

--- River's Edge Echo ---

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'Season of Advent' sparks anticipation for lighting of 'The Christ Candle'

As this newsletter is being distributed, it is the first day of the Season of Advent. We have four weeks of anticipation and then on the fifth Sunday we will be celebrating the birth of Christ.

During the season, many of us may be busy with Christmas parties or other traditional activities. One of the activities I look forward to is being in the audience for the Community Choir Christmas Concert. This year it will be on December 11 at 4:00 pm. While you are all hopefully enjoying, "the most wonderful time of the year," please take time to reflect on the reason for the season.

I also will remind you to be aware that for many people, this season can bring up painful memories. The pain can come from many sources. Examples include divorces, bad memories of family Christmas celebrations that were not joyful, and even the death of loved ones either on or around Christmas Day. Let us be supportive of those for whom Mr. Scrooge is a more appropriate character for the season than a fat man in a red suit and a white beard.

This year we will have our traditional Christmas Eve service at 7:00 pm. It will include Christmas hymns, the lighting of the Christ Candle in the Advent wreath and a message based on the birth of a child in a manger. The

next morning, we will have a church service, but it will not be a normal one. Instead, we will be singing Christmas hymns and have readings of scripture. I will not prepare a full-blown service with a sermon. It is my prayer that this carols and scripture service will be meaningful, even without a traditional sermon.

During the Advent Season, there are added opportunities to participate in leading worship. Not only do we need the liturgist and ushers, but we also need groups of people (can be, but does not need to be families) to light the Advent Candle(s) for the week. Also, on Christmas Eve, I will be looking for four people who will volunteer to read a passage of Scripture. If you desire to be part of either of these activities, let me know.

Merry Christmas to all of you.

—Blessings, Pastor Steve

Sermon Passages for Month of December

Dec. 4—Isaiah 11:1-10 Dec. 11 Luke 1:46-55

Dec. 18 Mathew—1: 18-25

Dec. 24—Christmas Eve service at 7:00 p.m.

Dec. 25—John 1:1-14

Merry Christmas

Meaning & Lighting of Advent Candles

First Sunday of Advent—Candle of Hope: "We light the candle of hope, and dare to express our longing for peace, for healing, and the well-being of all creation."

2nd—Candle of Peace: "We light it knowing full well that peace is elusive, and in some parts of the world, it is almost completely absent. Yet in this season of Advent, we trust that God is never absent from us. . . . And even where there is war and discord, whether between countries, within families, or within our own hearts, God is present, gently leading us to new possibilities."

3rd—Candle of Joy: "Joy is all around us—in the children, the lights, the music, the gathering together. Joy is like an underground spring that wells up within us, but joy is also a choice, an attitude. So today we open ourselves to joy, trusting that God has already planted it in us. All we need to do is give it care and offer it to share."

4th—Candle of Love: "With this flame we signify the love of God that surrounds and fills us at all times, but that we recognize it in a special way in the Christmas story. There is no greater power than love. It is stronger than rulers and empires, stronger than grief or despair, stronger even than death. We love, because God loves us."

Christmas Eve—The Christ Candle: "In Christ we find light and life, and the courage to be like Him, answering his call and following in his footsteps."
—graphics & script by Dick Perue, "Echo" editor

Next 'Gather at the Table' Dec. 5th

The Good Lord willing and the "gourmet cooks" stay healthy, crepes, with all the trimmings, will be served at the next "Gather at the Table" free meal Monday, Dec. 5, from 4:00 to 6:30 p.m. in the Saratoga Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall on corner of 3rd & Bridge Sts.

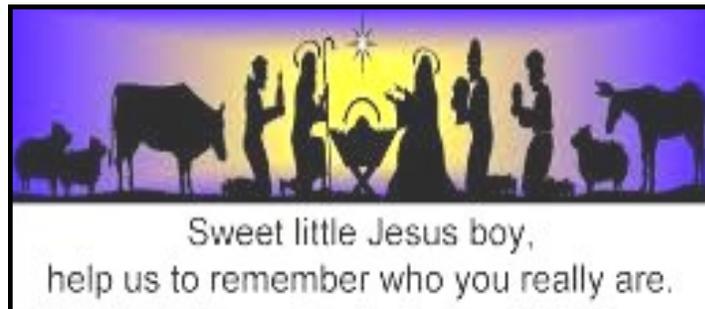
Last month, illness of a couple of the cooks forced the committee to change the menu from "Chicken Cacciatore" to "chili", which more than 30 folks enjoyed on a cold evening.

Monday evening the committee is preparing for a crowd of 50 or more, so attend and bring a hungry or lonely friend to the free meal and fellowship.

The menu consists of "stuffed crepes, with chicken cacciatore over garlic buttered noodles with sauce, plus bread and butter, desserts and a beverage.

"Gather at the Table" is a non-profit charity extension of the First Presbyterian Church of Saratoga. Its mission is to provide a welcoming meal to anyone who desires fellowship in and around this community.

Meals will be prepared and served buffet style by volunteers in order to provide families and individuals a free hot meal once a month in order to "fulfill a physical and spiritual hunger by reflecting the teachings of Jesus Christ with love and openness through serving others," according to the recently organized "Gather at the Table" committee.—by D.P.



Prayer Chain No. is 326-3369

Ways to contact Pastor Steve

**Normal drop-in office hours at Church are
Monday-Thursday 8:00 - 12:00**

Meetings and Appointments at Any Time

Office phone is 326-5337, Home phone 326-3163,

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Or leave note on white board on office door or on desk

Blessed Are the Peacemakers...

... for they will be called sons of God. This month, we celebrate the birth of the Son of God, the Prince of Peace. How appropriate that we are thinking about the seventh beatitude which says that peacemakers will be called "sons of God."

What IS a peacemaker? A simple definition [from Christianity.com] is: "*Someone who reconciles people with God and with one another*". "Reconciliation" is a synonym for "peace-making".

Notice that in this definition there are two aspects: (1) reconciling people with *God* and (2) reconciling people with *one another*. This definition illustrates the Cross – the upright and the crosspiece – and the order is important. The upright can stand alone, but the crosspiece is nothing without the upright. Reconciliation with God must come first, and then people can be reconciled to each other.



This idea is reflected in the words of Jesus, when He said that all Scripture can be summed up by two commandments: Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, *and* love your neighbor as yourself. [Matthew 22:37-40] Notice the order...

It is possible for a person to be reconciled to God in the midst of a pagan or atheistic culture. There are some in Muslim communities, for example, who learn of Jesus Christ and accept Him as their personal Savior – even when no one else in their family or community does so. And of course, people *can* be reconciled to each other without God. But that reconciliation is much more likely to be short-lived than if the parties have first been reconciled with God.

The Greek word translated "peacemaker" in this beatitude describes someone who actively proclaims God's Word *in order to reconcile the listener with God*. Dolores Smyth, a nationally published faith and parenting writer and a contributing writer at Crosswalk.com, explains that peacemakers "*build bridges between unbelievers and God through the ministry of reconciliation. The human race was separated from God because of our sinful nature until Jesus atoned for our sins and restored our relationship with God through His sacrifice on the Cross.*" [Colossians 1:21-22]

Smyth goes on to remind us that "*...Paul tells us that when God reconciled Himself to us through Christ, God called us to be 'Christ's ambassadors' by giving us the 'ministry of reconciliation'.*" [2 Corinthians 5:18-20] "*The ministry of reconciliation entails spreading the gospel message that all people can have a restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ.*" Believers who practice this ministry of reconciliation are peacemakers.

Next month, we'll ask and answer the question: "How can one be a peacemaker?" --Submitted by Virginia Senne

A Sermon for Today CHRISTMAS AND HOME

By Henry P. Cope

(The following article was selected, in part, from the Dec. 25, 1908 issue of "The Grand Encampment Herald". The message seems as appropriate today as it was back then—Dick Perue, editor of "Echo".)

"And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger."—Luke II., 16.

A new day dawned for our world when the center of religion passed from a temple to a home, from the awesome priest, as a leader, to the little child. Then religion came nearer to us, because of our hearts and our own bosoms, a real part of our daily lives, bound with our purest pleasures, as common as household thoughts and as sweet.

Since the birth of a child marked a new era in the spiritual history of the race, every birth has had a new significance. We have come to realize that each child is born not so much into a world of sin and sorrow as into the family of the Father of us all and into the right to love and peace and joy, into a world of growing good will.

Christmas tide serves to remind us how the best in all the religious aspirations of men everywhere clusters about the thing most simple. The stories we retell at this season are not about heroes and kings, not of magnificent and impressive ceremonies in vast temples; they are of a village mother and her new born babe, of a lonely dwelling, and of humble shepherds.

The heart of Christmas lies there in the founding of a home. An obscure cattle shed, a father whose heart is torn with pride and anguish, and mother suffused with joy that a man is born into the world, while her face is filled with a peace and light that give a heavenly radiance to the strange scene. How happens it that the eyes of faith have been centered here for centuries, that so commonplace an incident is of so great significance?

Pain and love, sacrifice, service and joy—these make the home and these make religion. Never is faith so simple, so apprehensible to us all as when it is expressed in these terms, when to be loving to our own, to plan and sacrifice for them, to share our joys and to gather closer in the home circle because of an act of religion.

These simple common elements make Christmas so nearly a universal festival. We may differ greatly in our views of the teaching of Christianity, but we all stand together before such a picture of a home, and it belongs to us all. We worship at a miracle of love, the same through which we had our being and about which all our homes are knit.

The sense of this home significance brings us hurrying from afar to spend this day at our own hearth sides; this

At Christmas

By Edgar Guest

"How glorious this world would be if we could live each and every day according to Edgar Guest's sentiments in the following piece."—quote from Gloria Rakness on submission to "River's Edge Echo". Enjoy!

A man is at his finest towards the finish of the year;
He is almost what he should be when the Christmas season is here;
Then he's thinking more of others than he's thought the months before,
And the laughter of his children is a joy worth toiling for.
He is less a selfish creature than at any other time;
When the Christmas spirit rules him he comes close to the sublime.

When it's Christmas man is bigger and is better in his part;
He is keener for the service that is prompted by the heart.
All the petty thoughts and narrow seem to vanish for awhile
And the true reward he's seeking is the glory of a smile.
Then for others he is toiling and somehow it seems to me
That at Christmas he is almost what God wanted him to be.

If I had to paint a picture of a man I think I'd wait
Till he'd fought his selfish battles and had put aside his hate.
I'd not catch him at his labors when his thoughts are all of pelf,
On the long days and the dreary when he's striving for himself.
I'd not take him when he's sneering, when he's scornful or depressed,
But I'd look for him at Christmas when he's shining at his best.

Man is ever in a struggle and he's oft misunderstood;
There are days the worst that's in him is the master of the good,
But at Christmas kindness rules him and he puts himself aside
And his petty hates are vanquished and his heart is opened wide.
Oh, I don't know how to say it, but somehow it seems to me
That at Christmas man is almost what God sent him here to be."

moves us to pity for the homeless and desolate on this day and gives the deeper pain to thoughts of vacant places about the table and by the fireside. This is the festival of the home; here stands our altar and here glow our sacrificial fires.

The thought of the family group and the interpretation of faith in terms of human affections dedicate the day to the child and sets a little one in the midst. This is the children's festival, and vain is the worship of any child without growing reverence for all childhood through all time.

Faith finds expression through the home. We give ourselves again to our own; we who have been so engrossed with our daily cares once more smile with the children or take our places again as children in the old home, and so fill the parent's cup of happiness to overflowing. A broad felling of good will for the whole world is not worth much just here if it is leaving some heart at home aching and desolate.

And then in terms of the home our faith and joy express themselves to all mankind. We hear no angels singing, but in our hearts is beating the promise of the day of peace, and all about us are signs of it coming if we will but broaden the bounds of our affections until the Bethlehem scene shall be the picture of a united humanity.



DEACONS' DOINGS

For the month of December, the Deacons will be spearheading a **FOOD DRIVE** to add to the local food pantry. We are asking *everyone* in our congregation to bring a food item or two to church each Sunday in December – Dec. 4th; Dec. 11th; Dec. 18th; and the drive will end on Dec. 25th. There will be a box in the Narthex of the church to hold our donations. Be sure your donations are non-perishable items and not expired, but they can include anything you'd like, such as canned fruits and/or vegetables, soups, spaghetti sauce, pasta, peanut butter, jelly, oatmeal, boxed cereals etc. Let's remember those less fortunate during this Christmas Season!

The Deacons will meet again after worship on Sunday December 11 to finish our yearly budget and to finish our yearly donations to charities.

The Deacons would like to thank everyone who has encouraged, donated or helped us in any way this year and every year. We pray that everyone has a healthy, joyous, rejuvenating Holiday Season!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY JESUS!

—submitted by Anne Wickstrom

Session notified of 'Special Gift'

The Session held its monthly meeting on November 17. The meeting was routine with only a couple of motions voted on. The first motion was to reject a snow removal bid made by a local contractor. The second vote was to approve putting an advertisement in the *Saratoga Sun's* special Christmas Candle edition.

The Session was also made aware of a special \$10,000 gift. The donor requested that part of those funds be used to improve some of the technology in our Sunday worship service. (e.g. sound equipment and video camera.) It was agreed to ask Joe Parrie to be a consultant on the technology.

The next Session meeting is December 15 at 4:30.

—submitted by Pastor Steve Niccolls

Adult Bible Study

Our group of early rising Bible students continue our exploration of Luke's fascinating story of the travels of the disciples to spread the Good News of the Gospel. In Acts 16 we find Paul and Silas adding Timothy and apparently Luke (he begins using the pronoun "we" in his narrative) to the group. This is the chapter that finds Paul and Silas in trouble for chasing out a spirit that allowed a slave girl to predict the future. This reduced her value and the slave owner brought Paul and Silas before the magistrates in the marketplace. These authorities had them stripped and beaten and thrown into prison. At midnight as the men were singing and praying, a mighty earthquake opened all the cell's doors. The Apostles didn't leave instead the jailer and all his household were saved. The whole amazing story is found in Acts 16 verses 16-40

Please come and join us on Sunday mornings at 8:15 in the Fellowship Hall as we continue our study of the expansion of the early church.—submitted by Sonja Collamer

Many ways for 'Year End Giving'

As was reported in the Session highlights, the church received a very generous donation. The person making the donation has been richly blessed. She did not need the money from her mandatory withdrawal from her IRA and rather than pay taxes on the withdrawal, she used a Qualified Charitable Distribution to direct the money to the church.

There are other ways, such as setting up a donor advisory fund or donated appreciated stocks to provide the church revenues without paying taxes on the capital gains.

As we come to the end of the year, there may be some of us who have been blessed with funds we do not need. Perhaps an end of the year donation may help your tax situation as well as benefit the church. There are strict regulations involved in making such contribution, so please consult with your financial advisor or accountant before using any of these tax strategies.—submitted by Pastor Steve Niccolls



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