

THE CHURCH BELL

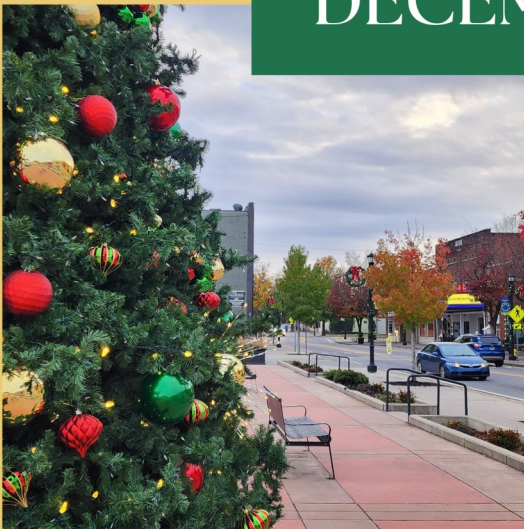


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1stchurch.org

DECEMBER 2025



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But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."
- **Luke 2:10**

Watching & Waiting

Rev. Jonathan Jonas

My childhood home was on a hill just across a valley from “the main road” on the facing hill. So, from a point just above my house, I could see vehicles approaching before they turned down the street toward our house.

I distinctly remember standing and watching one day when I knew my grandparents were coming to visit. It was a big deal that they were coming to our house, because we most often went to visit them! I knew about what time they had left their house, I knew about how long the trip would take, and so I knew *approximately* when they would arrive.

I stood, I watched, and I waited.

I feel a similar excitement now when one of my children comes home from college, even though the vigil is much different. Instead of watching the road, I watch my phone to see where they are or to know how much longer until they arrive. I still watch and wait.



For about 1,600 years now, we Christians have practiced a holy season of watching and waiting. Knowing that the celebration of Jesus’ birth and incarnation is on the way, we keep four weeks of holy vigil. We call this season Advent from the Latin verb *advenire*, which means “to come to” or “to come toward.”

It’s no accident that we squint into the darkness as we await the celebration of Jesus’ arrival. Our ancestors in the faith chose the darkest time of the year, the winter solstice, to celebrate Jesus’ birth. As John the gospel writer wrote so long ago, “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into (*advenire!*) the world” (John 1:9).

So, light is an important part of our vigil. Just as ancient grandsons and fathers might have placed a lamp or candle in the window so that their grandparents and children might see home in the darkness, we light candles of the Advent wreath to celebrate the arrival of Jesus’ light into the world.

That candlelight has morphed into Christmas tree lights and strings of light on houses and inflatable light-up lawn decorations. No doubt we occasionally lose our focus amid the festive in our celebration of the season.

Still, though, if we find that *just right* vantage point, this can be a meaningful season of watching and waiting for the one coming into our world to reveal God’s love, grace, and mercy.





Do Not Be Afraid

The world at the time Jesus was born was not that different than the world we live in today. Whether it's oppression, economic disparity or just uncertainty about what lies ahead, there are times people are afraid.

During this time of year, the Christmas Story reminds us that even in times when fear seems to be dominant, Christ's birth gives us reason to "not be afraid" and to insist on hope, no matter the degree of our despair.

Starting **November 30th** during regular worship services, step into the conversation of how to look for

- God to break in during times of fear;
- that God is at work even when we run out of hope;
- that in our fear, we are called forward;
- that in times when others are afraid, reach out your hand;
- and that Good News is louder than fear!

Learn more at 1stchurch.org/worship.

Simple meals to relieve food insecurity

The Blessing Box at 1st UMC serves a growing need in the community. Thanks for helping keep it stocked. In December, in an effort to help better ease the fear over food insecurity, we want to do something a bit different.



Lately, social media has been full of ideas to create "meals in a bag" aimed at making sure people have everything they need to make a particular dish and/or meal. As we enter the Christmas season let us fill the Blessing Box with these kinds of items. All items should fit in a gallon Ziploc bag.



While you can search the internet for ideas, we will have a link to a few "meals in a bag" on the website at 1stchurch.org/GoDo.

**PLEASE MAKE SURE THE
RECIPE/INSTRUCTIONS ARE
INCLUDED IN THE BAG!**

You can bring these meals to the Blessing Box at any time or bring them to the church office. 1st Kids Ministries will also collect them during the 1st Kids Christmas Celebration on December 7th. This would be a great project for a Sunday School Class!

If you have any questions please email communications@1stchurch.org.



Do Not Be Afraid.
A worship focus for the season

Setting the stage for the season

One of the things that makes the Advent/Christmas season so special at 1st UMC is the décor that goes up throughout the church. For many years, Leslie Ragland has worked diligently building wreaths, garland and more to set the stage for the season. For all her hard work, we say thanks.

This year, Brooke Cranford has taken the reins with Christmas decorations and she has put a lot of thought into the process. Here is what she had to say about the wreaths you'll soon be seeing in the Sanctuary.



"I spent a lot of time reflecting on the Christmas season, the colors within the sanctuary and symbolism related to the birth of Christ. The verse from Isaiah, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Nothing is more peaceful than awaking to a morning of pure white snow covering the trees. Peace within our homes, communities, country, and world is at the forefront of everyone's hearts. It seems appropriate to highlight it and relate it back to The Prince of Peace during the Advent season."

Christmas in Maryville

Whether it's the Chancel Choir Christmas Cantata, kids singing about Christmas and enjoying time together eating pizza and crafting the evening away, Christmas in Maryville centers around tradition. But that's not all. This special season is also about making connections and finding JOY in what can often be a stressful time of the year.

What are your plans for the next few weeks? Where will you find JOY? How will you share the HOPE of the season? And how can you REACH others to let them know about the Good News of Christ's birth? Find the answers as you celebrate Christmas in Maryville.



CHRISTMAS IN MARYVILLE



- Share the Christmas landing page on your social media channels. ChristmasinMaryville.com .
- Give the bulletin insert (or the bulletin) to someone you think might need to hear about HOPE.
- Invite friends and other family members to events.
- Show up for a Christmas event in the community to show your support and LOVE.
- Leave a Google Review after attending a worship service or special event.
- Volunteer to help with the 1st Kids Christmas Celebration on Dec. 7th ([email kalton@1stchurch.org](mailto:email_kalton@1stchurch.org)).
- Volunteer to help with hospitality efforts during the season and beyond ([email communications@1stchurch.org](mailto:email_communications@1stchurch.org)).
- Share a worship service on YouTube .
- Pick up Christmas notecards (coming soon) and send them to someone on your list.
- Listen to the Grace for All Podcast and share the episodes.
- Take a picture at a "selfie station" and share it (be sure to tag the church on social!)
- Pick up an Advent Devotional Guide (coming soon).
- Fill out a contact card in the pew to let us know you're here. This year, we'll have special contact cards for the non-worship events too.

Find a few Christmas in Maryville events and times on the back of the newsletter and even more at: ChristmasinMaryville.com .

Show your love for neighbors this Christmas!

As the temperatures outside begin to drop, the utility bills go up and that sometimes leads people to make difficult choices. At the same time, rent hikes are also creating problems for many of our neighbors.



For many years now, 1st United Methodist Church has relied on Good Neighbors of Blount County to help us make sure people calling for rent and/or utility assistance get the guidance they need when faced with not being able to pay the bills. Part of the Good Neighbors program is helping clients stay out of these difficult situations after they've initially been helped.

This year's Christmas Offering will go to Good Neighbors of Blount County so they can meet the growing needs for their services. You can donate during the evening presentation of the Chancel Choir Cantata, the Songs of the Season Recital, or Christmas Eve services. You can also donate directly online at 1stchurch.org/giving or mail a check to 804 Montvale Station Road, 37803.

1st Kids Christmas Celebration December 7th 4:30 to 6:30

The lights will shine in the Sanctuary as our 1st Kids Choirs lead us into the spirit of the season with their presentation of "A Day in a Manger." Afterward, the celebration continues at our "after party" in Asbury Hall (lower level). Come enjoy pizza and cookie cake, then let your kid's creativity shine at the craft stations throughout the room.

That night, we will be collecting "meals in a bag" for our blessing box and local food pantries. A meal in a bag is a large Ziploc bag filled with shelf-stable ingredients that make one complete recipe. Each bag should include a recipe card that explains how to prepare a full meal using the ingredients inside. You can find many great ideas online by searching "meals in a bag."

Check out 1stchurch.org/1st-Kids for ways you can Go.Do. and help make this event a success.



Keeping promises: December Sunday School focus

When sin entered the world, God made a promise to His people to send a Savior who would redeem them. Our great God did not leave us to our sin but kept His promise! This month we are celebrating the fruition of

that Genesis promise. Jesus is our forever King, Messiah and Rescuer. The stunning beauty of the Christmas season is that God is the promise keeper who sent the greatest gift of all, Jesus!

Monthly Memory Verse

For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)



Youth programs are getting ready to take a break for the holidays. Here is a quick look at what's happening.

- The last Wednesday Youth activities happen on December 17th.
- The last Sunday Youth program happens on December 21st when there will be a special Christmas celebration during evening youth.
- The last Rise and Shine will be on December 16th.

Also be watching for registration for Resurrection 2026 at 1stchurch.org/Resurrection.



News

FOR MORE
INFORMATION
ABOUT
1ST KIDS



Contact the 1st Kids Director
Kristi Alton

✉ kalton@1stchurch.org

☎ 865-982-1273 ext. 712



Kids Own Worship for December

At Christmas, gifts are all around us, but we know the holiday isn't about the toys—it's about the joy of Jesus' birth. We might experience joy from opening up gifts, but God gives us even greater joy through Jesus. In this 5-week series, kids will learn all about the joy Jesus brought into the world.

They will learn:

- **Jesus is the savior God promised, ,**
- **how God sent Jesus at the perfect time,**
- **that Jesus brings joy to the world,**
- **and what it means to say Jesus is God's greatest gift.**

Brayden York
1st Student Ministries
byork@1stchurch.org





DayBreak News

At the Sycamore Tree campus, there is a strong collaboration between the organizations that are housed there. Compassion Counseling and DayBreak have been sharing resources. CCC intern, Beth provide several weeks of valuable art therapy sessions for DayBreak groups. This helped enrich the program while fulfilling her professional and educational requirements.



Since the start of DayBreak many improvements have been made to the space at Sycamore Tree. Recently, the program acquired 67 FREE upholstered chairs from the Parks & Rec/ Everett Senior Ctr. Improvements have also been made in the plumbing area with a new faucet installed and changes made to the hot water system. Many of these improvements have been made using grant money from the Holston Foundation.

On the Second Sunday of each month people have the opportunity to be a part of a 30-minute worship service focused on having a barrier-free environment. In November, Rev. Jonathan Jonas shared a message of Thanksgiving and what God provides to make our spiritual and literal seeds grow. After the service people received packets of seeds from the front garden. The next worship service is Christmas themed and happens on the 14th at 2:00 pm.

Looking for ways to help DayBreak? There is a new way to help when you shop at Walmart. DayBreak is now a charity you can choose for the Walmart Round Up program. The Amazon Wish List is another way to help this Dementia Respite Care Ministry.

Contact Jill Pope for more information at 865-315-2371 or email her at director@daybreakcare.org.

Ways to help Family Promise this season

As Christmas approaches, Christians everywhere celebrate the greatest gift of all, the birth of Jesus Christ. Gift giving is a central part for many to celebrate the Christ child's arrival. This Christmas, consider giving a few hours of your busy schedules to help as a Family Promise host at 1st UMC @Sycamore Tree during **December 7th-13th**.

You can volunteer to prepare a dish for a meal (no training required). The families are most grateful to have this shelter as they work their way back into their own home.

With training, you can volunteer to sit down and share in mealtime with the guest families or to spend the night at the shelter. The training is just over an hour and must be done prior to volunteering. Please contact Case Manager Ciara Humphrey at (865) 253-3463 or chumphrey@blountfamilypromise.org to sign up for training.

Hosts may take their own children with them when they volunteer.

Feel free to contact Mavis or Amy regarding any questions using the online contact form at: 1stchurch.org/family-promise.

Looking for lovely gifts at great savings to put under your tree? Check out the Second Chance Thrift Store located at 705 E. Lincoln Rd. in Alcoa. Buying treasures found there help the families working toward their own home.

Have a most blessed Christmas.

Yours In Christ,
Mavis Ziegler and Amy Large,
Co-Coordinator of Family Promise at 1stUMC

Celebrate Recovery

In memory of:

Ashley Peery
Ashley Peery
Ashley Peery
Ashley Peery
Ashley Peery
Ashley Peery
Ashley Peery
Ashley Peery
Beverly Fint
Beverly Fint

Given by:

Michael Spears
Jerry & Frances Hodge
Rodney & Julie Nelson
Dub & Elaine McIntosh
Betsy Halliday
Lee Huffaker
Lynn Ladd
Susan Daves
Jerry & Frances Hodge
Maryville High Class of 1959

DayBreak Dementia Respite Care

In memory of:

Jim Scruggs
Jim Scruggs
Jim Scruggs

Given by:

Mike & Ibby Davis
Dwain Radford
Russell & Rose Clark

Family Promise

In memory of:

Bill McCall

Given by:

Steve Daves

Latvia Fund

In honor of:

Ron Werker

In memory of:

Carol Werker
Carol Werker
Carol Werker
Carol Werker

Given by:

Trendsetters Sunday School
Given by:
Victoria Bontrager
Trendsetters Sunday School
Gordo & Rhonda Watson
Rodney & Julie Nelson

Memorial Fund

In memory of:

Jimmie Eaves
Ralph Webber
Bill McCall

Given by:

Ben & Bonny Sugg
Steve & Martha Shields
Susan Daves

Welcome Table

In memory of:

Bill McCall
Bill McCall
Bill McCall
Bill McCall
Bil McCall
Bill McCall
Donna Doede

Given by:

Jere & Joy Ingram
Peter Towle
Jeffrey & Tina Adams
George & Margaret Smither
Karl & Sherry Miller
Bill & Rita McCarter
Jim & Jaylene Myers



Donna Doede

Joined First Church

May 18, 2008

Entered the Church Triumphant:

October 29, 2025

Carol Werker

Joined First Church

June 24, 2007

Entered the Church Triumphant:

October 31, 2025

Sharron Kull

Joined First Church

December 2, 1984

Entered the Church Triumphant:

November 7, 2025

Christian sympathy extended to:

Wayne Doede and his family in the death of his wife, Donna on October 29th.

Ron Werker and his family in the death of his wife, Carol on October 31st.

The family of Sharron Kull who passed away on November 7th.

Sandy Cogdill in the death of her mother, Marsha Johnson on November 14th.



EVERY WEDNESDAY
5:30 - DINNER
6:30 - WORSHIP
7:40 - SHARE GROUPS

Dec. 3rd - He is Coming
Dec. 10th - The Word Players
Dec. 17th - Blue Christmas
No CR on Dec. 24th
Dec. 31st - New Beginnings of Freedom & Watch Night

CRat1st.com



Staff Contacts

You can find staff and ministry contacts under the "Reach" tab on the church website:

1stchurch.org

The church phone number is 865-982-1273.
Email is: info@1stchurch.org

Maryville First United Methodist Church
804 Montvale Station Road
Maryville, Tennessee 37803
Phone: 865-982-1273
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November 30th
Contemporary Worship
Christmas Special
(10:30 am)

December 7th
Morning Glory Chorus
Christmas Cantata
(8:15 am)

December 7th
1st Kids
Christmas Celebration
(4:30 PM)

December 10th
In These Dark Streets
Word Players Presentation
(6:30 pm)

December 14th
Chancel Choir
Christmas Cantata
(10:30 am & 7:00 pm)

December 17th
Blue Christmas Worship
(6:30 pm)

December 21st
Songs of the Season
Music Recital
(3:30 pm)

More ways to enjoy the season
at: ChristmasInMaryville.com



December 24th
Christmas Eve
Especially for Kids & Families
(2:00 pm)

Christmas Eve
Traditional
Candlelight Worship
(7:00 pm & 10:00 pm)



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