

FROM THE PULPIT

Put focus on personal, spiritual growth in 2005

By Brad Bryant

FOR THE PANTAGRAPH

Who you are right now is merely a shadow of who God designed you to become.

God created you intentionally, and he proclaimed you "good" (Genesis 1:31). That event started your spiritual journey. As we're born into this physical world, we continue that journey, and begin to be influenced by both "good" and "evil." We choose which side to follow.

Every decision we make comes with consequences — good and bad, for our life, and those around us. These consequences often result in blessings or setbacks. Some decisions have little consequence; others have life-long impact. Most are somewhere in between.

We just celebrated Christmas — remembering the birth of Jesus, and the 33-year life he led, purposefully choosing to live a sin-free life — setting an example of how God wants us to live. Today, we look forward into the unknowns of 2005.

From our perch here on Jan. 1, what will 2005 bring into your life? Certainly it will be a year of new choices and decisions. It will be a year different from any other in your life. Already, several hours of the new 2005 are in the past as you read this article. How have you spent them?

One of the most significant gifts from God is our "agency" ... the freedom to make our own choices throughout life, and be responsible for

the results.

As you consider 2005, think about past choices you have made. Decide today which ones may need to be changed. I don't promote New Year's resolutions, forgotten a week later, but the new year does remind us that we can make new decisions and improve the direction of our life — any time of the year. Everyone's life can be improved, and often that improvement is only waiting for us to make some different decisions.

In the Bible, John the Baptist's purpose was to prepare people for Jesus' coming ministry. John began that preparation work (Luke 3), inviting people to repent (be sorry, undo damage, and work to avoid repeating mistakes) and be baptized for forgiveness of sin.

John said to them "no excuses!" (Luke 3:8b) Accountability is not about what church you belong to, or what family you come from, or how much you know!

Once the crowd realized that their history could not save them, they asked John, "What shall we do?" (Luke 3:10)

In Luke 3:11-14, John replied to several people, giving them (and us) ideas about how we can choose to make better decisions:

- ▶ Share the blessings you have with others.
 - ▶ Do not take other people's property for yourself.
 - ▶ Be honest and truthful with everyone.
 - ▶ Be satisfied with your pay.
- Though we only have part of John's message in Luke, it's a

good foundation for us, and for Jesus' teaching about the two most important commandments:

▶ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all our soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37-38)

▶ "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39)

Can you apply any of these guidelines? Here are a few thoughts that might help you grow into the person that God designed you to be in 2005:

▶ Are there things in your life that need eliminating? Habits? Debt? Bad decisions?

▶ Can you increase your service for good, bring happiness to lives around you, and improve your understanding of God's ways?

▶ Do you have "broken relationships" with others that need mending?


▶ God has a plan to bless your life — let him lead!

Jesus invites you into relationship with him. The purpose of Christ-centered churches is to give you other believers in your life, who help you make better decisions and encourage you along the path toward him. If you have a church family, allow them to support your journey. If you've been trying to go it alone, seek out and find a church family, centered in Jesus Christ, who can provide the loving, healing support you need to help you make decisions in your life.


Brad Bryant is a missionary serving the 30 Community of Christ congregations in the Central and Southern Illinois area. Contact him at brad.bryant@hp.com.

PHOTO REPRINTS AVAILABLE

FOR DETAILS CALL 829-9000 OR 800-747-7323, EXT. 249

 **UNITY CHURCH**
Worship and Sunday
School at 10:30 a.m.

THE MENNONITE CHURCH
805 S. Cottage **OF NORMAL** 452-6622
9:30 A.M.Worship
"Coming In and Going Out--Our
Lives as Gentiles"

 **Holy Apostles
Orthodox Church**
1670 W. Hovey Ave. Normal
268-9200
Sunday: Divine Liturgy 9:30 am