



The Presbyterian Light

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joy
to
the
World



2020
2021

When We Don't Know What We Don't Know Pray

By Pastor Ray

The Christmas 2019 newsletter began: "The Christian faith is a singing faith. Whether the Psalms, or hymns, or spiritual songs that fill our services of worship, or that encourage us and give words to our worship and thoughts of God throughout each week and day, can you imagine how impoverished we would be without our songs?"

At that time, we had no idea how 2020 would be experienced. We certainly did

not anticipate anything like it has been! Perhaps, at times you have lost your desire to sing? When God's people were in a time of exile, this is how they responded to their captor's demand: *"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"* They asked, *"How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"* (Psalm 137:3-4)

We have not been in a different location, but it surely has felt like a *"foreign land"* for most of this year. Ultimately, it is not location or circumstances that are

behind the songs of faith. If it were, then we would not be singing. As Christians, however, we do sing. Dare I say, we must sing! God is worthy of all our worship, praise, adoration and obedience. When times are fair and we are full of hope, and when times are uncertain.

As we conclude 2020 (without further "ado" we pray) we pray that the election tabulations will finally be completed, and verified in a nonpartisan manner, so that all Americans can move forward. Both sides have fueled doubts about the process for months. While most eyes are on the Presidential election, there are also other races being contested from both sides because the count did not go as they wanted. If the politicians are so questioning about the results, from both sides of the aisle, it is not surprising that the general public has concerns as well.

My hope and prayer in last month's article was: "Hopefully the results will not be convoluted. And we pray that all Americans will graciously accept the results and work toward restoring unity and trust. There is much work to be done on those accounts. We have little reason to believe that politicians will be a great part of that work."

But we must. By prayer and fasting. Regarding leaders: *"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers,*

intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." (1 Tim. 2:1-2)

We do also pray to the God of all grace, the Great Physician of soul and body, for deliverance from the Covid-19 pandemic. We pray for full healing for those afflicted. We pray for safe and effective medical resources. We pray that God will overturn this calamity which has affected most of the world. And we pray most of all that God will overturn the calamity of hardened, rebellious human hearts, that want to be God rather than worship and serve the only true and living God, through His Son Jesus Christ.

As John heard and recorded, while in exile on the island of Patmos: *"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory..."* (Rev. 19:6). Written while in exile. Up-to-the-minute relevance for Christians today. As we near the celebration of the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, ask the Lord to put a song in your heart, and on your lips, each day. And *"pray without ceasing."*

Christmas Blessings,

Pastor Ray



A Surprise in the Night

By Barbara Thayer

Last night as I was getting ready for bed, I decided I needed a sip of water. As I reached for my glass, I suddenly saw two little eyes peering over the top of the rim. I jumped back recognizing that another little tree frog had invaded our bedroom. My husband came to my rescue capturing the little guy and returning him to his natural habitat outside. Seems like we have been getting quite a few visitors in our home of late mostly because it has been rainy and also because when we let the dog outside, it gives these critters a chance to hop on in. I don't mind these little bug

eaters but I don't wish to share my water with them or my bedroom for that matter.

As I thought about this surprising and unexpected encounter, my mind went to the miraculous events that preceded the birth of our Savior. If a frog scared me momentarily, think how the Virgin Mary felt when visited by an angel. She was alone when suddenly the heavenly messenger appeared to her (Luke 1:26-38) announcing that she would conceive a Son and call His name Jesus. He would be the Savior of the world. This amazing news was also a lot for this betrothed young woman to take in to

her heart, and she could not understand how this would happen. When the angel finished his announcement, Mary was humbled to serve as a handmaid of the Lord, and spent time praising God after the messenger had gone. Not only was this meeting out of the ordinary, but Mary would also be with child outside of her formal marriage bonds. This would be a frightening prospect for any young woman of that day. Yet, she trusted herself to God's plan.

At some point, Joseph her betrothed husband found out about Mary's condition and decided to end their plans for marriage by quietly divorcing Mary so she would not come to shame. However, God, once again, sent an angel to Joseph in a dream telling Joseph to take Mary as his wife for the child she carried was the long awaited Messiah (Mathew 1:18-26). Once again, a miraculous event took place that brought about fulfillment of God's plan, but this is not the end of the visitations.

Shepherds in the hills around Bethlehem were startled by an angel proclaiming glory to God and announcing the arrival of Messiah (Luke 2:8-14). This angel was not alone, and the shepherds witnessed heavenly host singing praises to God for the gift He had given. Talk about a stunning proclamation! So astounding was the news that the shepherds left their flocks to go see this newborn child.

Then, of course, we come to the three kings. They came later (two years to be exact) and

were guided by an unusual star that came to rest over the place of Christ's birth (Mathew 2:1-12). They followed the star and inquired of Herod where they might find this newborn king. Being directed to Bethlehem by the priests, they paid homage to Jesus, but did not return to report this visit to King Herod as he had requested. An angel, instead, came to them and warned them not to speak to the king who desired to kill this child. They went away in another direction as the angel had suggested.

Again, one can only wonder about these miraculous visitations that ushered in the King of Kings. Seeing that frog took my breath away, but lets put ourselves in the shoes of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and the Magi. From beginning to end, God's news came in a surprising way emphasizing the greatest event in all of history. As we celebrate this season let us think on these things...that Christ came as God promised. He lived among us teaching, doing signs and wonders to prove His divinity, and then, He willingly gave up His life in our place for our sins. Finally, Christ rose again assuring us a victory over death and life eternal by believing in Him. We must not let our busy schedules ever obscure the wonder of this birth. I can thank that little frog for reminding me of God's surprise visits. Have a very Merry Christmas!

Selah!



Barbara Thayer



Songs of the Seasons By Joshua Klatt

(We are taking a short break from our current series to highlight the music of Christmas)

Perhaps no other season of the year is so saturated with music as the season of Advent and Christmas. The hymns and carols form a rich tapestry of sound that surrounds and envelopes our celebrations and traditions like a warm, comforting blanket on a snowy day. Indeed, it can be difficult to imagine what the Christmas celebration would be without the familiar carols or the sounds of Handel's *Messiah*. It is the one time of year when even the stores can be caught playing "religious music" on their loudspeakers.

The first songs of Christmas were written hundreds of years before Christ was ever born. The writer of Hebrews makes this clear in the first chapter of his book when he applies verses from Psalm 2 in the context of Christ's the incarnation: "For to which of the angels did God

ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten You?'" (Hebrews 1:5). While not speaking directly of Christ's incarnation, other Messianic Psalms speak of Christ's reign upon the earth, His compassion for the poor, and His coming to judge the peoples in righteousness. This is particularly evident in the three sections of Psalm 72 and Psalter #180 in our *ARP Psalter*. Other Messianic Psalms with an Advent or Christmas emphasis include Psalm 45A, Psalms 89A and D, the Psalms of the Lord's Coming (95-98), and Psalm 110.

The Gospel of Luke also makes it abundantly clear that the first Christmas was accompanied by an outpouring of music and song. Four songs are recorded within the first chapters of this book, the only New Testament song texts outside the book of Revelation: the Song of Mary (Luke 1:46-55), the Song of Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79), the Song of the Angels (Luke 2:14), and the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32). The beloved

Christmas hymn, "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks" is derived from the third of these sections, and is a metrical setting of Luke 2:8-14 along similar lines to some of the older Psalm versifications.

The celebration of Christmas and Advent continued to be an event of great importance in the life of the early and medieval church. The churches continued to sing the four songs recorded in Luke's Gospel and incorporated the singing of Psalms 98 and 110 into each of the three services for Christmas Day. In addition to this, two hymns were written for Advent which have become standards in most hymnals today: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" and "Of the Father's Love Begotten." Both of these retain their flowing, Gregorian melodies, infusing their texts with an aura of mystery, reverence, and great antiquity. A third text from the Greek tradition, "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence," has also come to be associated with this time of year, as have two medieval German carols: "Good Christian Men, Rejoice" and "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming."

The Reformation brought sweeping changes in the observance of Christmas all over Europe. The Lutheran Reformers translated many of the older Latin hymns into the vernacular and added a number of the folk carols that expressed a vibrant, Biblical spirituality to their hymnals. They also composed new hymns based on the Scriptures. In time, this pattern was adopted in England, and became the source of the most of the familiar carols we sing today. Isaac Watts adapted the time-honored

text of Psalm 98 to become "Joy to the World" in 1719, and Charles Wesley penned "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" in 1739. Collections of traditional carols from the past added "The First Noel" and "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen." The Scriptural teaching of God's saving grace and peace offered through Christ inspired many in the generations of writers that followed, particularly in the first half of the 19th century. This period gave us "Silent Night," "Angels from the Realms of Glory," and "O Little Town of Bethlehem." Finally, with the completion of "Away in a Manger" in 1892, the canon of Christmas hymns and carols was essentially as we know it today.

Seen in their full context, the carols of Christmas span more nearly three thousand years from the Psalms of David to more recent texts like "Rose of Bethlehem," "How Many Kings?," and "Mary, Did You Know?" However, there are at least two commonalities that unite most of them together: a close adherence to the Scripture and a clear presentation of the good news that Christ has come to save sinners. This is especially evident in the older hymns characterized by paraphrased Scripture passages and clear-cut doctrinal focus. It is, after all, the crux of the Christmas message: "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). I hope that these carols will take on new and special meaning for all of us as we celebrate our Lord's first Advent and wonder again in the greatness of God's gift "freely offered to us in the gospel" (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. 31.).



Musical Celebration

Sunday, December 13th, 6:00 pm

The music ministry will present a special Christmas program of carols and Scripture readings based on John's Gospel entitled, "I Am the Way" in our historic sanctuary. Social distancing will be encouraged and we will plan to have audio recordings available for those who are unable to attend..



Christmas Eve Services

Thursday, December 24th

Contemporary Service

4:00 & 6:00 pm

(masks optional for both services)

Traditional Service

5:00 pm (mask please)

8:00 pm (mask optional)



Christmas Day Dinner

Friday, December 25th, 4:00 pm

At the Genesis Center

Enjoy good food & fellowship!

Please call the church office at 863/465-2742 if you are interested in attending.



Christmas Coffee House Announcement



Unfortunately, due to safety concerns related to Covid, this community outreach event has been canceled this year.

Thanks to everyone who has been so helpful in the past (i.e., decorators, bakers, servers, welcomers, clean-uppers). God willing, we will all enjoy this fun fellowship time next year.



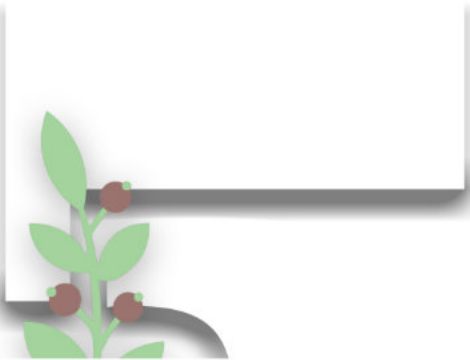
December Anniversaries



Greg & Pam Karlson	December 2, 2000	Years Married: 20
Dave & Carol Finstrom	December 3, 1960	Years Married: 60
Lois & Lowell Schenck	December 6, 2003	Years Married: 17
Richard & Mary Karlson	December 14, 1962	Years Married: 58
Michael V & Janet Hulen	December 15, 1973	Years Married: 47
Jeff & Teri Grooms	December 19, 1993	Years Married: 27
CB and Pam Brewer	December 21, 1966	Years Married: 54
Gary & Nancy Merriman	December 23, 1955	Years Married: 65
David & Darcia Munro	December 27, 1985	Years Married: 35
Norman & Sue Woodman	December 27, 1992	Years Married: 28
Jim & Christie Waller	December 28, 1991	Years Married: 29
Ryan & Wendy Walker	December 29, 2001	Years Married: 19
Steve & Alayne Busch	December 30, 1959	Years Married: 59
Barry and Karen Rehbein	December 29, 1962	Years Married: 58
Donald & Debra Elliott	December 30, 1969	Years Married: 51



Home Missions



Five Minutes of Celebration



October 2020
Fishers of Men
Celebration!

There are so many times the Bible talks about giving thanks to the Lord: Psalm 100, “Enter His gates with thanksgiving in our hearts and His courts with praise!” Psalm 107 multiple times, “Give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His great deeds.”

CRU

As my team has served Cru Global and National Leadership teams, we began to notice an evaluation tendency when they are focusing on workforce ministry results or finances. Teams usually start evaluation in ‘observation mode’ and then into ‘action point mode’ to steward what God has entrusted to them. (This is my natural approach when evaluating our personal finances, family, personal ministry...).

Instead of starting in an ‘observation mode,’ our team has challenged them to begin their evaluations with 5 minutes of celebration, expressing gratitude for the things God has been doing. What an amazing change happens within the team environment when we start an evaluation session with five minutes of celebration before moving to concerns and action points! Leadership teams have been giving us feedback that those five minutes of celebration have led to increased gratitude, worship, and encouraging those they serve. Please take five minutes to celebrate with us what God has done through the global campus ministry! Each of these numbers represents a person whose life has been changed

- From 1951-2012 (61 years), Cru started ministries on 4,000 campuses around the world. Yet from 2012-2019 (7 years), God expanded our ministry to an additional 5,444 totaling 9,444

campuses! We saw 19% growth in campuses just last year!

- Last year God brought 169,265 students to faith outside the US through personal Gospel presentations! This is the largest number since 2014. Last year we also saw 657,146 students make decisions to trust Jesus through the Cru evangelistic and discipleship website <https://www.everystudent.com>. This is the largest number EVER in a year!
- Since 2013, Cru has launched university ministries in 24 new counties. Currently, there are only 8 countries without a Cru presence. We are trusting God to reach those remaining countries by the end of next year.

“Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” Psalm 50:14-15.

Much love in Jesus,
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Cru Account: #6208905
<https://give.cru.org/6208905>



Foreign Missions

Ribbons of Love



My dear friend Maria Leal and I started this foundation 10 years ago to serve the people of Nicaragua, where Maria is from. What a journey it's been and what a blessing serving these people! Maria and I are blessed beyond words at the donors that have come along side us to say they care about these people they do not know. Our foundation Bible verse is 1 John 4:19 "We love because God first loved us." Our donors are perfect examples of this verse. They love the people of Nicaragua simply because God first loved them, and they are putting their faith into action, and

loving those in Nicaragua without knowing them but through the love of Christ/God want to bless them.

I want to share a story that happened this week... Julio, Maria's brother, called Maria during hurricane Iota. He told her he had all the donated clothes we had shipped down to take to the communities Ribbons of Love works with. There was so much flooding from the hurricane in Cuesala, he was not going to be able to stay there. He was putting all our donations up high but he was leaving and he knew these donations would be destroyed. Maria told him that there were many praying for him,

Nadir and the people, to do what he could to save the donations. [Later] he said it was a miracle but instead of rising during the hurricane, the water started receding... quickly!! He was able to stay there in the house and none of the donations were touched. Praise God!! He was able to get them to the top of the mountain this week, and Martin from La Calamidad worked until midnight last night with a volunteer from Buena Vista to get the clothes and donations divided up for the people of the communities. What a powerful story, a testimonial to our God and the power of prayer.

The church we are helping to build in Buena Vista was not harmed by the storm and the piping (lost in the storm and found) has been delivered so Ribbons of Love and Julio may start working to bring running water to the small community of La Calamidad's chapel and school.

Our God is Great!!!



Youth Ministry



Brandon Monroy

A College Intern

Hello, my name is Brandon Monroy, and I'm a college Intern here at First Presbyterian Church. I was born in Long Island, NY, and lived there for the first three years of my life and then moved to Florida. All my life I was surrounded by the name Jesus and I always enjoyed going to Church; in fact, I loved it! At the end of every service since I was two years old, I would run straight to the drums and play. It was around that time I was fascinated by the drums. Later on in the years, around eight, I played the drums my very first Sunday with the worship team. A couple additional fun facts about me: I love to play soccer and have been playing since I was two, and I love to eat chinese food ever since I was in my mothers womb.

It is really important for me to show everyone on a daily basis how much Jesus means to me... My main goal always, ever since I was a little kid, was to be with Jesus, and nobody was holding me back on that dream. Of course there have been rocks I've stumbled upon in my life, some bigger than others, but when I'm reminded of the most important thing Jesus did for me, that He died on the cross for me paying my

penalty for sin, rising again on the third day as He conquers death, and then offers us Grace and the free gift of eternal life over and over even when we fail, there's nobody I would rather run after than to be with and spend eternity with Jesus Himself. Even though we are living in hard times, Jesus will come back for us and save us from this world! I'm grateful for the opportunity to intern and share this message with youth.



NEW CHURCH PICTORIAL DIRECTORY



BRING YOUR SMILE :-)

After five years, and many requests for an update, a new Church pictorial directory is being planned. A committee is currently trying to update names, addresses and phone numbers for those who worship with us in preparation for the directory. If you have not already submitted your info, someone will be calling you soon to verify that with you.

Pictures for the directory are scheduled to be taken by Colorcraft, Thursday through Sunday, January 21-24. A representative from Colorcraft will be calling all family units starting after Christmas to schedule appointments for the photo sitting sessions. Photos will be taken in the large gathering area of the Youth House on Belview Ave, across from the Genesis Center. Social distancing is being planned so that folks will feel comfortable coming for their photo session.

About two weeks after the photo sessions, the company will return for

folks to choose the picture that they want in the directory, and each family will receive a complimentary 8x10 photo, and have the opportunity to purchase additional photos if desired. Families that come to choose their free photo will receive a free Church directory after they have been printed.

This is a big undertaking as we have approximately 400+ family units in our church, and we are hoping that everyone will participate. It will be good to be able to put a name to a face that we frequently see.

If you have questions, please call Lois King, coordinator, at 863-465-2871. If she does not answer, please leave a message with your name and phone number and she will return your call.