A Miracle of Transformation (...still in process)

In the beginning, when all the world was wild and waste...

Eventually it was cut down, and asphalt covered the verdant earth.

For everything there is a season... a time to pour asphalt and a time to rip it up.

A time to dream dreams

Wisemen came from afar...

A time to renew, replant, regrow...And the multitudes joined

And bit by bit THE GARDEN was once more.

Joy to the World!

(more photos on page 4)
Skipping Through Advent

Advent is the liturgical season of beginnings, the first day of the New Year in the life of the Church. In a nod to the undeniable truth of the cosmos, Advent anticipates the Northern Hemisphere’s winter solstice. Importantly, then, the Church year doesn’t begin when the light has finally conquered the skies. The year begins when the darkness is still dominant. (We could consider the importance of darkness and debate using it with negative connotations, but gently placing such arguments aside, the dependence on light for growing, nurture and sheer survival is key here. The necessary return of life-giving light was no debatable matter for humanity dependent on the warmth of spring and growth of summer.)

The first day of the new Church Year purposefully falls prior to the ‘victory’ of the light. Four weeks prior. So, early Christians fervently prepared during Advent, much like a farmer prepares the soil before planting seeds. No preparation? Not much, if any, result from the planting.

So, here’s a question: Have you ever felt empty after the Christmas season? Perhaps that is partly because we didn’t prepare properly. How did we spend our Advent?

If the regular ritual of our Advent is centered in shopping while humming “Frosty the Snowman,” what can we expect? Is it any wonder, when the musak stops, our spirits sag?

Like Lent’s preparation for Easter, Advent is, in its earliest traditions, a time of confession, fasting, and prayer. …which, again, hardly describes most of our experiences today. The fasting becomes feasting, the confession obsession with finding the right gifts (especially for those from whom we expect to receive gifts) …and prayer? …The prayers of Advent all too often are prayers that we can survive the season’s onslaught, that we not gain too much weight, and that we can just make it through the holidays with our wider family and still like each other. (Be honest, now. I’ve heard these exact prayers multiple times already… and Advent has barely begun!)

Advent. The further truth is that we’ve so thoroughly merged the penitential time of Advent into the Christmas season (Christmastide) that our celebration is all but over on December 25… the very date that traditionally the fast ends and the celebration begins. Today… encouraged by merchants in malls of sacred wealth, we jump straight into Christmas after Thanksgiving… if not before. We skip through Advent altogether. (I saw Rudolph listed in programming the week before Thanksgiving… How unabashedly secular can you get!)

Here’s some spiritual direction (even as I try to follow it myself)... Let us not pass over Advent lightly.

Advent acknowledges, confronts, and honors the darkness.
  Where has the darkness been in your life?
  What gifts do the shadows offer?
Advent calls for deep self-reflection.
  How are we falling short of the Imago Dei within us?
  Who/what would God, breaking into our world today, look like?

Christmas without Advent? If we’re not careful, the Holy Days become nothing more than holidays …a well wrapped season of gluttony …a sugary cake that we gorge upon in emptiness.

Advent… We fast… we wait… we pray…
  …for the coming of the things of the Spirit.

Waiting with you,
YOUTH

Youth Group

December 5- Meet at church 12-1:30 pm
December 12- Whacky Tacky Christmas Party! Ugly sweater contest, white elephant gift exchange, and collecting gifts to contribute to Heifer International. Mark your calendar, because it’s going to be a blast!

Children

Christmas Pageant in the Woods- December 5
Come visit with church friends! After playing our parts in the telling of the story of Jesus’ birth, we’ll have time for playground fun and refreshments! This link provides complete information.

New Year, New Start!
In hopes of restarting our in-house Nursery & Children’s Church programming, we plan to ‘restart’ on January 2 with safety protocols we have used since we returned to worshiping in the building.

In pre-Covid times, more than 30 adults assisted with our four groups of children each Sunday. With so many contributing their time and gifts, the load was lightened- and the experience more fun and diverse for all. We invite all adults interested in volunteering (or learning more about) our programs for children and youth) to watch for an upcoming review of our resources and procedures. (UPUCC Safe Church Policy training, along with a background check, is required of all those working with our youth and children.) Contact peg@upucc.org.

Children & Youth Team Up with Faith In Action
During this fall’s Trunk & Treat, UPUCC children and youth played an active role in the annual fundraising efforts for Heifer International and Healing Transitions Gift Drive. Between decorating trunks and hunting for treats, all had the opportunity to give for the benefit of others.
Check out pages 7 & 8 for the results of these collections!
**Stewardship Update**

As of Nov. 26 we’ve received pledges totaling $182,149. Adding sustainers who haven’t pledged for 2022 yet, that brings us to almost $270K toward our projected needs of $315K. That is obviously a great start; however, we need to hear from all of you!

Remember that the modest increase in this year’s budget is almost totally due to raises needed to address some embarrassingly underfunded music staff salaries. Since there is no real ‘fat’ in the budget to be trimmed, failure to raise our full operating budget will result in some painful conversations at the January Congregational Meeting. That’s why we hope to hear from everyone as soon as possible before the first of the year!

**Mug Winners!**

Rewarded for sending in their pledges early, winners of the mug drawings follow: Alice Jermyn, Debbie Beroth & Ed Speas, Joyce Hall, Peg Arcari, Ada & Colin McKerrell, Dan Harrell & Tim Champion, Jeff Poupart & Nicole Olivieri, Eleanor Smith and Marcia Welsh.

*More photos from garden party, plus mulch spreading, and Christmas tree lighting!*
Sunday Forums- 9 am (In person and on zoom)  
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83482803068?pwd=TFF2eXdCd2JQdGdNOHdMOGFtmdKUT09

December 5th – Faith Journey – Tyler Ung  Don’t miss this opportunity to learn more about Tyler Ung, who has graciously agreed to share the journey of faith that brought them to our congregation.

December 12th – The Legacy of Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray (Mary Nations)  The Pauli Murray Center for History and Social Justice, the childhood home of Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray, is just up the road in Durham. Mary Nations will lead a discussion on the life and legacy of Pauli Murray, a twentieth-century human rights activist, legal scholar, feminist, poet, Episcopal priest, labor organizer, and multiracial Black, LGBTQ+ community member. Check out this recent article for a brief glimpse into Pauli Murray’s Durham: https://bittersoutherner.com/feature/2021/hope-for-the-dirt-pauli-murrays-durham

December 19th – John Shelby Spong on Joseph  In a sermon delivered around the time of the publication of his book Biblical Literalism: A Gentile Heresy, Rev. John Shelby Spong discussed the Gospel of Matthew and its portrayal of Joseph (father of Jesus). We’ll review portions of this sermon and discuss his thoughts on whether Joseph as “the Strong Silent Type” was myth or history.

December 26th – No forum

January 2nd – Coffee & Tea-ology  While we in the West place the beginning of the new year in January, other traditions celebrate their new years’ beginnings at different times. However different they may seem there are many similarities between these traditions. Let’s brew a conversation about New Year’s traditions around the world!

Monday Progressive Bible Study -7 pm online  https://zoom.us/j/94118673022?pwd=NHNSNmFi3fIWT0lWRU9HMzQwR0FLdz09

Dec. 6 - Hearing Voices: In this overview session, we’ll discuss the various prophets of the Old Testament - their historical context, as well as how “prophetic voices” are understood in the past as well as today.
Dec. 13 - Social Justice Warriors - We’ll review and discuss the writings of the prophets Amos and Micah.
Dec. 20 - Isaiah - We’ll focus on "First Isaiah" and how this prophet has influenced both Judaism and Christianity.
Dec. 27 - No session

Additional Offerings

Tuesday Book Group 6 pm online-  
Watch for updates in This Week emails. Contact Kathy at kdcorgi56@gmail.com

Thursday Brew Theology (2nd & 4th Thurs-7:30 pm) Contact Brian at raleighdurhambrewtheology@gmail.com

Saturday Monthly Meditation Group online-  
First Saturday of each month at 10 am)- Contact Bridget at babspears@gmail.com
New Volunteer Opportunity
As we have begun the plantings in our new garden area, we recognize the need for a Garden Team to keep the area cared for. We encourage everyone to consider becoming part of this team. Email Rebecca at rebeccalvandorsten@gmail.com.

Greeters
All are welcome to volunteer as a greeter for Sunday morning, offering a friendly hello to all and especially to those who are new to our church. (Instructions are provided on the sign up.)
Sign up for a specific date here: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/4090544aaab2ba6fe3-20181

Nursery & Children’s Church Leaders/Assistants
See page 3 for details.
faith in action

Thinking of Spring- Community Supported Agriculture
During the past summer and fall seasons, a number of UPUCcers committed to purchasing veggies from local farmers, Demetrius Hunter and LaTonya Andrews-Hunter. UPUC plans to continue growing our relationship with LaTonya and Demetrius, as they try to make their farm and related businesses a success.

The produce raised was delivered to UPUC around 9 am each Tuesday for two 8-week periods. Two options for joining this opportunity to support local farmers include either a purchase of a full share $250, intended to feed 4-5 people, or a half share for $125 for each 8-week season. Produce was stored in the church pantry for pickup later in the day or week.

This commitment provides action related to learning in our efforts with Creation Care and Racial Justice. This relationship is an opportunity to think about the changes we need to embrace when it comes to where we source our food, how we change our diets, how we extend ourselves to support people of color, and how we grow our community. Those interested in the Spring 2022 season, please email Peter at pv2049@gmail.com.

Healing Transitions Gift Tags
Thank you to all who participated in our 2021 Healing Transitions Gift Drive. Thank you to Ashley Montague, Robert and Learla Stefanics’ daughter, and Linda Bossert, whose announcements helped bring awareness of the drive to all. Thank you to Gail Holden, who pulled the wagon from car to car during the Trunk and Treat event and strongly encouraged participation! Thanks to the generosity of all who took tags, forty children who might not otherwise receive a gift will receive one, and some struggling mothers and grandmothers are being given the dignity of being able to provide a gift for a loved one.

Creativity Group December
We so appreciate your continued support of our card ministry through your donations. Although the time of multiple card orders has ended for this year, we do have beautiful one of a kind holiday cards, as well as cards in our other categories. These are perfect for those special people you want to remember during the holidays, like teachers, coaches, hairdressers, etc. We will even have some gift card holder cards. We hope you will stop by our table!

-Submitted by Marcia Welsh

Gifts to Heifer Project Continue
Thank you to Ashley, Linda, and Vienna for making announcements to promote our Heifer drive, and to Peg for all of her support and her skill at rejuvenating the animal banks! This year we raised a total of $1121.43, which is broken down in the following ways:

-Online Contributions: $620
-Adult Contributions: $365
-Animal Banks: $136.43

...continued on page 8.
free by reservation - performances at NC Museum of Art! this year JTP presents a beautiful 35-minute concert version of Black Nativity in the outside amphitheater at the NC Museum of Art. Here’s the best part - it’s FREE for the public with open seating. The concert features 10 dynamic singers, 6 dancers, and of course a live band.

Registration for this event is open, and the museum is requiring registration for their concessions staff’s planning purposes, and to get an idea of how many people will attend.

For more details: thejusticetheaterproject.org
### upucc december calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wed.</td>
<td>Dec. 1</td>
<td>UPUCC Choir Rehearsal in the worship space.</td>
<td>7 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thurs.</td>
<td>Dec. 2</td>
<td>Creativity Group in the library</td>
<td>9:30 am</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Children’s Committee</td>
<td>5 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sat.</td>
<td>Dec. 4</td>
<td>Meditation Group. Contact Bridget at <a href="mailto:bahspears@gmail.com">bahspears@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>10 am</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun.</td>
<td>Dec. 5</td>
<td>Hybrid Forum: Tyler Ung’s Faith Journey. See page 5.</td>
<td>9 am</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Worship 2nd Advent: “Impatient Peace” (with prayers by Todd Smith)</td>
<td>10:30 am</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Advocacy Task Force</td>
<td>11:30 am</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon.</td>
<td>Dec. 6</td>
<td>Progressive Bible Study. See page 5.</td>
<td>7 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tues.</td>
<td>Dec. 7</td>
<td>Book Group. Contact Kathy at <a href="mailto:kdcorgi56@gmail.com">kdcorgi56@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>6 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed.</td>
<td>Dec. 8</td>
<td>UPUCC Choir Rehearsal in the worship space.</td>
<td>7 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thurs.</td>
<td>Dec. 9</td>
<td>Brew Theology. See page 5.</td>
<td>7:30 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun.</td>
<td>Dec. 12</td>
<td>Hybrid Forum: The Legacy of Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray. See page 5.</td>
<td>9 am</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Stewardship &amp; Finance Committee</td>
<td>9:15 am</td>
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<td>Worship 3rd Advent: “Welcoming Joy” (with prayers by Frank and Sonja McKay) Covenant Partners joining</td>
<td>10:30 am</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Music &amp; Worship Committee</td>
<td>11:45 am</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon.</td>
<td>Dec. 13</td>
<td>Progressive Bible Study. See page 5.</td>
<td>7 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tues.</td>
<td>Dec. 14</td>
<td>Book Group. Contact Kathy at <a href="mailto:kdcorgi56@gmail.com">kdcorgi56@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>6 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed.</td>
<td>Dec. 15</td>
<td>UPUCC Choir Rehearsal in the worship space.</td>
<td>7 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thurs.</td>
<td>Dec. 16</td>
<td>Creativity Group in the library.</td>
<td>9:30 am</td>
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<td>Covid Response Task Force</td>
<td>5 pm</td>
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<td>Coordinating Council</td>
<td>6 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun.</td>
<td>Dec. 19</td>
<td>Hybrid Forum: John Shelby Spong on Joseph. See page 5</td>
<td>9 am</td>
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<td>Worship 4th Advent: “Love Still Comes Down at Christmas” (readings by Eleanor Smith, Alice Jermy)</td>
<td>10:30 am</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon.</td>
<td>Dec. 20</td>
<td>Progressive Bible Study. See page 5.</td>
<td>7 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tues.</td>
<td>Dec. 21</td>
<td>Book Group. Contact Kathy at <a href="mailto:kdcorgi56@gmail.com">kdcorgi56@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>6 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed.</td>
<td>Dec. 22</td>
<td>UPUCC Choir Rehearsal in the worship space.</td>
<td>7 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thurs.</td>
<td>Dec. 23</td>
<td>Brew Theology. See page 5.</td>
<td>7:30 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Dec. 24</td>
<td>Christmas Eve Lessons, Carols &amp; Candlelight (featuring a video of UPUCC Children)</td>
<td>5 pm</td>
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<td><a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83839210667?pwd=dmFIVjFjZD12dXV3Q1pvQUtvdysrQT09">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83839210667?pwd=dmFIVjFjZD12dXV3Q1pvQUtvdysrQT09</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tues.</td>
<td>Dec. 28</td>
<td>Book Group. Contact Kathy at <a href="mailto:kdcorgi56@gmail.com">kdcorgi56@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>6 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed.</td>
<td>Dec. 29</td>
<td>UPUCC Choir Rehearsal in the worship space.</td>
<td>7 pm</td>
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