the Savior, “I am yours body and soul; let it be to me as you have said.” (Luke 1:38). She did not consider her life or her body her own but gave full rights to God. Joseph’s plans were overturned with another angel’s visit, so he reversed his decision to end his engagement to Mary and instead “he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.” (Matthew 1:24). The shepherds heard Christ the Lord was born and “hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby.” (Luke 2:16). They left their responsibilities at work in order to worship. The new baby, God’s son, entered into the lives of Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds and became their priority.

Christ enters into the life of those who place their faith in him for salvation. This faith can and should change the common order of their lives.

At Christmas time we have an opportunity to celebrate what Christ has done for us by ushering in the birth of the Christ child, in some ways like we welcome a newborn into our home. Bringing home a newborn would demand our full attention, time and love. Responding to the grace of Christ in our life should do the same.

What would it look like to welcome the Christ child into your home and life this Christmas? The days and weeks leading up to Christmas can bring simplicity, focused worship, and an overhaul of all priorities around Christ.

Here are some ideas that can get you started:

1. Read the Christmas narrative in Matthew, Mark, and Luke and as you do so meditate on Adoring God for who he shows himself to be; Confessing how you are not what you were created to be; Thanking Jesus for being born as a man and living the life you could not and dying to pay your

penalty; and finally Asking God to practically work his righteousness into your life.

2. Take extra time just to be with Jesus; pray to be warmed with a new affection for him.

3. Give up a few holiday activities to allow room for the simplicity that would be true of life if you had just had a baby.

4. Look around you and notice who needs to know about the coming of Christ. Welcome them into your life this season and give them a glimpse of Jesus.

5. Give the gift of humbling yourself and serving others as Christ humbled himself and served.

May you find this Christmas season to be one where Christ slows you down to worship Him alone. You will find Him to be a “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6)

## HFNY 2012 IN REVIEW... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 3)

our current affiliates, providing volunteer support, direct grants, and capacity-building opportunities to help them do their work more effectively.

This Christmas season, as you remember Jesus, who emptied himself of His riches and came to earth for our sake, we

ask that you respond by remembering the poor among us. Pray for those who are hurting and hopeless this Christmas, that they would receive their hope and comfort from Christ. Pray for our affiliates who are serving these populations, that God would provide for their every

need so they can continue in their good work.

As we at Hope for New York seek to serve the poor and most vulnerable in our city, please consider making a year-end contribution toward our work. You can find ways to give at [hfny.org/donate](http://hfny.org/donate).

hear non-believers talk about how Jesus was a good man and a good teacher, but not God Himself, it comes as more of a shock to find professing Christians leaning towards this view. Nestorianism has snuck in the back door, as a hermeneutical stance towards the Bible. What happened?

According to John's gospel, Jesus Christ is the Incarnate Word (John 1:1-14). In Jesus Christ, God has fully expressed and revealed himself to us. As we have seen, the Word made flesh is both fully human and fully divine. God has also revealed himself through his written Word, in the Bible, and throughout the centuries the Christian church has insisted that the Scriptures were also both human and divine. It is a human document, written by a variety of human authors, and in specific cultural and historical locations, using human language.

This means that in order to understand a biblical text you must understand what the human author meant to say with the particular vocabulary, idioms, reasoning, images and literary devices of the time. And yet the Bible is also fully inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). Behind all the human authors is one divine author, perfectly preparing, inspiring and directing them all to write exactly what he wants them to write. In the Bible we see a document that is fully human *but also no less* fully divine, with one Mind behind every word.

As Jesus was fully human but without sin, the Bible is fully human but without error in all it teaches.

However, a form of Nestorian thinking is now being applied to the Bible—by Christians. The thought is that while the Bible certainly has many great things in it that are inspired by God, it has much that is now outmoded, regressive, or just erroneous, because ultimately it is a human book and God's power has not been able to prevent these mistakes and outmoded teachings.

But what if we asked this question: Could the Omnipotent Creator of the universe sovereignly rule the world through his providence so that the writers of the diverse genres and documents which make up the Scripture would be the perfect vehicles for the transmission of the truths he has chosen to reveal? That's pretty much a "Duh!" Common sense suggests that the God who spun the worlds and who now holds every atom of it together would have no trouble communicating flawlessly with his creatures. And as the Psalms tell us, the words of God are flawless (Psalm 12:6) and perfect (Psalm 19:7 and 119:96).

But most importantly, this high view of Scripture was Jesus' own. He insisted that not a letter or even a part of a letter in the Word of God would be proved false (Matthew 5:17-18) and that no Scripture, even a single word, could be set aside and ignored (John 10:35). At

the end of his life, even in the face of painful death, he insisted that the Scripture had to be followed and fulfilled in everything (Matthew 26:54). He died quoting Psalm 22:1. Something like 10 per cent of all Jesus words in the gospels are references to the Old Testament. That's how important, flawless, and perfect the Scripture was to Jesus.

*And here we see how Jesus-Nestorianism is connected to Bible-Nestorianism.* First, if the Bible is just a collection of ancient texts of varying genres and cultures, then it is not telling the coherent story of redemptive history. The narrative arc of God's work in saving his creatures, beginning before the foundation of the world, continuing through the flawed and sinful people of the Old Testament, and climaxing in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of the God-man Jesus is an imaginative fiction.

More importantly, if you insist that the Bible is more human than divine, because it contains the outmoded and erroneous, then of necessity you have a Jesus who is more human than divine, because he was mistaken in one of the foundational beliefs of his life—the perfection of the Scriptures. A lower view of the Bible leads to a lower view of Jesus.

If we say then he, too, is flawed, and no longer the fully divine God-man who is able to save us from our sin, then there is nothing to celebrate at Christmas.



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## GOSPEL & CULTURE CONFERENCE... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 2)

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Hearing so many inspiring accounts of past wrestling, lessons learned, and continued faith journeys, one final aspect of the conference this particular year was remarkably special. As many know, Redeemer chose to carry on and hold the conference at the scheduled time, five days after Hurricane Sandy. Little known, though, was that CFW Director Katherine Alsdorf's neighbor is New York City's Chief Transportation Officer. Accepting an invitation from Katherine for prayer and support, he spoke to us

about the storm and the immense toll it took on the city, his team, and himself as a leader. It was inspiring to see someone in the very center of the city's current struggles, wrestling with how to lead and rebuild with integrity, strength, and perseverance. As applause erupted into a standing ovation, emotions swelled, and the entire congregation was led in prayer for him and his team. In the midst of a conference on wrestling, it felt like an incredible gift from God to share the city's pain before him and look

in hope to Christ and his compassion to renew it.

All told, the conference was a wonderful experience. There was so much to take away, and I have already begun re-imagining my own work in light of the teachings and inspirations the weekend gave me. I look forward to CFW's offerings this year and encourage you to pray for this ministry as it leads our congregations in looking at what it means to wrestle and ultimately rest in the gospel in our work.

## LASTING EFFECTS OF HURRICANE... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 4)

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Anything less than that simply cannot serve as a proper witness to the God who "though he was rich, yet for our sakes be-

came poor, so that we through his poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9)

*To find regularly updated opportunities to serve go to [www.hfnny.org/hurricane](http://www.hfnny.org/hurricane).*