

The Beacon

December 2016

OGDEN-HILLCREST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
1061 CHENANGO STREET, BINGHAMTON NY 13901

Joyce K. Allen, Pastor

The Three Trees

According to legend, three trees grew near Jesus' manger: an olive tree, a palm tree and the fir. The olive offered its fruit to the newborn king, and the palm tree gave its dates.

The poor fir, having nothing to give but worship, raised its boughs in adoration, and the angels hung stars on its branches. So the fir became the first Christmas tree.





Joseph & Mary travel to Bethlehem to pay taxes



Luke 2: 1-7

PASTOR'S PAGE

“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn”. Luke 2:1-7

We all know the story, a young woman ready to give birth is forced out into the world to register to pay taxes. We know the couple was poor to begin with, but planned to stay at the local Inn when they arrived in town. We understand that the Inn was full when they arrived but that the Inn Keeper decided that they could, at least, stay out in the barn. I guess when the street is your only other option, the barn becomes a warm, welcoming place.

I wonder what I would have done if I had answered the door that night. I hope that the impending birth would have prompted me to make room, somehow, inside. I hope that the woman and child would not have been an inconvenience for me in the middle of a busy tax season. I pray that I would have seen God in the midst of the busy-ness. Have you ever thought about what you would have done had you answered the door?

One of the wonderful things about God is that we get the opportunity to ponder that question anew every Advent. We live behind closed doors, the doors of our heart, our soul, our inner self. Some of us don't let anybody inside those doors. The, Advent comes again and we are asked to prepare our hearts and minds to meet Jesus. Will we let him in; will we let him pass through the doors of our heart and soul? You, my friend, are an Innkeeper and Jesus is asking to come in. Will you make room? Will you let him in? Advent is the season of preparation, so come to worship and let God help you to be ready.

Merry Christmas!
Pastor Joyce



CHILDRENS HOME TREE LIGHTING

Our neighbors are having a celebration and have invited us to take part. On December 1st we are invited to The Children's Home from 4-6pm to help spread some Christmas cheer. There will be crafts and cookies and music and, of course, the tree. The children who live at the home will have a very different Christmas than your kids and grandkids. Showing up doesn't take a lot of effort but it sure blesses the kids. We'll be right out on the front lawn.



TUESDAY BIBLE STUDY

We meet most weeks in the Parish House and everyone is invited. We are off on December 6th, but we will meet on the rest of the Tuesdays this month. On the 20th, we'll have a little Christmas party, as well as our study, so come hungry and plan to stay more than an hour that day. If you haven't tried this study yet, come on out. You will really enjoy it.



YOUTH GROUP NEWS

After a really successful trip to Skate Estate, we are going to do something for others this month. Pastor Joyce is leading the worship service at Elizabeth Church Manor at 2pm on Sunday December 11th and we are going to help her. She has asked us to meet and greet the residents, help people find songs in the hymnal or play or sing music. Youth are invited to travel with the group for some lunch between church and going to ECM or folks can meet us there.

On December 18th at 5:30 we are having our Christmas party. There will be dinner, crafts, games and prizes. Youth in middle and high school, you do not want to miss this party!





DINNER GROUP

Don't miss the Christmas Party at 6pm on Friday December 16th! Instead of going out this month, we are having Phil's Chicken House come to us. There will be door prizes, games, a dessert buffet and a few special surprises. Only ten dollars per person gets you half a chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, coleslaw, your beverage and a go at the dessert table. The Thrift Shop has graciously subsidized our party to keep the cost per person so low.



There will be a signup sheet in the sanctuary and you MUST pay your ten dollars by Wednesday December 14th. Pastor Joyce will be collecting the money. If the cost would keep you or your family from attending, talk to the Pastor. Help is available. This will be the party everyone is talking about. Don't miss out!

CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

Our kids have been working hard on their Christmas play and they would love you to see it. They chose the play in November and everybody who wants a part got one. Both our elementary and Middle/High school Sunday school classes are in it. You can see the pageant at both the 8:30 and the 10:45 worship services on December 18th. It's not really Christmas until you see a children's pageant.

"A CHRISTMAS SILHOUETTE"

Readings
Acting
Silhouettes



Audience participation welcome in singing the Christmas songs throughout the pageant.

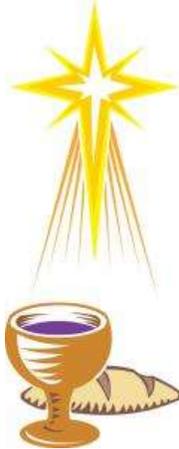


HOLIDAY SCHEDULE



Christmas Eve SERVICE

Our Christmas Eve service will be at 7pm on the 24th. It will be a traditional service of lessons and carols and communion. Everybody is welcome.



On Christmas morning there will be one service at 10am. Everyone is welcome to come in their pajamas, if they'd like to, and you're invited to bring the present you received that you like best. We'll be talking about the best gifts we've ever received and we'll be singing lots of Christmas carols.



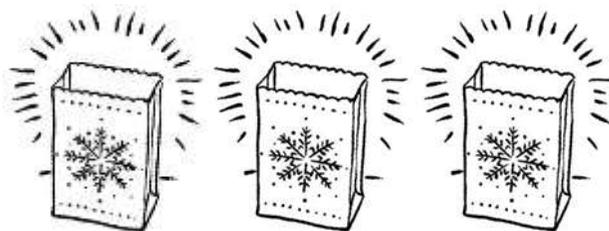
In Your Honor

John and I want to say thank you to our wonderful church family. On December 14th the Campus of Hilltop United Methodist Home and the Highlands will be lighting luminaria to "Recognize, Remember, and Rejoice" those people that have important meaning in our lives. We have arraigned to have a luminaria lighted on this evening to recognize and say thank you to our Ogden family. We have received unending support with prayers, cards, regular visits from Pastor Joyce and the choir with their hymnals and songs and I could go on and on. Also, we appreciate your support for the Walk to Defeat ALS. Our team raised \$4,100 and many of you played a large part in this goal.

Perhaps you would like to drive to Hilltop/Highlands on December 14th beginning at 5pm to view the beautiful candle light and know that one of these luminaria is burning brightly to honor all of you.

We wish you a Blessed Christmas and a Happy, Healthy New Year. Thank you and may God bless you.

Kathy and John Case



PRESENT POSSIBILITIES, FRONTIERS OF FAITH

Brazilian theologian Rubem Alves called hope “the suspicion ... that the frontiers of the possible are not determined by the limits of the present.” Who among us doesn’t sometimes imagine our future based solely on present-day obstacles? Even biblical heroes did so.



Abraham and Sarah laughed at God’s promise of a child, seeing only their present circumstance of old age. Only in hindsight could Joseph see how God turned slavery in Egypt into great good.

At first another Joseph, learning his fiancée was pregnant, believed his world was limited to two possibilities: shame Mary publicly or divorce her quietly. But his heart was open to God’s message: “What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [Her] son ... will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20-21, NIV). How exceedingly far this future must have seemed from the limits of Joseph’s present.



Christmas is a reminder that God calls us
all into frontiers of the future
we never could have dreamed!

BREATHLESS ANTICIPATION

In *Whistling in the Dark* (HarperOne), Frederick Buechner compares Advent to the moments right before a symphony conductor raises the baton to begin a much-anticipated performance. “You hold your breath to listen,” he writes. “You are aware of the beating of your heart. The extraordinary thing that is about to happen is matched only by the extraordinary moment just before it happens. Advent is the name of that moment.”

During December, silence can seem elusive, Buechner admits. But “if you concentrate just for an instant, far off in the deeps somewhere you can feel the beating of your heart. For all its madness and lostness, not to mention your own, you can hear the world holding its breath.”



THE CHURCH MOUSE

It's the most wonderful time of the year to be a mouse. We have found a way inside for the winter. Food and water and heat are available to us at no cost. It reminds me a little bit of God's grace and love, freely given to us. If you look for me you might find me at worship or at any event with food!

I am looking forward to the Advent and Christmas seasons here at Ogden. There are parties for adults and families and another one just for the youth group. Mice love parties because parties mean food! I heard Phil's Chicken House is coming with their famous chicken and mashed potatoes and cabbage salad. Then, I heard Pastor Joyce say there is going to be a dessert buffet. It's like I already died and went to heaven. Hang on though God, don't take me home to heaven until I get a crack at that buffet.



I am asking you to pray for some of my friends. Barb McKane is over at Susquehanna Nursing Home for rehab. I hope and pray she is home for Christmas. I miss Doris Slater at church. She's home but still weak. Grete Dodson and Elmer Miner are both at the VA Home at Oxford, each of them finds it a lovely place to live. Pray for John and Cathy Case too, please.

One of the things I enjoy about our church is watching how people work together. Now that we have all these youth around, they run up and down the steps bringing all the Christmas decorations down. A couple of days later, it was an older crowd that strung lights and hung wreaths and ornaments. The children bring us closer to God with their Christmas pageant and their openness and excitement. I love watching our church family prepare to celebrate Jesus's birthday.

By Christmas Eve the children are barely able to sit still. We ought to be just as excited because God gave us Jesus as the best Christmas present ever. It's wonderful to know that we aren't alone and that God is in charge. Just when it seems like the world has reached a dark and dreary time again, Christmas arrives and we are reminded once again that God loves us so much, that he would come to us as a tiny baby. Come join us in this special season. If you want, I will even save you a few of the better crumbs.

Merry Christmas!

The Church Mouse



CHRISTMAS
CROSS WORD



God sends
His Love
a tiny baby



Ogden
Christmas
Parties



Adult & Youth