

--- River's Edge Echo ---

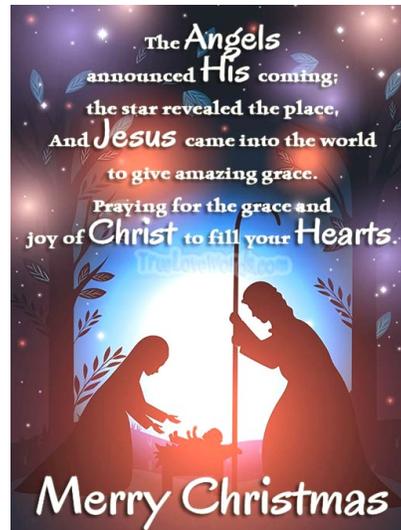
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Advent, holiday season is suddenly upon us, time to prepare thru Jesus

WAIT A MINUTE! What do you mean Advent Season is here? I know I am not the only one who is shaking his (or her) head and wondering what happened to 2021. Yet as I am drafting this article, I am also working on my sermon for Christ the King Sunday. The year has been counting down the days, and the Christmas Season is saying ready or not, here I come.

For many people the yuletide season is one of joy and anticipation. We look forward to the holiday festivities and the joy they bring. One festivity I am personally looking forward to is the Community Choir performance on

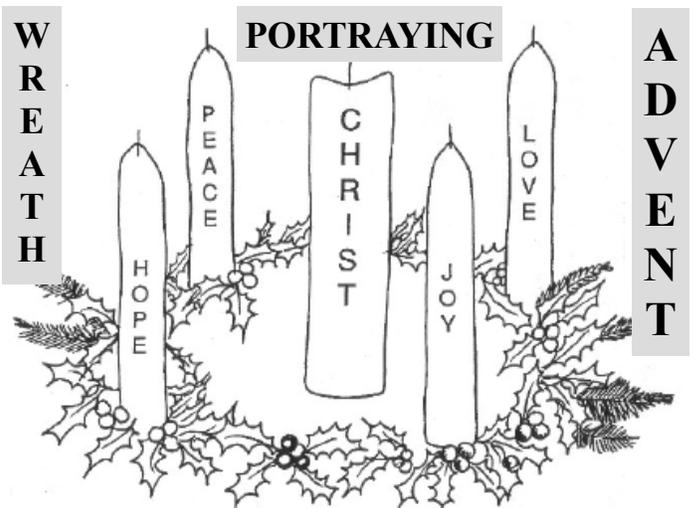
December 12. Yet we should also be aware that for many people the holiday season does not bring joy. Instead, it brings pain. The pain may come from deaths of loved ones that occurred during this "most wonderful time of the year." Another source of pain may come from knowing that their economic situation will not allow them to participate in



the gift giving that society almost makes mandatory. Let us be sympathetic to those who may not feel joyous this season.

This is also a time of the year where it is easy to become overcommitted. I would challenge all of us to be strong enough to say NO to requests for your time if it would lead to over-committing yourself. In Luke's version of our savior's birth, we are told that after the shepherds saw the child laying in a manger, they told everyone they saw what the angels said, and what they saw. We are told that all who heard the shepherds' account were amazed. The question I ponder is did the people go and check things out? Or were they too busy and just went about their normal routine?

I am going to issue a challenge. That challenge is to spend some time this Advent Season and read Matthew's and Luke's account of the birth of Jesus. If you are looking just at the birth of Jesus, Matthew's account covers chapter 1 verses 18-25. If you want to read about the Magi, read the first 12 verses of Matthew as well. In Luke's account read Luke 1: 26-56 and 2:1-20. As you



read those sections, take some time to pretend you are one of the people in the story and think about what you might be feeling. What questions might you be asking. What concerns do you have? What joy can you take from the events of the Savior's birth? May this Advent Season be one of discovery and wonder for each one of us.

—Blessings, Pastor Steve

Sermon passages for the month of December:

Dec. 5—Luke 1:68-79 Dec. 12—Isaiah 11:1-9
Dec.19-Micah 5:2-5 Dec. 24-Luke 2 Dec. 26—TBA



As is our tradition, we will be having our annual Christmas Eve service at 7:00 p.m. on December 24. We will have a number of Scripture readings that will tie into the birth of our savior. There will be singing of Christmas hymns and Pastor Steve will deliver a Christmas message. The service will end with the lighting of the candles in a darkened sanctuary. This is a great service to invite your friends to attend.

Pastor Steve will need three to four volunteers to read the Scripture passages. We are still looking for a family or small group to volunteer to light the Advent and Christ candles as well. If you are interested in doing either of these tasks, let Pastor Steve know.

Session and Deacons conduct busy joint meeting during November

On November 18, there was a joint meeting of the Session and the Deacons. This fulfills a mandate of the *Book of Order*. During the meeting, there were discussions on the roles of members of Session and the Deacon Board. There was also a discussion based on the requirements needed to be met to have Deacons and Elders serve Communion to those who are homebound or hospitalized.

There was also a brainstorming session on ideas on how to increase membership/ attendance and how to be more welcoming. One idea that was suggested is on the third Sunday of December (the 19th), we encourage everyone to move to the other side of the aisle and move either further to the front or to the back in the sanctuary. Also, try sitting with people you do not normally sit with. We are a loving church within our normal groups. Let's try to expand our circles.

The Session did vote to call a special Congregational meeting for the purpose of electing new officers to fill unexpired terms and elect nominating members at large.

There was also a vote to ask a person to become the new Treasurer. As of the writing of this article, that person has not officially accepted, so the name will not be released until that person accepts the appointment. Sonja Collamer has been our faithful treasurer for a long time. She has requested that Session

appoint a new treasurer. We are very grateful for the blessing of having Sonja be our treasurer for many years.—*submitted by Pastor Steve Niccolls*

Church receives a bequest

Recently the church received a generous bequest from the estate of Dick Wiant. This bequest will ensure that Dick's impact on the church will continue beyond his life here on earth. It will also provide this church an opportunity to take on some special project(s). The Session will discuss how to use this blessing at their December meeting.

Please consider including a gift to the church in your will or trust document. Pastor Steve is willing to talk to anyone concerning possible ways to include the church in such documents.—*submitted by Pastor Steve Niccolls.*

(Frances (Wiant) Kirby noted that "Dick's grandmother, Frances Ellen Wiant, was a member of the Saratoga Presbyterian Church in the late 1800s. His grandfather on his mother's side, George Marston, was minister here in the early 1900s." Church records show that Frances Wiant was the first person baptized in the church and the Rev. Marston was pastor from 1921 to 1922.—submitted by Dick Perue.)

What Does It Mean to Seek First the Kingdom of God?

As we enter the season of making wish lists and hinting about what we would like for Christmas, I thought it would be good to look at the Biblical perspective on where our priorities should be. The following article was excerpted from the website "GotQuestions.org" and edited by Virginia Senne.

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus said: ***"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness..."*** The verse's meaning is as direct as it sounds. We are to seek the things of God as a priority over the things of the world. ... Does this mean that we should neglect the reasonable and daily duties that help sustain our lives? Certainly not. But for the Christian, there should be a difference in attitude toward them. If we are taking care of God's business as a priority—living in obedience to Him and sharing the good news of the kingdom with others—then He will take care of our business as He promised...

How do we know if we are truly seeking God's kingdom first? There are questions we can ask ourselves. "Where do I primarily spend my energies? Is all my time and money spent on goods and activities that will certainly perish, or in the service of God—the results of which live on for eternity?" Believers who have learned to truly put God first may then rest in this holy [promise]: ***"...and all these things will be given to you as well."***

God has promised to provide for His own, supplying every need. [We have Paul's word on this in Philippians 4:19 – "God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."] But His idea of what we need is often different from ours, and His timing will only occasionally meet our expectations. For example, we may see our need as riches or advancement, but perhaps God knows that what truly we need is a time of poverty, loss, or solitude. When this happens, we are in good company. God loved both Job and Elijah, but He allowed Satan to absolutely pound Job (all under His watchful eye), and He let that evil woman, Jezebel, break the spirit of His own prophet Elijah (Job 1-2 and First Kings 18-19). In both cases, God followed these trials with restoration and sustenance.

These "negative" aspects of the kingdom run counter to a heresy which is gaining ground around the world, the so-called "prosperity" gospel. A growing number of false teachers are gathering followers under the message: "God wants you to be rich!" But that philosophy is ***not*** the counsel of the Bible—and it is certainly not the counsel of Mathew 6:33, which is not a formula for gaining wealth, [but] a description of how God works. Jesus taught that our focus should be away from this world—its' status and its' lying allurements—and placed upon the things of God's kingdom. Something to think about as Christmas approaches.



Pastor reflects on potluck dinner

I was asked to write a personal reflection on the potluck we had on November 6. I have always enjoyed potlucks and have frequently joked that somewhere in the Presbyterian Church's *Book of Order* there is a mandate that every congregation has to be good at having potlucks. With the COVID-19 situation for the past 20 months, having a potluck brings up extra logistical challenges. When the presbytery's Interim General Presbyter, Rev. Monica Hall, and I scheduled having her join us for worship on November 7, I thought it would be a great reason to have a potluck the night before to give Monica another opportunity to get to know this congregation. Emily agreed to take the lead on organizing the event and we had a potluck scheduled.

On November 2, I received a phone call from Monica alerting me to a situation that would result in the visit being cancelled. My first reaction when I got the call is how do I get the word out that the potluck was cancelled while Emily and I were on vacation? Then I realized there was no need to cancel the potluck. Yes, the reason for having the potluck was cancelled, but I had a feeling the Holy Spirit was telling me the potluck was what God wanted for First Presbyterian, Saratoga. I am glad the potluck went on as scheduled.

During the dinner, I felt a joy among those of us who



were able to attend that has been missing since that terrible day in March 2019 when Governor Gordon banned our in-person worship for seven weeks. I heard multiple people tell me they would love to have more of these potlucks. I agree. Perhaps there are a few people who would be willing to be part of a committee to help organize similar events. If you are interested in being part of such a committee, let me know. I am well aware that in the past the Deacons have been the "potluck" committee. However, if we look at the *Book of Order*, that is not part of the duties listed for the Deacons. That is an archaic tradition. Our current Deacon Board have enough to do without adding potlucks to their list. I am looking forward to our next fun activity. We can do other activities besides potlucks. These activities can double as evangelistic/recruiting opportunities.—submitted by Pastor Steve Niccolls

Christmas Reminders

When was the last time you looked around at the beauty of Christmas surroundings and wondered "why this decoration or that one?" I decided to expand my noodle and went to Google. Learned some new info about old traditions that I was unaware of and found more reasons to honor Christ during this magical time of year. These aren't all of them but a few to share.

Christmas Wreath: The circular shape represents eternity. Wreaths hung on doors or in windows are like a symbolic invitation for the spirit of Christmas to fill our homes with the joy of the season.

Bells: Long been used to announce the arrival of the Christmas season. They symbolize the announcement of the birth of Christ when angels in heaven praised God and declared "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace good will toward men." Luke 2:14.

Holly: Lasts all year around and used in decor all over the world. The sharp edges of the holly leaf can remind us of the crown of thorns placed on the Saviors head. The red holly berry

reminds us of His blood shed for all.

Trees: A green thriving tree in the dead of winter reminded people of hope and new life. Because of Jesus Christ, we can have everlasting life—thus the name "evergreen."

Poinsettias: This plant thrives during winter and symbolizes new life. Their shape resembles a star. Red leaves remind us of the blood shed for us. White leaves of His purity.

Lights: May the beautiful lights of every holiday season remind us of Him who is the source of all light. Jesus Christ is the light of the world. A reminder to us to be a light to others to come to Christ.

Stockings: The Christmas stocking comes from an old legend. Stockings can remind us of the importance of service. Jesus Christ always went about doing good. In Acts 10:38 His selfless acts of service show the way for us to give Christ like service and kindness to others.

This is a condensed (Lori version) fun find that I hope enhances your holiday experience as we share the joy and awe of the Saviors birth. Info: *Ten Symbols of Christmas*. —submitted by Lori Erhart



DEACONS' DOINGS

The Deacons met on Sunday November 14, 2021 after worship. Thankfully the Deacons will have a full board as we move into next year – Vicki Stolns and Carol Jo Jones will be joining Carlene Sjoden, Anne Wickstrom, Becky Strickland, and Susan Collamer. We really thank Sandy Willford and Laurie Johnston for volunteering their time and talents, as their terms as Deacons are completed. We will hold elections of officers for 2022 at our December meeting on Sunday December 12 after worship and after our congregational meeting. Also the Deacons will be conducting the Advent Lighting during worship on Sunday December 12th. It seems Dec. 12th will be a busy day!

We have decided to make two donations from our treasury. One donation has been made to the Helping Hands organization to help them with their annual FREE Thanksgiving dinner for those who are alone, shut in, or in need of food in our Valley. The second went to the Valley Service Organization who provide the “Giving Tree” project to help those in need this Christmas.

On Thursday evening at 4:30 pm, the Deacons met with the Session in the Fellowship Hall. Many creative ideas were discussed to expand our church membership numbers, such as a silent auction, a soup kitchen, yard sale and creating youth programs. We also discussed how we as members could be more open and inviting to new people. Just maybe we could sit in a “new” pew or “hang out” with new friends instead of the usual. We decided to really pray for God's vision with this – as our membership continues to grow smaller.—submitted by Anne Wickstrom

**THE DEACONS WISH EVERYONE
A SAFE, HEALTHY,
HAPPY AND BLESSED HOLIDAY SEASON!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY JESUS!**

Prayer Chain No. is 326-3369



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Adult Bible Study

The Sunday morning Bible Study has changed its meeting time to after Worship Services on Sunday morning. We will meet in the Sunday School Room at 10:45 a.m. and finish up at 11:45 a.m. We are working on the Book of Psalms. Please join us! Bring your own Bible or borrow one from the Church. Hope to see you there.—submitted by Sonja Collamer

Presbyterian Women conduct Bible study, annual pecan sale

Greetings from the ladies of the North Platte Valley Presbyterian Women. We meet monthly on the second Thursday of the month, normally we meet in Encampment except the month of June when we meet in Saratoga.

Each month we have a business meeting and Bible Study, this past year we did a study on Laments and in 2022 the study will be "What My Grandmother Taught Me: Learning from the Women in Matthew's Genealogy of Jesus" .

At our last meeting we elected co-moderators for 2022-23, they are Joan Dowdy and Emily Niccolls. We are in the midst of pecan sales, we took preorders but will have extra nuts available for sale.

During December we will hold our annual Christmas party/luncheon. All ladies are welcome to participate, ask Emily, Frances Kirby or Carol Clemetson for more information.—submitted by Emily Niccolls

Ways to contact Pastor Steve

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