

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Thursday, December 25

No School  
9:00am: St. John's Lutheran Worship  
**Birthdays:** Angela Carlson • Scott Fordham:  
Christmas Day

## Friday, December 26

No School  
**Senior Menu:** Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, coleslaw, frosted brownie.  
**Birthday:** Ben Peterson

## Saturday, December 27

GBB at Parkston Classic  
**Birthdays:** Rayne Baker • Raymond Alberts  
1:00pm: James lowery birthday  
4:30pm: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church  
Mass

## Sunday, December 28

**Birthdays:** Tracey Heidrich • Sharon Tullis  
9:00am: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church  
Mass  
9:00am: St. John's Lutheran Worship  
10:00am: Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Pierpont  
(LCMC) worship  
10:15am: Emmanuel Lutheran Worship  
11:00am: United Methodist Church Worship  
7:00pm: Emmanuel Lutheran Choir

## Monday, December 29

No School  
**Senior Menu:** Swiss steak with mushroom gravy, mashed potatoes, mixed vegetables, rice and raisins, whole wheat bread.  
**Birthdays:** Adam Herman, Barbara Stauch • Connie Stauch • Nicole Osterman • Delbert Hinkelman

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apartments) at 407 N Garfield**

**FOR RENT**

**Attached garage.**

**Major appliances included.**

**\$700 per month**

**Roger: 605/397-7118**

## The cardboard/paper

recycling trailer at the school is **OPEN**

## **OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton**

The recycling trailer is back at 10 East Railroad Ave. Don't forget, there is also a dumpster at the city shop for aluminum cans with the proceeds going to the pool.

## Holiday Plants for Holiday Spirit

Column by David Graper, SDSU Extension Horticulture Specialist & SDSU Extension Interim Coordinator of the South Dakota Master Gardeners Program

Winter can be a rather dark and dreary time of the year, with the shortest days, long cold nights and lots of cloudy weather. Thankfully, the holidays help to brighten things up with colorful lights, displays and beautiful plants too.

There are quite a few holiday plants that one might find for sale at this time of the year. If you give them proper care, you can enjoy them through the holidays and even for months and years to come.

Just about everyone is familiar with the traditional poinsettia with its bright red colored bracts, actually modified leaves, which are their main attraction. But, did you know that they come in lots of different colors? White and pink cultivars have been around for quite a while but now there are some with bracts in pink, red, yellow or mauve and these can have blotches, spots or speckles in some of the other colors. They are even dyeing and spray-painting poinsettias with even glitter sprayed on to make them just about any color under the unnatural rainbow.

### Care of poinsettia

Proper care of a poinsettia starts at the nursery, garden center or flower shop, wherever you purchase your plant. It is important to remember that these plants were once native to semi-tropical areas and do not like the cold weather of the Dakotas and Minnesota. Make sure the store wraps up your plant before bringing it outside in the cold or to be placed into a cold car.

Be aware that sometimes the big box stores do not have large enough bags to properly cover a poinsettia plant to protect it from the cold. You may consider purchasing it someplace else that really knows plants or bring along a lightweight garbage bag to carry it in. Be careful though, the branches are pretty brittle and can easily break off the main stem. Be careful unwrapping the plant too!

Once you get it home and unwrapped, find a good place to display the plant.

If the plant can get good light exposure it will last longer and probably look better too. This is especially important if you want to keep your plant in bloom for more than a couple of weeks.

Poinsettias do not need full sun but bright indirect light will be the best. Avoid a drafty location that either gets cold drafts from doors or leaky windows or warm, dry drafts from heating ducts, which will

## Help Wanted

**Wheatcrest Hills - New Wage Scale - is hiring for PT and FT CNA positions. We are looking for caring compassionate individuals to join our team. CNA certification training class to start in December and January, benefit packages available. Please stop in for application or contact Kristin at 605/448-2251. (1209.1216)**

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## Classifieds

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## Apartments For Rent

ONE AND TWO bedroom apartment for rent. HDS subsidized. Rent includes utilities and heat. No smoking. Pets okay. Contact Darlene Daly at 605/397-8131.

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cause the plant to dry out too quickly and could encourage pests like spider mites.

If the plant is in a fancy container or pot cover, make sure that there are holes in it to allow for excess water to drain out after watering. If there are not any holes in the container, then just dump the excess water out after watering by tipping the plant over the sink on its side, allowing the excess to pour out. If a plant sits in water it can cause root rot which will make the plant wilt.

That may make you think the plant needs water so you end up making the problem worse. Stick your finger into the potting media to see if it feels moist. If it does, then don't water yet. Wait another day or two and check again. When it feels dry, water thoroughly to saturate the potting media, then let the excess drain out.

If the plant is sitting in a saucer, empty the saucer when it is done draining out. You probably don't have to worry about fertilizing your plant if you are only going to keep it for a few weeks. But if you want to try to keep your plant looking good and growing, you should use a half-strength houseplant fertilizer about once every two to three weeks.

## Leaf loss

One of the most common problems we see with poinsettias is that they will lose their leaves. You will usually see this when you come back from being at grandma's house for a few days. If poinsettias, and a lot of other plants, dry out too much between watering, the most common response is to drop their oldest leaves.

If the plants didn't get too dried out, they will recover but probably be rather ugly. People often keep their poinsettias growing for months, maybe thinking they can get them to rebloom. But it is not an easy task - making sure the plant will get six to eight weeks of a short day photoperiod treatment next fall.

We recommend that people enjoy these colorful plants for a month or so for the holidays then recycle it in their compost pile.

## Christmas cacti

Holiday or Christmas cacti (*Schlumbergera*) have been another traditional plant for the holidays. These "jungle cacti" are another group of plants that naturally bloom during the shorter days of winter. They typically have bright pink, red or white flowers but one can also find them in golden-orange.

Holiday cacti can be found for sale in 3-inch or 8-inch pots. Unlike the poinsettia, these interesting plants do not have leaves, rather they have specialized, flattened stem segments called cladodes. The cladodes are green and act like leaves in that they perform photosynthesis.

Areoles are found at the end of each cladode that may produce one or more cladodes or flower buds. *Schlumbergera* are native to warm, humid climates and are usually epiphytic meaning that they grow in crevices in rocks, or in the crotches of trees. They can grow to be quite large plants in their natural habitat and at home too. I have seen a number of old plants in large pots that were over 3-feet in diameter and with a height of about 2-feet.

Holiday cacti should be grown in a bright location. During the late fall and winter they can be placed in full sun but they should be in a more shaded location during the rest of the year.

If they are exposed to the natural day length they should come into bloom about the middle of November to the middle of December, depending on the type that you have. The Holiday cactus with the more sharply pointed cladodes flowers earlier and is the most commonly sold in stores.

The Christmas cactus has more rounded cladodes and it usually flowers later, in December. *Schlumbergera* need more water than the typical desert cactus. Allow the potting media to dry somewhat before thoroughly saturating it. Be careful not to let plants sit in water or the roots will rot, just as they would in a poinsettia. Use a houseplant fertilizer at full strength about once a month during the spring

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to fall when the plants are actively growing.

All of these plants are easy to root from stem cuttings stuck in potting media in the spring, so it is fun to share.

## **Amaryllis**

Amaryllis is another popular holiday plant, available in stores everywhere at this time of the year. Their large, colorful flowers are borne on thick stems that may grow over 2-feet tall, each usually bearing four flowers.

Amaryllis bulbs should grow larger each year and will eventually produce daughter bulbs so that in a few years what started as a single bulb in a pot that produced a single stem of four flowers could produce several flower stalks and produce a dozen flowers or more.

It's not too late to plant amaryllis bulbs or give them as gifts but they will probably not bloom in time for Christmas.

## **Norfolk Island Pines**

Norfolk Island Pines (*Araucaria*) are commonly available at this time of the year too. These small evergreen trees are sold when they are small, often as several little trees growing in a 6-inch or larger pot.

When they get a bit larger you could even decorate them like a little Christmas tree, using small ornaments or lights until the branches get strong enough to hold heavier items. They should be kept in a full sun or at least a bright location and thoroughly watered when the potting medium feels dry. However, do not let the potting medium dry out too much or you will likely see the lowest branches turn yellow and drop. Norfolk Island pines can live for many years, putting out new growth as whorls of new branches at the top of each main stem.

Eventually they can grow too large for your home. They are not hardy here but if you lived down south in Florida or the gulf coast you might have one of these trees in your landscape. They can grow well over 100-feet tall in a good location.

## **Moth orchids**

Moth orchids (*Phalaenopsis*) are growing in popularity as a houseplant in general but are now being seen as a holiday plant too. They are grown by the millions and most are now very inexpensive. Moth orchids are one of the easiest orchids to grow, really breaking the old idea that all orchids are difficult to grow and get to rebloom.

In fact, it is not difficult to see one of these plants in bloom four to six months of the year! They are making appearances all over on television too, just check out the sets of some of the daytime dramas and popular talk shows like "Ellen". There are several large moth orchids in the background.

Moth orchids come in a variety of flower colors ranging from pure white to pink, burgundy or even yellow, and they may have delicate striping or spots as well. You might even see some that are bright blue, but don't be fooled, those have been dyed. Flower size ranges from about 3-inches or more for the standards down to about an inch in the miniatures.

One of the great aspects of a moth orchid is that they are easy to rebloom.

When you look to purchase a plant, check the flower stalk to make sure that there is a small green bud at the very tip of the flower stalk. Once the flowers on the main stem wilt and die, that bud will soon grow out to produce another set of flowers. If there is still a green bud at the tip, this can happen again.

Eventually that bud at the tip will produce a flower or turn yellow and die, along with the upper part of the stem. Cut off the yellow/brown part of the stem just above a small, triangular leaf along the flower

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stem. That is yet another bud that can also grow out to produce another flower stalk that in turn can grow out a second or third time. By then, a healthy plant might have sent up an entirely new flower spike so you can see how you can have flowers for several months of the year with an individual flower lasting 2-3 weeks on the plant.

Moth orchids like to grow at typical room temperature and receive bright indirect light. Full sun during the winter through a sheer curtain would be fine but additional shade from direct sun will be needed during the spring and summer. An east window would work well or they can even be grown under artificial lights.

These orchids are epiphytic so are usually grown in a potting media that is mostly comprised of bark, coarse chunks of perlite and maybe charcoal. The roots are fairly coarse and covered with a whitish material that allows them to adhere to rocks, wood and other materials and also absorb moisture. However, like most other plants, allowing plants to sit in water or overwatering is the most common cause for failure.

Plants should be grown in pots with drainage holes. If those pots are in a decorative container, either take them out of the container or be sure to dump out excess water in the container after watering. I have my orchids sitting on a plastic tray filled with pea gravel. When I water my plants the excess runs out of the pot and goes into the pebbles. It then slowly evaporates to create a more humid microclimate for the orchids which is beneficial to most orchids.

Additional water can be added as needed to keep the gravel moist. Just do not let the bottom of the pots sit in water. This again can lead to root loss, wilting of plants and yellowing of lower leaves. Use a half-strength houseplant fertilizer about once a month.

For additional information on orchids, other holiday plants and winter care of house plants, visit [www.iGrow.org](http://www.iGrow.org).



## Today in Weather History

1966 - A white Christmas was enjoyed by residents from North Carolina to New England in the wake of a major snowstorm. Even coastal Virginia was white. (David Ludlum)

1980 - It was the coldest Christmas Day of modern record in the northeastern U.S. Temperatures as cold as 36 degrees below zero were reported in New York State, and as the sharp cold front swept southeastward the temperature at Boston MA plunged from 34 degrees to seven degrees below zero during the day. (David Ludlum)

1983 - It was the coldest Christmas Day of modern record for the central and eastern U.S. More than 125 cities reported record low temperatures for the date, and thirty-four of those cities reported all-time records for the month of December. The temperature plunged to one degree below zero at Huntsville AL, and dipped to 14 degrees at Galveston TX. Snow covered the ground from the Pacific Northwest through much of the Great Plains Region to the Northern Appalachians. (The National Weather Summary)

1987 - Residents of Tucson, AZ, awoke to a white Christmas for the first time in forty-seven years of records, as a winter storm blanketed the area with up to four inches of snow. While heavy rain inundated Arkansas, freezing rain was reported from northwest Texas to southwestern Missouri, with an inch of ice reported at Harrison AR. Unseasonably mild weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S. Seven cities reported record high temperatures for the date. For the second day in a row McAllen TX was the hot spot in the nation with an afternoon high of 91 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A massive winter storm made for a very white Christmas in the western U.S. Las Vegas, NV, reported snow on the ground for the first time of record. Periods of snow over a five day period left several feet of new snow on the ground of ski areas in Colorado, with 68 inches reported at Wolf Creek Pass. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - It was a record cold Christmas Day for parts of the southeastern U.S. Morning lows of zero degrees at Wilmington, NC, and five degrees below zero at Jacksonville NC established all-time records for those two locations. Miami Beach FL equalled a December record established the previous morning with a low of 33 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003 - Heavy rains affected areas of southern California that were just recently ravaged by wildfires in October. The downpour produced flash flooding that resulted in mudslides, taking the lives of 15 people at area campgrounds in

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San Bernardino (AFP).








2004 - Snow fell on Christmas Day in Deep South Texas. Snow totaled 4.4 inches in Corpus Christi, making it the second White Christmas ever. Farther north, Victoria had their first white Christmas on record when 12.5 inches of snow fell.

2006 - Severe thunderstorms produced four tornadoes in Florida. Columbia, Pasco, Lake and Volusia counties were hardest-hit, including the Daytona Beach area. A tornado generated considerable damage on the campus of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, delaying the start of the spring semester (Orlando Business Journal).

2010 - Up to 32 inches of snow and blizzard conditions affected parts of the eastern U.S. on December 25th-27th. A state of emergency was declared in North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Maine. In New York City, up to 24.5 inches of snow fell, effectively shutting down rail lines, major airports, and bus services. Thousands of flights were cancelled and stranded subway riders were forced to spend a night in unheated train cars. One person was reported killed in Maine due to the weather conditions. (NCDC)

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| CHRISTMAS DAY   | TONIGHT   | FRIDAY  | FRIDAY NIGHT  | SATURDAY   | SATURDAY NIGHT  | SUNDAY  |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 40%   | 50%   |   |   |  |   |   |
| Chance Snow<br>High: 30 °F  | Chance Snow<br>Low: 20 °F   | Mostly Cloudy<br>High: 22 °F ↓  | Partly Cloudy<br>Low: 2 °F  | Mostly Sunny<br>High: 20 °F  | Mostly Cloudy<br>Low: 11 °F   | Mostly Cloudy<br>High: 18 °F  |

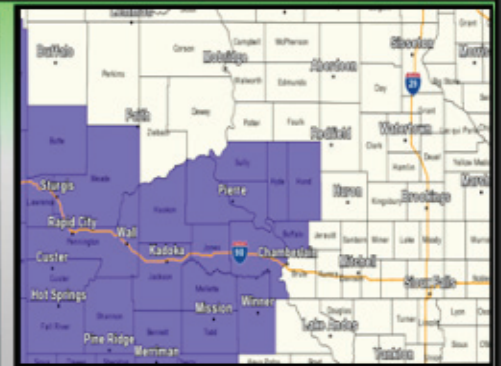
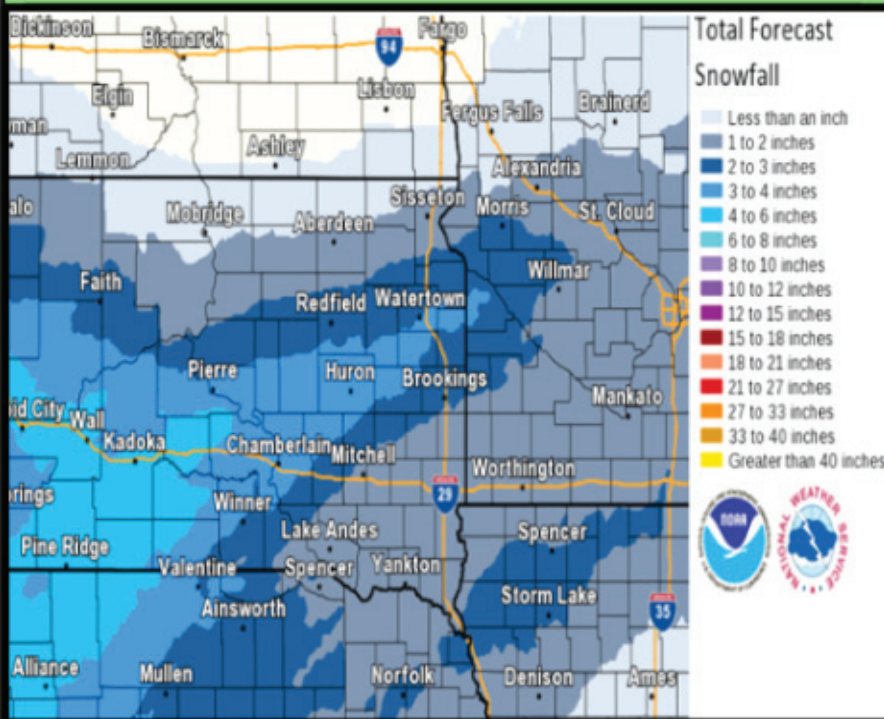


## Expect Light Snow Today - Tonight



### Expected Snowfall Through Friday Afternoon

### Christmas Day



- *Expect Light Snow Today through Tonight*
- *On Social Media, you can follow the [#holidaytravel](#) hashtag for information concerning this winter storm.*

**National Weather Service – Aberdeen, SD**



[weather.gov/Aberdeen](http://weather.gov/Aberdeen)



National Weather Service Aberdeen



@NWSAberdeen

Updated: 12/25/2014 5:38 AM Central

An area of low pressure will move across the central plains today through tonight. This system will bring light snow to most of South Dakota. Western and south central South Dakota will have the best potential of seeing 2 to 4 inches of snow by Friday morning. Snow will diminish from the northwest to the southeast during the day on Friday.



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## Yesterday's Weather

**High:** 27.6 at Midnight

**Low:** 24.3 at 8:20 AM

**Wind Chill:**

**High Gust:** 28 at 12:00 PM

Precip: 0.00

## Today's Info

**Record High:** 51° in 1999

**Record Low:** -25° in 1996

**Average High:** 23°F

**Average Low:** 3°F

**Average Precip in Dec.:** 0.39

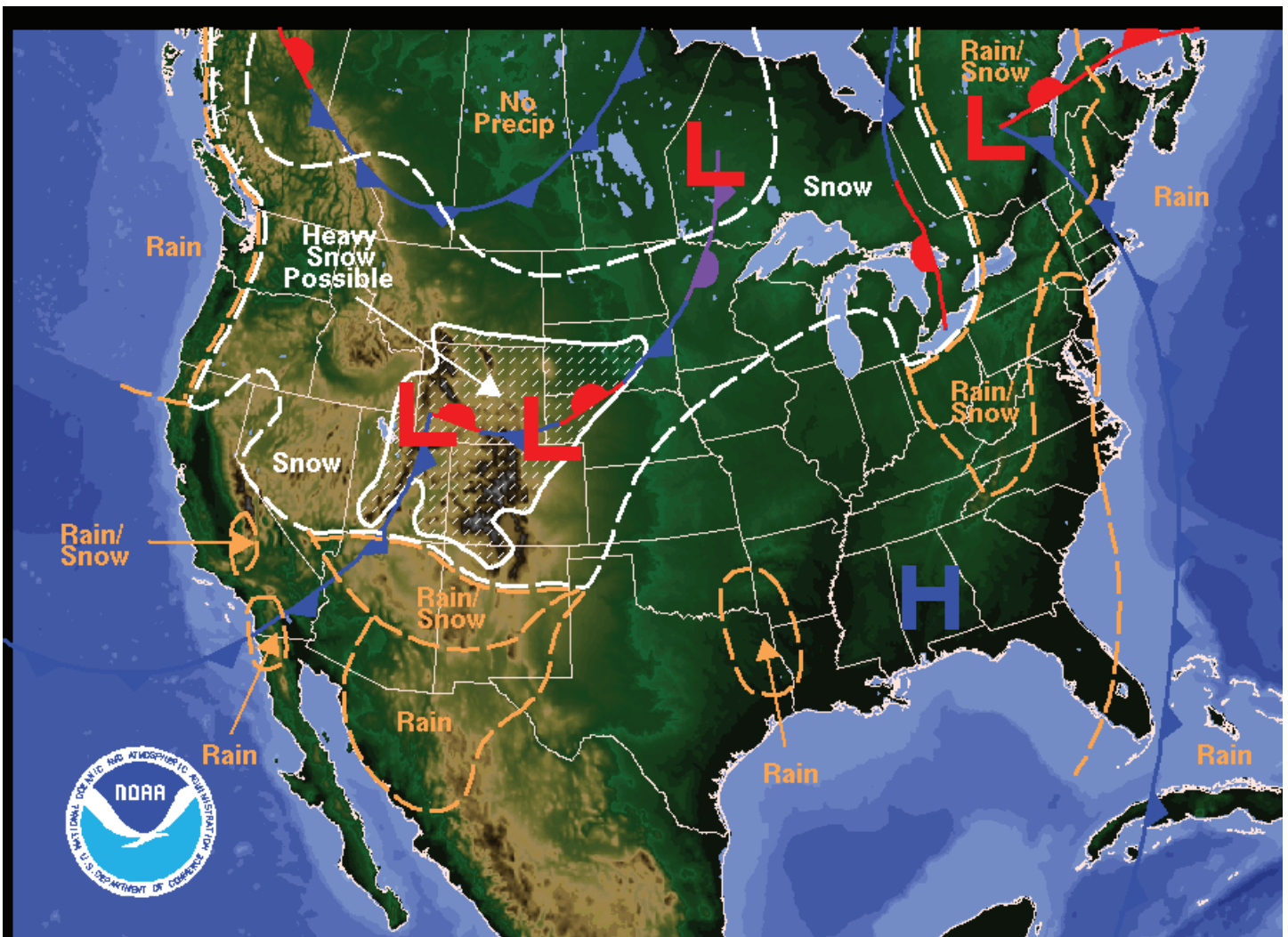
**Precip to date in Dec.:** 0.00

**Average Precip to date:** 21.59

**Precip Year to Date:** 13.99

**Sunset Tonight:** 4:56 p.m.

**Sunrise Tomorrow:** 8:13 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Thu, Dec 25, 2014, issued 2:34 AM EST  
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center  
Prepared by McReynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts



## THE BIRTH OF JESUS

And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.

Luke 2:6-16: 2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while[a] Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

## News from the **AP** Associated Press

### Fire Marshal: Watch out for cooking fires

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The state Fire Marshal's Office is reminding South Dakotans to be wary of cooking fires as they whip up holiday meals.

The safety office says cooking accidents are the most frequent causes of home fires. Keeping sleeves under control and monitoring simmering food can go a long way toward preventing fires. Officials also warn residents to watch out for pooling grease, and to always keep a fire extinguisher handy.

In addition to cooking fires, holiday traditions can make homes likelier to spark up. Authorities say South Dakotans should remember to water Christmas trees and unplug holiday lights. All houses should be equipped with working smoke detectors.

### Flu season's 1st death reported in Hutchinson Co.

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials say the first death related to the flu in the state has been reported.

State epidemiologist Lon Kightlinger says the patient was a Hutchinson County resident in the 80-89 age group.

Kightlinger says the state has seen 144 lab-confirmed flu cases during the 2014-2015 season. Forty-eight people have been hospitalized.

State health officials reported this week that South Dakota's flu activity level has increased from "regional" to "widespread," the highest level of flu activity. Widespread activity indicates increased flu-like activity or flu outbreaks in at least half of the regions in the state.

Health officials are urging residents to get the flu vaccine.

Common signs of the virus include abrupt onset of fever, muscle aches, sore throat and cough.

### Thune: No airspace plan would be 'terrible loss'

**JAMES NORD, Associated  
Press**

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — It would be a "terrible loss" to the U.S. Air Force if it doesn't move forward with a proposal to establish an enormous bomber training area over the Northern Plains, South Dakota U.S. Sen John Thune says.

The Republican senator pushed

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back Tuesday against criticisms from Montana Gov. Steve Bullock, who is calling on federal officials to stop or make changes to the proposed expansion of the Powder River Training Complex over the Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming. An Air Force decision could come by the end of the month, and then it would go before federal aviation regulators for authorization.

The proposed expansion would quadruple the training airspace, making it the largest over the continental United States. It would be used by B-1 bombers at Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota and B-52 bombers at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota.

"It's enormously significant on a national security standpoint, and it'd be really tragic if it didn't move forward," Thune said.

Thune has said the expansion would also provide an additional layer of protection against Base Realignment and Closure for Ellsworth, which is a significant economic driver for the Rapid City area.

Bullock said in a letter dated Monday to Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx that the proposal should be dropped. And if it moves forward, the Democratic governor asked for changes, including more measures to protect civilian aircraft from harm.

Montana elected leaders and state aviation officials have said the bombers would disrupt rural communities and scare livestock as they roar overhead on maneuvers, dropping flares and chaff.

"There is no doubt that Montanans support our nation's efforts to enhance national security," Bullock wrote. "The (Powder River Training Complex) expansion proposal, however, would be at the expense of the livelihoods and economic prosperity of many Montanans."

Under the Air Force plan, any given location across the training area could see up to nine low-altitude overflights annually. Supersonic flights would be limited to 10 days a year during large-scale exercises involving roughly 20 aircraft.

As many as 78 civilian flights a day could be impacted when the large-scale exercises are conducted, the Air Force said.

The Air Force acknowledged in a study released Nov. 28 that the low-altitude flights and loud sonic booms have the potential to startle ranchers, recreationists and those living on four reservations in the region.

But Thune said the concerns that Montana officials raised have been addressed.

"At this point, the process is awfully late now to start trying to raise additional issues," said Thune, who started working on the project in 2006. "The wheel's been in motion for a long time."

### Court reverses protection order against man

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A man barred from his sister's property by a protection order issued when he wasn't present in court was successful in arguing to the South Dakota Supreme Court that his lawyer should have been able to represent him the proceedings.

The high court on Tuesday reversed a lower court's decision to grant Cynthia Arch's five-year protection order against her brother, Myril Arch. Cynthia Arch says her brother threatened her and kicked up gravel around her house with his truck. A circuit court granted Cynthia Arch's request for a protection order because her brother didn't attend court.

The Supreme Court says the lower court was wrong to issue a default judgment because Cyril Arch's attorney was present. The justices called for another hearing on the order.



## AP News in Brief

### **Sony's on-demand release of 'The Interview' will serve as a test for movie industry**

ATLANTA (AP) — Sony's "The Interview" has been a hacking target, a punchline and a political lightning rod. Now, with its release online at the same time it debuts in theaters, it has a new role: a test for a new kind of movie release.

"The Interview" stars Seth Rogen and James Franco as journalists tasked by the CIA with killing North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Its Christmas Day release was canceled by Sony after threats of violence by hackers linked to North Korea. But after an outcry, the release was reinstated in some independent theaters and now, through a few online video services.

Although the circumstances surrounding "The Interview" are unprecedented, experts say the release will be closely watched to see how moviegoers and theater chains react to a simultaneous debut. It's a challenge to the longstanding practice of "windowing" — opening a movie first in theaters to maximize box-office revenue before making the movie available in other stages of home video, streaming and television.

"I can't say that this is the future," said Jeff Bock, senior box office analyst for Exhibitor Relations Co. "For this film, in particular, it works because of the saga that goes along with it. But it's nice to have a film we can actually use as a guinea pig for a video-on-demand release."

Sony released "The Interview" Wednesday on a variety of digital platforms — Google Play, YouTube Movies, Microsoft's Xbox Video and a separate Sony website. It costs \$5.99 to rent for 48 hours and \$14.99 to purchase. It also will open in more than 300 smaller theaters on Thursday, though major chains are still holding out.

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### **Protesters rally for 2nd night in Missouri after officer fatally shoots armed 18-year-old**

BERKELEY, Mo. (AP) — Demonstrators took to the streets for a second night after a white police officer in Berkeley, Missouri, killed a black 18-year-old who police said pointed a gun at him.

Dozens of protesters held a vigil late Wednesday at the gas station in the St. Louis suburb where Antonio Martin was shot, and they briefly blocked traffic on Interstate 170 during a march before returning to the station. Berkeley Police Chief Frank McCall told KMOV-TV that six to eight people were arrested.

Later, about 75 people staged a peaceful protest early Christmas morning outside of a nearby church, according to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Police in riot gear were present.

The actions were calmer than a night before, when a crowd of about 300 people gathered at the gas station, throwing rocks and bricks in a scene reminiscent of the sometimes-violent protests that followed the death of 18-year-old Michael Brown in nearby Ferguson.

Unlike in the death of Brown, who was unarmed and whose shooting was not captured on video, Berkeley Mayor Theodore Hoskins said Wednesday that surveillance footage appeared to show Martin pulling a gun on the unidentified 34-year-old officer who questioned him and another man about a theft at a convenience store.

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## **Afghanistan banks on local forces, thaw with Pakistan as foreign troops leave amid bloody 2014**

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — When Graeme Smith arrived in Afghanistan in 2005, he drove across the country from Kabul south to the Taliban's former capital Kandahar on a newly paved road that cut traveling time from a bone-rattling 14 hours to just six.

Today, 13 years after the U.S.-led invasion toppled the Taliban's brutal regime, and after billions of aid dollars flowed into one of the world's poorest countries, making that same 460-kilometer (300-mile) trip would be like signing his own death warrant, said Smith, Afghanistan analyst with the International Crisis Group, an independent conflict resolution organization.

"That journey is back up to being a treacherous 11-hour slog because of all the explosions that have damaged the route and because you're frequently stopped at Afghan security forces checkpoints and Taliban checkpoints. So it is completely suicidal for a foreigner like me to drive on that road now and will probably remain so for a long time as the insurgency rises," he said.

With U.S.-led forces shifting to a supporting role at the end of this month, Afghanistan will have to chart its own course after the country's bloodiest year since the 2001 invasion, a year which saw record casualties among Afghan civilians and security forces alike.

There is cause for measured optimism — a new president has vowed to overhaul the government, root out corruption and mend ties with neighboring Pakistan, where the Taliban is long believed to have enjoyed safe haven. But President Ashraf Ghani faces a monumental challenge in trying to reform the notoriously corrupt government and security forces, and the Taliban have vowed to keep fighting until the last foreign soldier departs.

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## **CDC says laboratory technician in Atlanta may have accidentally been exposed to Ebola virus**

ATLANTA (AP) — A laboratory technician at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was being monitored Wednesday for possible accidental exposure to the Ebola virus that came during an experiment, officials said.

The person working in a secure laboratory in Atlanta may have come into contact with a small amount of a live virus, CDC spokeswoman Barbara Reynolds said in an emailed statement. The experimental material was on a sealed plate, but wasn't supposed to be moved into the lab in which the technician was working, Reynolds said. The worker will be monitored for 21 days and the person's name hasn't been released.

Additional employees have been notified, but none has required monitoring, Reynolds said. Other staff will be assessed for exposure.

There is no risk to the public and lab scientists notified CDC officials of what happened on Tuesday, Reynolds said. The lab has been decontaminated twice, and the material in question was destroyed before CDC officials became aware of the mistake.

The possible exposure is under internal investigation and has been reported to Secretary of Health and Human Services Sylvia Burwell, Reynolds said.

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## **Obama personal chef, nutrition policy adviser, friend hangs up White House apron after 6 years**

WASHINGTON (AP) — For six years, Sam Kass cooked up policy as well as meals for President Barack Obama and his family. He was not only their personal chef but also senior adviser for nutrition policy, giving him a seat at the table where administration officials hashed out everything from updated food labels to new requirements for healthier school lunches.

Kass, a newlywed, is leaving the White House at the end of the month, but don't ask him what the Obamas like or don't like to eat. "Top secret," he said.

"I love this family and believe in everything the president and first lady are doing and this has been the greatest job of my life and I assume will be the greatest job of my life," the 34-year-old said in an interview. "But I'm going to be with my wife. Once you're married you kind of need to be together."

Kass' wife, MSNBC host Alex Wagner, is based in New York City.

Kass' relationship with the Obamas started when they hired him to cook healthier meals for the family in Chicago before the 2008 elections. Michelle Obama was a vice president at the University of Chicago Medical Center and caring for young daughters, while Obama was a U.S. senator spending most of his time in Washington.

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## **Dreaming of a white Christmas? Go West; other states to get gusty winds**

NEW YORK (AP) — If it's a white Christmas you're after, you'd better follow this familiar advice: Go West.

Snow will be falling in the western U.S. on Thursday, with anywhere from 2 to 6 inches in the valleys up to a foot in higher elevations in northern California, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming and Montana, according to the National Weather Service.

The Dakotas and Minnesota already have accumulations of several inches from Wednesday's storm.

Weather service spokesman Patrick Burke said gusty winds are expected in states such as Indiana, Michigan, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania — but not the snowy weather for which some holiday-minded people are longing.

"The place where it's tranquil is Texas and the Gulf Coast," he said.

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## **Cuba's relations with Catholic Church hit a high point after decades of hostility**

HAVANA (AP) — Golden rays of tropical sunlight slant through the caved-in roof of Saint Thomas de Villanueva chapel, illuminating tiles graced by the faces of saints. Vandals shattered the stained-glass windows and scrawled their names on the thick walls during decades of frigid relations between the Roman Catholic Church and Cuba's communist government.

But a new chain-link fence surrounds the building, protecting it for a future that once seemed unimaginable.

The church is planning to restore the building to its former glory, along with more a dozen more churches, parish houses and other buildings, as part of a quiet reconciliation between the Catholic Church and the Cuban government that has brought relations to a historic high point this Christmas. Authorities have also given permission for the construction of the first two new churches in more than

five decades.

After years of bridge-building behind closed doors, the Cuba-Vatican rapprochement burst into the headlines last week when the U.S. government credited Pope Francis with helping facilitate the secret reconciliation talks between the U.S. and Cuba. Francis wrote the leaders of both countries to invite them to resolve their differences.

"We ask the Lord to continue moving forward this process of reconciliation and peace that Pope Francis has favored and supported," Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega said in his homily at a Christmas Eve Mass in Havana's colonial cathedral.

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## Christians in China celebrate Christmas under a watchful eye

BEIJING (AP) — Two days before Christmas, members of a rural Christian congregation in eastern China welded pieces of metal into a cross and hoisted it onto the top of a worship hall to replace one that was forcibly removed in October.

Within an hour, township officials and uniformed men barged onto the church ground and tore down the cross.

"They keep a very close watch on us, and there is nothing we can do," a church official told The Associated Press on Tuesday on condition of anonymity because of fear of government retaliation. "The situation is not good, as any attempt to re-erect the cross will be stopped."

That means that the worshippers in Wenzhou city, like many Christians in the eastern province of Zhejiang, will worship this Christmas under a roof without a cross. Provincial authorities have toppled crosses from more than 400 churches, and even razed some worship halls in a province-wide crack-down on building code violations.

Many Christians say their faith has been singled out because authorities, wary of its rapid growth, are seeking to curb its spread in a campaign that has targeted China's most thriving Christian communities.

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## With help from Rudolph's nose, NORAD 'tracks' Santa's fabled flight across globe

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — Volunteers at the North American Aerospace Defense Command are pretending to monitor Santa Claus as he makes his storybook Christmas Eve flight. So far, NORAD says it used the heat signature from Rudolph's nose to "track" St. Nick over spots ranging from Australia to South America and on to the United States.

Technology and social media have become an important part of the U.S. and Canadian military tradition, and NORAD Tracks Santa has already attracted around 1.6 million Facebook "likes."

The volunteers on Wednesday were answering phone calls and emails from children and posting updates on the mythical journey to Facebook, Twitter and [www.NORADSanta.org](http://www.NORADSanta.org).

The 59-year-old program now has a control center at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, and it generates enough statistics, anecdotes and stories to fill a sleigh:

— HOW IT WORKS: Kids can call 877-HI-NORAD or email [noradtrackssanta\(at\)outlook.com](mailto:noradtrackssanta(at)outlook.com) on Christmas Eve. A volunteer checks a big-screen computer monitor and passes along Santa's location. Updates are posted at [noradsanta.org](http://noradsanta.org), [facebook.com/noradsanta](https://facebook.com/noradsanta) and [twitter.com/NoradSanta](https://twitter.com/NoradSanta). The volunteers will keep answering questions through 3 a.m. MST on Christmas Day.