

**Second Sunday of Advent
December 9, 2018**

We welcome you to worship.

Meditation in Preparation for Worship

*“I would rather live in a world where my life is surrounded by mystery
than live in a world so small that my mind could comprehend it.”*

(Harry Emerson Fosdick)

Prelude “Lo, How a Rose E’re Blooming” Johannes Brahms
(See Hymn 48)

Introit “Go, Tell it On the Mountain” arr., Andrew Duncan
Westminster Ringers

Welcome

Ringing of the Bell

Call to Worship – Lighting of the First Advent Candle

9 a.m. Rob and Joan Tanner

11 a.m. Bob, Jenny, and Elle Cesaria

***Hymn of Praise No. 5** Picardy
“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence”

***Opening Prayer**

First Scripture Reading (p. 1245) Luke 1:76-79

Christmas Pageant (11 a.m.) “The Littlest Angel Choir”

Children 3-years-old through Kindergarten are excused for Bible Bunch (Bible Bunch Rm)

Children in grades 1 through 5 are excused for Sunday School (Sunday School Rm)

Commissioning of New Members

Presentation

9 a.m.: Dick and Do Ann Falk

11 a.m.: David and Emma Flautt

Covenant Questions and Promises

To the new members: Who is your Lord and Savior?

Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

Will you, as a believer in Jesus Christ and as a member of this church, act out your faith in the world, in your work and in your family?

I will.

Do you covenant to be an active member of this church through your life in the world and support of this church?

I do.

To the congregation: As a congregation, will you support these new members with your encouragement and your prayers, as together we seek to call upon and praise God?

We will, God being our help. May God give us all grace to share ministry together that Christ may be glorified in this place.

Charge by the Pastor

Welcoming Prayer

Hymn of Welcome

“Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.
The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.”

Prayers of the People

The Lord’s Prayer

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.”

The Ministry of The Church

(Please sign and pass the red friendship book.)

Offering . . . *“Freely we have received, freely let us give.”*

Offertory Anthem

“Veni, Veni, Emmanuel”

Randol Bass

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel” from *A Feast of Carols*

“Veni, veni Emmanuel, captivum solve Israel.
Qui gemit in exilio privatus Dei filio.
Gaude, Emmanuel nascetur pro te Israel.

O come, thou dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by thine advent here.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death’s dark shadows put to flight
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel.
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.”

***Doxology and Prayer of Dedication**

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost! Amen.”

***Affirmation of Faith**

Titus 3:4-8

But “when God our savior’s kindness and love appeared, he saved us because of his mercy, not because of righteous things we had done. He did it through the washing of new birth and the renewing by the Holy Spirit, which God poured out upon us generously through Jesus Christ our savior. So, since we have been made righteous by his grace, we can inherit the hope for eternal life.” This saying is reliable. And I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God might give careful attention to doing good. These things are good and useful for everyone.

Special Music

“In the Bleak Mid-Winter” Gustav Holst, arr., Ruth Schram
Women’s Ensemble

Second Scripture Reading (p. 696)

Psalm 42:1-2

Message

“The Simple Gospel”

Dr. Hood

***Hymn of Dedication No. 8**

Truro

“Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates”

***Benediction**

***Postlude**

“Let All Moral Flesh”

arr., Gustav Holst

*The congregation is invited to stand, if able.

The Church Bell is rung in loving memory of Ronald (1934 – 2007), Lois (1935 – 2017), and Nancy (1957 – 1997) Horn. Prior to Sunday morning worship, the bell from our original Sanctuary is rung in memory of those in our Memorial Garden. Let us pause to give thanks for all who have gone before us, who rest in the peace of God, thanking God for the Christian witness of their lives.

The **flowers** that beautify the Chancel this morning are given by Charles and Linda Molesphini, in honor of the 50th wedding anniversary of Tino and Diane Calogero.

Greeting You

9 a.m.: East Door – Leo Thorne. West Door – Yvonne Thorne.

11 a.m.: East Door – Bob and Lynne Weedling. West Door – Maryann Rana.

Christmas Pageant

Narrators:

Juliet Baum, Caroline Calder, Rudolph Milliken, and Nathan Singjaidee

The Littlest Angel Choir:

Stirling Calder, Chloé-Anne Cauldwell, Lilika Cauldwell, Elle Cesaria, Betty Lou Flautt, Ernest Flautt, Noah Gimmy, Shane Gimmy, Clara Hartwell, Laila Milliken, Connor Post, Ethan Schmidt, Mark Schmidt, and Nilla Singjaidee

Gifts to

Christmas Eve Offering from Beth Rivers, in loving memory of Abigail Buck.

Memorial Fund from Don and Karen Carter, in loving memory of Karen's father, John Loennecker.

Take Note

Stewardship 2019: Our thanks to members and friends of our congregation who have made their stewardship pledge for 2019. Thus far, we have received 118 pledges, totaling \$535,844. If you have not yet made your pledge for 2019 we encourage you to make it as soon as possible. Estimate of giving cards are available in the pews. You may place these in the offering plate, mail them to the church office or call Christine Davis in the financial office (561-276-6338, ext. 16), and make a verbal pledge by phone. Please note that if you are currently using automated payments through your bank or credit card to make your pledge, we still need a completed pledge card from you. Let us all be faithful to our calling as Disciples of Christ and support the work of Christ's Church.

Capital Campaign pledges reach the goal of \$3.5 million! Exciting news that we achieved this in early July 2018. To be at the final mark is an amazing accomplishment and everyone in our congregation should be proud and thanked as we had a 90 % + participation rate. We now have \$3.5M in pledges, and we are less than \$200,000 away from collecting all of it, as many made a pledge on the three year plan which ends later this year. Our debt on this project is very low, and assuming the pledges come in as planned, we expect to be debt-free again as a church by January 1, 2019. If you have made a pledge and are able to finish off your fulfillment of such pledge, it will put us at our goal of full collection.

Stop by the **Narthex** and purchase **Doug Hood's new book** Nurture Faith: Five Minutes to Strengthen Your Walk with Christ for **\$15**. This expanded edition of Heart & Soul: Volume 2 contains 24% new material in a more compact design.

You can be an angel by helping the Mission Outreach Committee wrap gifts for the **Back-to-Basics Angel Program today, Sunday, December 9th** in **Fellowship Hall** following each worship service. This program provides the neediest children with new sneakers, socks, and underwear as gifts at Christmas time, recognizing the importance of school children having the basic necessities in which to attend school and learn.

Offering Envelopes for 2019 are available in the Narthex to pick up after the service today. Please take a moment to pick up your envelope box. By doing so, you can be a good steward to the church by helping to save postage costs.

Join us for a **Special Holiday Concert on December 16th at 4 p.m.** Beloved former soloist, Jennifer Cooper, mezzo-soprano, will present a recital with Don Cannarozzi at the piano. Jennifer's program will include opera arias, French and German songs, musical theater selections, and some Christmas favorites. Don will play a few of his favorite Christmas Carol piano improvisations. Please put "Jennifer Cooper First Presbyterian" in your YouTube search and you will hear her heartfelt rendition of "Mary Did You Know" she sang here a few years ago. She will present the same song at our services on December 16th. She is always remembered for her truly heart-felt interpretation. The concert is free, a free will offering will be taken.

The **Christmas Eve Candlelight Services** are at **7 p.m.** and **9:30 p.m.** in the **Sanctuary**. Please plan to arrive early and carpool when possible. A special **Children's Message** will be given at the **7 p.m.** service. (There will be a musical Introit prior to each worship service.)

Reservations for **Choir Loft Seating** on **Christmas Eve** for the **7 p.m.** and **9:30 p.m. services** may be made in the Narthex following the worship services or by calling the church office (561-276-6338). These are the best seats in the house. Seating is limited, so reserve your seats early.

On **Sunday, December 30th**, there is only **one morning worship service** at **11 a.m.**

The **Nominating Committee** would appreciate recommendations from members of the congregation to fill active Elder and Deacon positions which will begin in March 2019. A form to submit recommendations is available on the Welcome Center in the Narthex. Please complete the form and mail it to the church office by **Sunday, January 6th**.

Our congregation is made up of members from all over the USA and beyond. Unlike our home town congregation where we grew up, many of us came to Delray Beach as adults. The person sitting on your left or right could be from your home town and you wouldn't know it. **Home Town Sunday, February 17, 2019**, sponsored by the Fellowship Committee, is a day to celebrate our origins and help us connect with each other. Please complete the pull out insert in the bulletin and drop it in the Offering Plate or put it in the basket in the Welcome Center.

Our **Sunday School and Bible Bunch** have been growing steadily. This is exciting! We are **looking for an assistant to help the teachers**. This is an exciting opportunity for anyone who would like to share their love of God with the children of our church. If you are interested, please contact Grace Hood (561-276-6338, ext. 17 or gracehood@firstdelray.com).

Join Doug and Grace Hood and Michael and Page Brown for a **Bible Land Exploration** from **November 13 to November 22, 2019**. This trip to Israel will expand our knowledge of the Bible and this sacred land. A journey following in the footsteps of Jesus will change the way you read the Bible, and you will learn why scholars refer to it as the "Fifth Gospel". Brochures and registration forms are available on the Welcome Center in the Narthex.

For Our Younger Worshippers

Children's Worship Activities and Bibles are at the **Children's Table** in the **Covered Patio** for use during worship. Please return the clipboards and Bibles to the table after the service.

Our Main Church Financial Accounts and Funding

Operating account/Stewardship/Annual Pledge Funds – This is our main account, with the majority of the cash raised from the annual Stewardship Campaign, or annual pledges. These funds are what the church uses every day to pay mission outreach, salaries, power bills, insurance, maintenance, etc. Our annual budget is approximately \$1.45 million and our pledges typically come in lower than this amount. On top of pledges, we get money from plate and special purpose collections on Sundays, gifts directed for specific operating purposes, from weddings and valet parking. We then dip into our "Remembrance Fund" (described below) and our "Endowment Fund" (described below) to fill the gap as needed. Our # 1 goal is to work with our membership to reduce our dependence on these other funds so we can continue to operate and expand our ministries fully. Our annual "Stewardship Campaign" for annual operating pledges runs from November through January each year.

Remembrance Fund – This fund includes unrestricted gifts to the church (wills, trusts, estates), including contributions made in “remembrance” of others. These funds are used in support of the Operating account described above on an as-needed basis as approved by the current Elders who make up Session.

Endowment Fund – This is our long term fund. Historically these funds come from bequests from our congregation (wills, trusts, estates) that restrict the gifts for this purpose. We transfer a portion of these funds each year to help cover our full operating budget as needed, but we never take more than 5 % of the current balance. Many people view bequests as “perpetual pledges” to leave a legacy of continuing ministry.

Capital Campaign – The latest Capital Campaign was a 2016-2018 campaign to upgrade most of the church’s physical facilities – parking, Narthex, bathrooms, Center for Christian Studies Building, etc. A special campaign was put in place to raise \$3.5 million and the project came in on time and on budget with completion in the first half of 2018. A few ancillary capital projects are being included in this account to top off the work needed at our beautiful facility, and we will continue to strive to maintain a small balance here for future capital needs.

Debt – Right now the Church has just \$100,000 of debt. This stems from the 3 year capital campaign project, and is expected to be paid off by the end of 2018 as final pledge payments come in toward the \$3.5 million, which was fully pledged but not yet 100% collected. We are blessed as one of few congregations nationwide to have no meaningful debt and a fully upgraded set of facilities.

Our Ministry Develops Through



Free New Testament Bibles

First Presbyterian Church is a point of distribution of God’s word in the **New Testament** at *no cost* to anyone who would like a copy. If you have not previously picked up a copy in the Narthex, you may do so this morning. If you know of people who would appreciate receiving a copy, please take copies to them. Join with your church in distributing God’s word throughout our communities in Palm Beach County.

Connect with First Presbyterian Church

Please join us in the **Narthex** at **10 a.m.** for a **Coffee Break** and at **noon** for **Fellowship Hour**, our times of fellowship.

Read **Doug Hood’s weekly meditation** through our church website (www.firstdelray.com) under *Resources*. Don’t forget to subscribe to his meditation so that you do not miss any of the postings.

Following the worship service, feel free to pick up a copy of **Doug Hood’s *Heart and Soul, volume 2*** by the west door.

For those interested in taking notes during the worship service, a **Sermon Notes Page** is available by the west door.

Follow us on **Twitter** at @FPCDelrayBeach or **tweet** #FPCDBWORSHIP.

If you are a member of the church and need a **blue** First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach **parking sticker**, please contact Nancy Fine (nancyfine@firstdelray.com or 561-276-6338, ext. 10) or stop by the church office during the week.

Members who would like to receive **email notification of members' deaths and memorial services** should contact Nancy Fine (nancyfine@firstdelray.com). You will only be informed if the family has approved public notification.

If you would like to receive your **Spire Newsletter electronically**, please email Nancy Fine (nancyfine@firstdelray.com), text FPCDELRAYBEACH to 22828 (message and data rates may apply), or complete the online form on our website (www.firstdelray.com) under *Resources*.

Sunday Mornings

Please turn off your **cell phones and electronic devices** during the worship service.

Closed Circuit TV is available for viewing the worship service in the **Quiet Room**.

Children's Worship Activities and Bibles are at the **Children's Tables** in the **Covered Patio** for use during worship. Please return the clipboards and Bibles to the table after the service.

Large Print Bulletins and Hearing Devices are available from the Deacons.

Nursery Care for children from birth through Kindergarten is available from **8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.** in the **Nursery**.

Please join us in the **Narthex** at **10 a.m.** for a **Coffee Break** and at **noon** for **Fellowship Hour**, our times of fellowship.

Sunday Children's Programs

Bible Bunch Sunday School meets after the Children's Time during the **11 a.m. worship service**. Children 3 years old through Kindergarten should follow the class leaders to the **Bible Bunch Room**. The class is led by Alice Barnett and Iva Branscombe.

Sunday School for Children in 1st through 5th grade, meets after the Children's Time during the **11 a.m. worship service**. They are using the *Growing in Grace and Gratitude* curriculum. They have access to activities to do at home via online resources with a downloadable e-book for iBooks and Kindle. The class is led by Grace Hood and Liz Landes in the **Sunday School Room**.

Youth Group

Refuge Youth Group will gather **today**, from **6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.** in the **Youth Room** for fellowship, food, and fun. Friends are always welcome! For more information, contact Greg Rapier (gregrapier@firstdelray.com or 561-276-6338, ext. 13).

Young Adults

Friday, December 14th, from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., Greg and Lissette Rapier will host a Christmas Party/Potluck/White Elephant Gift Exchange in their apartment complex. **Childcare will not be provided**, but children are welcome to attend. For more information, contact Greg Rapier (561-276-6338, ext. 13 or gregrapier@firstdelray.com).

Monthly Educational Program

The **Monday Women's Book Group** meets on **Monday, January 7th, at 12:30 p.m.** in the **Meeting Room**. All women are invited to attend the discussion on Lilac Girls by Martha Hall Kelly. Contact Martha Smith (561-276-6338) for more information.

Weekly Education Program

The **Monday Morning Women's Bible Study** on **Mondays at 10 a.m.** in the **Youth Room**. They are using the video study, "Reading Biblical Literature: Genesis to Revelation", by Professor Craig Koester. The Bible has shaped thousands of years of faith, art, and human history. Yet, we rarely engage with the Bible as a collection of unique narratives that were later united into the Old and New Testaments. Dr. Koester transforms these ancient texts into a learning experience that is equal parts educational and entertaining. All women are welcome. For more information, contact Linda Prior (561-276-6338).

The **Women's Discipleship Group** meets on **Thursdays at 10 a.m.** in the **Meeting Room**. All women are invited to attend the study on Growing to be like Christ, Doing Life Together by Zondervan and Rick Warren.

Men's Fellowship

Men's Fellowship meets on **Thursday** mornings at **8:30 a.m.** in the **Meeting Room**. Bring a friend and enjoy the camaraderie. They are discussing the devotional book Uncommon Life by Tony Dungy. For more information, contact Bruce Gimmy (561-276-6338).

Music

The **Chancel Choir** rehearses on **Sunday** mornings at **10:15 a.m.** to prepare for the worship service and on **Thursday** evenings at **7:30 p.m.** in the **Choir Room**. Don Cannarozzi is available for those who may be a little shy about becoming part of this ministry. You can speak with him after service, or contact Don Cannarozzi (dcannaro@hotmail.com), to set up a time to meet.

Westminster Ringers (for adults and high school youth) is on **Thursdays** in the **Bell Room** from **6:30 p.m. to 7:20 p.m.** Contact Jim Poch (561-276-6338, ext. 24 or jimpoch@firstdelray.com) for more information.

Holly House

Holly House Workshops meet on **Tuesday** and **Thursday** mornings from **9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.** in the **Holly House**. If you like to sew, craft, create shell decorations, or floral arrangements, you are invited to join. Perhaps you have other talents you would like to share. The Holly House is a ministry of women who enjoy fellowship and crafting.

Find unique handmade gifts for family and friends at the **Holiday Gift Shoppe at Holly House**. There are lovely crocheted baby blankets, surprises for pets, quality jewelry, tree ornaments, Santas, villages, designer trees and wreaths, aprons, quilted place mats and runners, decorations for the coastal home, and much more. The Gift Shoppe is open **this Tuesday and this Thursday from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., this Saturday, December 15th, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., and next Sunday December 16th, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.** For more information, contact Cindy Pemberton (561-276-6338).

Employment Connections Ministry – Career Shepherds

The **Employment Connections Ministry** (employmentconnectionsministry.com) was formed to provide a caring, supportive, and helpful avenue for unemployed/underemployed members of the congregation and the community, as well as for those whose career paths may no longer seem fulfilling to find a more rewarding career or employment opportunity. Seeking new employment can be frightening and reinvention later in life can be daunting; how do you get help? Our ministry assists these individuals to get information and/or career guidance. From our network of Specialty Area Mentors, who share their work expertise, experience, and knowledge, to an assigned Career Shepherd, who walks with you to help identify your strengths and talents, our ministry provides useful tools to assist you in networking and guiding you throughout the process. We invite all church members to join this exciting ministry by lending their expertise and availability to mentor or help for whatever time they may have available. If interested in doing the Lord's work through this ministry, please feel free to email us (jobs.fpcdb@gmail.com), or contact Richard Story (561-276-6338), Michaela Logue (561-276-6338), or Nancy Fine (nancyfine@firstdelray.com or 561-276-6338, ext. 10) for more information.

Financial Considerations

There is a very convenient way to **donate online** to First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach through the Presbyterian Mission Exchange which is part of the 200+ year old Presbyterian Foundation and transfers your donation promptly. Visit the church website (www.firstdelray.com) under *Give* for more information and a link to our giving page.

On December 18, 2015, the President signed legislation indefinitely extending the **charitable IRA rollover provision** enabling IRA owners ages 70½ or older to make a direct, tax-free transfer to First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach or the charity of their choice. Certain limitations apply so please consult your tax adviser.

Remember the Church When Estate Planning. Our Endowment and Remembrance Funds are two excellent opportunities for your giving consideration, be it your will, stocks, or as a named beneficiary to an insurance policy. This financially wise method of stewardship helps ensure the long-term financial stability of the church and provides a planned means for the church to continue its role in the lives of our members and those to whom we reach out, in our community and beyond. For more information on long-term giving, call the church office (561-276-6338).

Mission Opportunity

We are making **Hygiene Kits** for The Caring Kitchen. If you have unopened travel size items that you would like to donate, please put them in the collection basket in the Narthex.

Membership

Are you interested in **joining our church**? If so, we would love to see you on **Sunday, January 6th** in the **Covered Patio immediately following the 9 a.m. or 11 a.m. worship service**. In order to join, no reservations or classes are required for those who have been previously baptized.

Invite a family member, friend, neighbor, co-worker, or business associate to worship with us. Share your faith and love for Christ's Church with others.

If you are a **guest visiting us**, we invite you to participate in all of our worship services and activities.

Church Membership Directory

The **Pictorial Church Membership Directory** is available online for members of the church. There are two ways to access the directory. You may visit our website (www.firstdelray.com) under *Connect* to request a password to access the membership directory to print or save to your computer. Or, you may view the directory by visiting www.instantchurchdirectory.com or downloading the free Instant Church Directory Member's App from the Apple Store, Google Play, or Amazon App Store. In order to gain access to the online directory through Instant Church Directory, you must register your account using the email address on file with the church. For issues with registering through Instant Church Directory, contact Nancy Fine (nancyfine@firstdelray.com or 561-276-6338, ext. 10).

Pennies from Heaven

Help First Presbyterian Church support the battle against hunger and poverty at home and away. **Pennies from Heaven** is a simple act of thanksgiving for what we have received and a commitment to share with others. Collect 5 cents per family member per meal each day. At the end of each month, bring your money to church and we will collect your "Pennies from Heaven" during the worship service. All monies collected are donated on a quarterly basis to local food programs as well as to regional and national hunger programs. We collected \$515.60 from the **November Offering**. Since September 2012, we have collected \$36,100.81. Our next collection is on **Sunday, December 30th**.

Partners in Prayer

You are invited to participate in a six-week ministry of prayer called **Partners in Prayer for First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach Leaders**. This six-week ministry does *not* require attendance at any meetings. Participants receive a resource packet with the names of six church leaders. Simply, the ministry is a commitment to pray each day for one week for the same person. Each week for six weeks you will pray for a different church leader. At the beginning of each week you will write an encouraging note to that leader indicating that you are praying for him or her. Contact Nancy Fine (nancyfine@firstdelray.com or 561-276-6338, ext. 10) for a resource packet with all the details including sample notes, messages and prayers.

Prayer Ministry Team

The **Prayer Ministry Team** meets on **Wednesdays at 3 p.m.** in the **Youth Room** to pray together for all those who request prayers. This includes concerns, thanksgiving, and praise. Each request is treated with respect, confidentiality, and caring. If a request includes a name and address, a card will be sent to confirm the group is praying for those concerns. You are **invited to join** this prayer ministry team simply by calling Sharon Koch (561-276-6338). She will be happy to provide additional information about this ministry and welcome you to participate.

Prayer Concern Cards are in the pews. If you have a specific prayer concern, please complete a card and place it in the offering plate or mail it to the church office. Concerns are forwarded to members of the Prayer Ministry Team and pastoral staff.

Hospitalization

If you or a family member are **hospitalized**, please notify the church office (561-276-6338). Even if you give the name of the church upon admission, the hospital will not notify us.

Special Prayer List as of December 4th

Please keep our members and friends in your thoughts and prayers this week.

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## Symbols on the Chrismon Tree



### The Fish

In its early years, Christianity was an illegal religion. Because of this, the “Sign of the Fish” became a universal signal that secretly identified believers to one another. The Greek word for “fish” is IXOYS. These five letters were also the first letter (in Greek) of the words JESUS CHRIST, GOD’S SON SAVIOUR. By drawing the “Sign of the Fish”, Christians revealed both their identity and the basis of their faith.



### The Dove

The use of a descending dove to represent the Holy Spirit is based upon the account of Jesus’ baptism found in Luke 3:22: “and the Holy Spirit came down on him in bodily form like a dove. And there was a voice from heaven: “You are my son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness”.



# Christmas Memorials . . .

Members and friends wishing to make a memorial gift for the Christmas Season may designate their contribution for (1) Christmas poinsettias for the decoration of the Sanctuary or (2) feeding hungry people. This alternative giving opportunity, which began 30 years ago, has offered us a way to respond to hunger in our community and the world.

The names of those in whose memory or honor gifts are made and the names of the donors will be printed in our Christmas Eve (December 24<sup>th</sup>) bulletin. Please use the form below to provide the necessary information and send your contribution to the church office by **next Monday, December 17<sup>th</sup>**, which is the final date for including names to be printed. The Sanctuary will be decorated for Sunday, December 16<sup>th</sup>. Donors of poinsettias (\$10) may pick them up on December 24<sup>th</sup>, **after the 9:30 p.m. Christmas Eve service**; or, at the donor's request, have them delivered to shut-ins.



(Please PRINT YOUR LISTING, as you want it to appear in the bulletins)

My/our Christmas Memorial Gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ is given:

In loving memory of \_\_\_\_\_

In honor of \_\_\_\_\_

Given by \_\_\_\_\_

My/our contribution is to be used for:

Christmas Poinsettias \_\_\_\_\_ Food for the Needy \_\_\_\_\_

(Please make the check out to **First Presbyterian Church** and indicate either "**Poinsettia**" or "**Food for the Needy**".)

\_\_\_\_ I will pick up my poinsettias after the **9:30 p.m. Christmas Eve Candlelight Service**.

\_\_\_\_ Please deliver my poinsettias to shut-ins.



## Christmas Begins with Wonder

**READ:** Luke 2:7 (Common English Bible)

*“She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom.”*

**REFLECT:**

My wife, Grace, and I collect nativity sets. Over the course of our marriage we have collected over thirty, each beautiful and unique in their own way. Several have come from Congo, Africa, where my wife was born and raised by missionary parents. Others are from Guatemala, Argentina, Peru, Mexico and Israel. There are also beautiful sets from Alaska and from Native American reservations in the west. Two are whimsical sets from North Carolina – one that depicts every character of the nativity as black bears and another as red cardinals. They have been fashioned from metal, stone, clay, wax and wood. Each represents a cherished memory and all stir the wonder of that first Christmas.

Christmas begins with wonder. It is a story whereby we are reminded that God has come into the world for every generation and for every person. It is a story that defies reasonableness. God, the creator of the heavens and the earth and all that is them, comes to earth as a vulnerable baby, to parents of little material possessions, in the non-descript town of Bethlehem. The parents have no stature, no power and no capacity to provide anything more than a manger to place their first child. Absent is any hint of privilege, any suggestion that this family will ever attract the notice of others. Yet, shepherds are drawn to the nativity, leaders of great nations travel considerable distances to bring gifts of substantial value and angels sing from the heavens of the birth of Jesus. The story is astounding, incredible, and outside the parameters of credible story-telling. Serious engagement with the Christmas story begins with wonder.

Wonder is not doubt. For those who doubt, they are unable to see. Their eyes are clouded by a determined focus on what they understand. Wonder exists where there is hope in inexplicable love, and uncommon generosity. Wonder springs from believing that there is more in life than can ever be explained and the deep desire to be surprised. Christian wonder arises from the ancient promise of a God who cares deeply for us, clinging to that promise tenaciously, particularly at those times when there seems to be so little evidence for it, and paying attention, recognizing that God may surprise at any moment. The shepherds and the magi arrived at the nativity not because of incontrovertible proof that the Holy Son of God was born but because they were paying attention to a God that surprises.

For Christmas to be more today than a nostalgic glance backward there must be a recovery of wonder. We cannot rejoice at Christmas unless we rejoice that this is a season where images of the nativity – in our homes and churches, on Christmas cards and wrapping paper – remind us that God comes to us in unexpected moments, in a surprising fashion, and always in a manner that is beyond our ability to understand. We live in a world that doesn't know what to make of the love of God; a love that is free of ulterior motives. God baffles us and mystery and wonder permeate God's presence and activity in the world, including the Christmas story. The Christian faith has never asked that we dismiss our questions. But its promises are realized only when we permit ourselves to experience expectant wonder once again.



**This Week: December 9<sup>th</sup> through December 15<sup>th</sup>**

**Sunday, December 9<sup>th</sup>**

8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Nursery Care – Nursery  
9 a.m. Worship Service – Sanctuary  
10 a.m. Back to Basics Wrapping – Fellowship Hall  
10 a.m. Coffee Hour – Narthex  
10 a.m. – 1 p.m. Holiday Gift Shoppe – Holly House  
10:15 a.m. Children’s Christmas Pageant Rehearsal – Sunday School Room  
10:15 a.m. Chancel Choir – Choir Room  
11 a.m. Worship Service – Sanctuary  
11 a.m. Bible Bunch Sunday School – Bible Bunch Room  
11 a.m. Sunday School (1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grades) – Sunday School Room  
12 p.m. Back to Basics Wrapping – Fellowship Hall  
12 p.m. Fellowship Hour – Narthex  
12 p.m. Fellowship Team Meeting – Meeting Room  
6 p.m. Refuge Youth Group – Youth Room

**Monday, December 10<sup>th</sup>**

10 a.m. Monday Morning Women’s Bible Study – Youth Room

**Tuesday, December 11<sup>th</sup>**

9:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. Holly House Workshop – Holly House  
10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Holiday Gift Shoppe – Holly House  
10:30 a.m. Staff Meeting – Dr. Hood’s Study

**Wednesday, December 12<sup>th</sup>**

3 p.m. Prayer Ministry Team – Youth Room

**Thursday, December 13<sup>th</sup>**

8:30 a.m. Men’s Fellowship – Meeting Room  
9:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. Holly House Workshop – Holly House  
10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Holiday Gift Shoppe – Holly House  
10 a.m. Women’s Discipleship Group – Meeting Room  
6:30 p.m. Westminster Ringers – Bell Room  
7:30 p.m. Choir Rehearsal – Choir Room

**Friday, December 14<sup>th</sup>**

6 p.m. Young Adults and Family Christmas Party – Offsite

**Saturday, December 15<sup>th</sup>**

11 a.m. – 2 p.m. Holiday Gift Shoppe – Holly House

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