

The Chimes

December 2015 - January 2016

A NEW LOOK AT CHRISTMAS by Pastor Gary

I really like Christmas – the gifts, the lights and the genuine sense of goodwill it creates even in a cynic culture such as ours. But the truth of Christmas when it comes to faith is this: Jesus never asked us to remember his birth. Not once did Jesus teach we should remember Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds.

We do so because Christmas tells the story of how the Savior, Jesus Christ, came into the world. It is a story rich with meaning and brings hope each and every year it is carefully taught. The Bible presents the truth about Jesus not as an abstract doctrine simply to be believed, but as a matter of fact and history. The Bible says, in effect: Here is good news – for you and everyone. Believe it; trust yourself to it, and enter into abundant life.

While we remember Jesus was born like the rest of us – a helpless infant – he didn't stay that way. Sometimes, our nativity scenes keep us stuck at the manger with the livestock. We need to remember he was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah – another word for the Savior of the world.

Men and women were created in God's image, but through sin became alienated from God. So the prophet Isaiah says, "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear to dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." (Isaiah 59:1-2).

The wonderful passage in Isaiah 53 gives God's whole plan of salvation in a nutshell: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

The Bible makes clear, however, that for one reason only the Messiah was able to suffer in our place: Because of who he was. God says again through Isaiah, "The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him" (Isaiah 59:16).

This year, let's not forget that the Baby Jesus is the Suffering Servant, the Messiah. He is unique in all of history: Jesus Christ, the only truly Righteous One, because he was the only person who ever came into the world as fully God and fully human. In 2015, let's take a new look at Christmas. Let's remember not only his birth but what he became to us.

Dates to remember:

- Christmas Cantata
Dec 19 & 20
- Christmas Eve
Candlelight Services - 7 pm & 11 pm
- WNL Starts Jan 6
- February Chimes
deadline Wednesday, Jan 20th

Inside this issue:

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**First United
Methodist Church
seeks to make
disciples for Jesus
Christ. We seek
to relate people
to Christ, connect
people to the
Body of Christ,
and reach out in
love and concern
to the world.**

Food for the FISH Pantry

Current Needs:

Canned Meat
Pasta & Sauces
Cereal
Peanut Butter

Donations can be
left at any of the
FISH Food
containers or
grocery carts
throughout the
church.

**Thank you for
your
generosity!**

PRAYER MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

Please remember to pray:

- For all connected to our church family who are confined to their home or nursing homes
- For our TV Audience (9 am Worship)
- For veterans, public servants, police/fire/medical personnel
- For our nation, Christ's Church universal, United Methodist Church, Sugar Creek Cluster
- For our congregation, our pastor and staff

Prayer concerns: John Schetzle family, Jerry Bannon, Don Carpenter, Frances Smith, Olivia Stevens, Rev. Bill Parks, Barbara Odle, Gerri Hester, Janet March, Jim Hutcheson, Beth Wilkinson Redenbaugh, **Our missionaries:** Chris & Anna Pratt, Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) in Orlando, FL

WESLEY THRIFT SHOP

Thanks to the about 65 volunteers, a large number of consignees, and faithful customers, the Wesley Thrift Shop board recently was able to make some significant donations to a number of church and community organizations. \$5,000 was donated to the Table of Grace, our church's program to assist the homeless. Another \$5,000 was given to the Fish Food Pantry. In addition \$3,000 was awarded to each of the following; the Half Way House, The Montgomery County Free Clinic and the Family Crisis Center. That's a grand total of \$19,000!

The Thrift Shop has been very busy recently and it promises to be busier during the upcoming holidays. More volunteers are needed! If you could give as little as half a day each month, please contact the Thrift Shop Manager, Myrna Vaught at the Thrift Shop, 362-7353 on Wednesdays or consult your church directory for her home telephone number. Its' a happy place to work!

Our church has given \$81,740.19 to support mission efforts so far in 2015. Below is a breakdown of those disbursements:

<i>Montgomery County Free Clinic - \$11,000</i>	<i>The Barker-Switzer's - \$3,035.94</i>
<i>Cru, Chris & Anna Pratt - \$2,750 + \$622 (special offering)</i>	<i>Trinity Life Ministry - \$1,650</i>
<i>FISH Financial - \$1,780</i>	<i>Discretionary fund - \$11,241</i>
<i>New Day Charities (Abby Twarek) - \$1,100</i>	<i>South Carolina Mission Team- \$14,550</i>
<i>Barbi Leaman (Haiti) - \$500</i>	<i>Heifer International - \$550</i>
<i>Kehoe Family Expenses - \$905</i>	<i>South Carolina Rural Mission - \$3,850</i>
<i>Back to School Supplies - \$500</i>	<i>Half Way Home, Inc - \$3,500</i>
<i>Sugar Creek Cluster food backpacks - \$2,130</i>	<i>Imagine No Malaria - \$575</i>
<i>FISH Food Pantry - \$5,350.00</i>	
<i>Women's Resource Center - \$50</i>	
<i>Volunteers for Mental Health - \$500</i>	
<i>Table of Grace - \$13,156.25</i>	
<i>Africa University - \$2,245</i>	
<i>Rainbows & Rhymes Scholarships - \$200</i>	



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from all of us at Rainbows & Rhymes. We've all been looking forward to the much needed time with our families during this holiday season. We all worked really hard on our Christmas program. We appreciate all the familiar and new faces who came to the service.

As we head into the new year, we are preparing to strengthen our program even more by having all three teachers full time. We found we can utilize the extra hands and eyes to promote better learning all around. All staff members were excited to expand our program.

We look forward to more community involvement with field trips where students can learn more about their hometown. We will also continue our weekly children's devotionals with Pastor Gary and our Storytellers series.

We wish everyone safe & healthy holidays!!

Blessings!
Leslie



Rainbows & Rhymes Preschool

Christmas Program
Sunday,
December 6th
9 am

Preschool
3 - 5 year olds
Monday - Friday
8:30 – 11:30 am &
12:30 – 3:30 pm

Lead Me

Back to Bethlehem

First United Methodist Church
Chancel Choir and guests
will present

“Lead Me Back to Bethlehem”

Sat, Dec 19th @ 6 pm

&

Sun, Dec 20th @ 9 am



The Heart of Christmas - A Journey of Joy

Presented by the Community Christmas Choir at the Russellville Community Center

Fri, Dec 4 - Sat, Dec 5
Dinner at 6 pm
Program at 7 pm

Sun, Dec 6
Dinner at 12 pm
Program at 1:30 pm

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY NEWS...

WNL

The kiddos in the elementary grades have been learning about Christmas, how the holiday got its name and how it all began. We really enjoy our video based curriculum, "What's In the Bible?" It is very informative and fun, presented in a way that children will retain the information using lots of repetition.

The kids are totally into earning points to get prizes. Several of the children have been saving their points so they can go for the "big" prizes! They have been memorizing as many bible verses as they can to earn lots of extra points! A few of the kiddos have brought friends to earn extra points, also. Another way to earn extra points is for extra good behavior and there are quite a few that have earned those as well!

January

With a new year beginning, you may be asking yourself, what sort of New Year's resolution should a Christian make? Here are some suggestions: (1) pray to the Lord for wisdom in regards to what resolutions, if any, He would have you make; (2) pray for wisdom as to how to fulfill the goals God gives you; (3) rely on God's strength to help you; (4) find an accountability partner who will help you and encourage you; (5) don't become discouraged with occasional failures; instead, allow them to motivate you further; (6) don't become proud or vain, but give God the glory. [Psalm 37:5-6](#) says, "Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun."

Let's start off the New Year right. I hope you will all join with me in praying for our children's ministry. Pray for our church, our congregation, all of our ministries and our efforts in reaching out to our community to show God's love and concern and be His hands and feet.

FROM ADVENT SEASON TO EPIPHANY by Pastor Patty Bymaster

"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen." (Luke 2:20, NRSV) The greatest event in history had just happened! The Messiah had been born! For ages the Jews had waited for this, and when it finally occurred, the announcement came to humble shepherds. The good news about Jesus is that he comes to all, including the plain and the ordinary. He comes to anyone with a heart humble enough to accept him. Whoever you are, whatever you do, you can have Jesus in your life.

Our liturgical calendar refers to the last Sunday of December as the "First Sunday after Christmas Day". Advent season ends on Christmas Eve and we enter what is called the Epiphany season which includes four to nine Sundays, depending on the date of Easter. We celebrate the Baptism of the Lord and we traditionally talk about the Magi (traditionally called wise men). The wise men traveled many miles to see the King of the Jews. When they finally found him they responded with joy, worship, and gifts.

I always love the scriptures, stories, praise songs or

hymns for both these seasons. I love the approach of the wise men who were joyous when they finally found the Christ child. It is a reminder to us that we must approach Jesus with the same attitude. It should not be our expectations that Jesus is to come looking for us, He does not have to prove to us who He is, nor does He owe us any gifts. We should be searching for Him, worshiping Him, and praising Him.

It is an exciting time whether you are celebrating Advent or celebrating Epiphany. Let us remember to share the meaningful stories of this time of year with family, friends, and strangers. God's blessings to all as we go forth in our ministries for Christ.

To those interested in a 10:00 A.M. Bible Study on Monday mornings, we will begin again on Monday, February 1, 2016. The Bible book to be studied will be announced later.

TRADITION NOT TRADITIONALISM by Bishop Mike

I am writing this E-pistle from Lake Junaluska, NC, where the active bishops of our United Methodist Church are gathering for a "Learning Forum." This is not a Council of Bishops meeting, because the retired bishops are not present, but it is a helpful time of continuing education and sharing among the active bishops from around the world.

Our focus is upon "adaptive leadership" in a changing and challenging world. One of our presenters is Dr. Greg Jones, former dean of Duke Divinity School and a helpful theologian and thinker. Among the many great moments of his presentations to date (he is doing one more this morning) was his commentary about Tradition. As you probably know, our Wesley understanding of seeking truth is that we look to Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience. Greg had an excellent comment that Tradition is very different from Traditionalism. He differentiated it this way: "Tradition is the living faith of dead people; Traditionalism is the dead faith of living people."

His point is that Tradition, properly understood, is a living and on-going gathering of the wisdom of those who have gone before us – persons who recorded their own experiences with the Living Lord. As such, Tradition is ever-changing as new generations of experience with God are added to the layers of Tradition that inform us. By contrast, some persons want to define and stifle our experience of God into a rigid, never-changing set of beliefs (usually very much like their own personal beliefs) which leads to a Traditionalism which is dead and void of on-going learning.

I think his point is easily observed when some churches refuse to consider new ideas, new forms of worship, new ministries of outreach, new ways of organizing themselves, or even just new carpet in the sanctuary because, they say, "We've never done it that way be-

fore." Or equally painful is when a church says, "We've always done it this way," and thus no change and adaptation is needed. Such statements are the Traditionalism of living people whose faith is dead.

By contrast, I hear many people and many congregations say, "God has been with us in the past, and that gives us assurance for a future which seems to be changing and challenging us in new ways. Those who went before us tried new ways of ministry to adapt to their circumstances, so we can learn from them and trust God as we explore new options for ministry." What a difference! That attitude understands the living faith and power of Tradition, rather than being stuck in the Traditionalism of any one pattern of religion.

I remember one congregation I served as pastor where I proposed adding a second worship service, and – somewhat to my surprise – our oldest members responded enthusiastically by remembering that the church had added an English-speaking service to the regular German-speaking worship service when they were kids. They said, "The church changed to help us feel more included since we were no longer speaking German in our homes, so we should do the same with the next generation. These kids speak a 'different language' in terms of their music, so we have to find ways to reach them." Looking back, I realize that they were using Tradition is a most helpful way to make decisions for the future.

As we United Methodists deal with all manner of new situations and challenges in a world that is fast-paced and difficult, I pray that we will be guided by the Tradition of those faithful ones who went before us – without becoming stuck in the Traditionalism of our own familiar patterns.

Hat, Sock & Mitten

Tree



Every year for many, many years we have collected new hats, gloves, mittens, scarves and socks for needy children in our area. I take those gifts to local schools and they distribute them as needed. People are in desperate need of these items, both children and adult alike, especially during this difficult economy. Please be sure to remember all those cold little fingers and toes as you are out shopping, and bring some in to hang on our tree in the main hallway of the Education Building.

Christmas Schedule

Christmas Cantata

December 19,
6 pm

December 20,
9 am

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

in the Sanctuary

7 pm
(childcare provided)

11 pm

Church office closed

Christmas
December 25

New Years
Jan 1

Wednesday Night Life 2016

The upcoming dates for WNL are:

January 6th -
March 30th

More information will following on classes available.

**FIRST UNITED
METHODIST
CHURCH**

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Marsha Smith, Choir Director
Cindy McCormick, Organist
Randy Neideffer, Maintenance
Sunny Lollar, Custodian

Service Times

9:00 a.m. Traditional
Worship in
the Sanctuary
&
11:00 a.m.
The Gathering in
Fellowship Hall

10:00 a.m. Sunday
School
with classes for all
ages!

9:30-11:00 a.m.
Take-Up-A-Cup in the
Library & Narthex

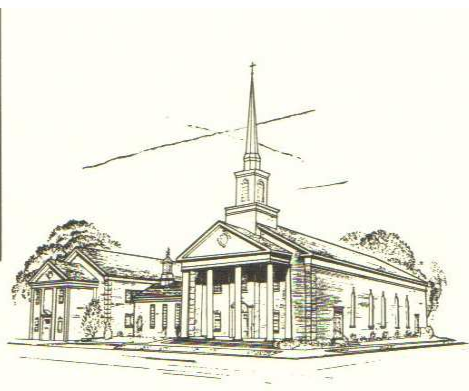
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YOUTH NEWS

Hey all,
I'm attempting a new format for the monthly news-
letter so hang in there for this edition at least.

What happened?

Looking back over November we had a great time working through some of the tough questions of the faith. I'm happy that we have leaders that are bold enough to allow students to openly explore what it means to be a Christian in today's world. We had a great time serving at Bickford Assisted Living with the Senior Prom. It turned out to be a great afternoon of dancing and getting to know some of the residence that live there.

Where are we going?

For December: The first weekend of December is PACKED with youth activities. On Friday, the M.S. students will have the opportunity to go to Christmas at the Zoo in Indianapolis and the next morning, the H.S. students will leave for Christmas in Chicago. Both trips have turned into annual Christmas time trips with lots of Holiday fun. Over

Christmas break we'll be taking a break from youth programming as well. We won't have WNL or YG over break. We'll start up again on January 3rd.

In January, we'll be serving at the Friendship Kitchen on the 23rd and having a Family Night on January 24th. We're almost to our 3rd Family Night, when we don't come to the church but stay at home and have a family discussion, and they seem to be going well. We starting doing Family Nights this school year because of some leading research about the importance of families discussing faith with their children. This is our program's way of contributing to that effort by not having Sunday night Youth Group, but giving that time back to families so that they can have their own personal discussion. Please pray for our families as they navigate the challenges of living in a post Christian culture.