

THE FIRST PRESS

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INTERIM INK by Rev. Fred Lyon

Judging by their sheer volume over the centuries, no stories capture the Christian imagination more completely than those connected to celebrating Jesus' birth. True, Easter is more theologically significant to our faith, and the Gospels tell us much more about the resurrection than the nativity.

Yet, popular stories inspired by Christmas greatly outnumber those having to do with Easter. Maybe this is because birth is easier to understand than resurrection, at least from

first-hand experience.

Then again, this may have to do with how the best known popular tales for the Christmas season actually are Easter stories. Treasured Christmas lore that contributes to our memory of Jesus' birth tends to feature characters undergoing rebirth. Look closely at a good Yuletide story and you will find that true Christmas spirit is not far removed from the Spirit of the risen Christ.

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Join us for in-person worship Sunday mornings at 9:00 a.m. Register online at www.fpcgastonia.org/services.

Consider some examples.

Ebenezer Scrooge is set free from his greedy ways to become the possessor of a most generous heart. Speaking of heart, that belonging to the Grinch—who really only almost stole Christmas—grows three sizes when he realizes that those from whom he has taken all the trappings of the holiday still joyfully gather to sing about the lively substance of Christmas. The Peanuts gang discovers the meaning of Christmas when they stop scoffing at a scrawny little tree long enough to turn it into something beautiful through some tender loving care. George Bailey runs wildly through the streets of Bedford Falls, rejoicing over his new beginning in “It’s a Wonderful Life.” In “Amahl and the Night Visitors,” Amahl takes his first ever unaided steps when he gives the

Magi all he owns for the Christ Child, namely, the very crutch the boy needs to walk.

So we witness the resurrection power of renewal and transformation in stories meant to remind us of him whose birth the angels sang to certain shepherds watching their flocks outside Bethlehem around two thousand years ago. And if you pay close attention to the original Christmas story, you may well discover resurrection stirring in the bands of cloth and a feeding trough of a savior’s humble birth.

Joy to the World, Peace on Earth, and God Bless Us, Everyone,

Fred

Trikes for Tykes

Here’s your chance to feel good this Christmas and help our Presbyterian Weekday School. The Weekday School Committee is asking for your help in purchasing new tricycles for the school replacing those that were rusted or otherwise in disrepair. Our children’s safety is of utmost importance!

Riding toys are an important function in child development. A riding toy provides both fun and fitness and is a therapeutic activity that allows children to help develop gross motor skills that then allow them to build fine motor skills, such as writing.

We are seeking to purchase at least 8 riding toys at approximately \$250 each and are challenging each Sunday School Class, Women of the Church, small groups or individuals to contribute to the cost or provide the total cost to purchase a tricycle.

We are so excited that the PWS plans to reopen in January 2021 and we want everything special for the children when they return. New tricycles and scooters will allow more play time for outside activities, important as we cope with COVID-19.

Please make your contribution with a check to the church showing “PWS tricycle” in the memo line.

December Birthdays

Rynn Carver	12/1	Ed Stebbins	12/13	Marini Shook	12/22
John Bowyer	12/2	Jane Cole	12/14	Chuck Adams	12/23
Zan Frederick	12/2	Hannah Spencer	12/14	Beverly Bradshaw	12/23
Lauren Vanacore	12/2	Garrett Voorhees	12/14	Jim Smith	12/23
Harrison Falls	12/3	Joan Barringer	12/15	Jennifer Thomas	12/24
Eva Pacetti	12/3	Betty Burrell	12/15	Catherine Cherry	12/26
Alice Ragan	12/3	Sarah Winget	12/15	Becky Voorhees	12/26
Sarabeth Edwards	12/4	Emily Craig	12/16	Marsha Jones	12/27
Henry Humphrey	12/4	Megan Holland	12/16	Spurgeon Mackie	12/27
Anna Kathryn Clark	12/5	David Rogers	12/16	Geny Ware	12/27
Holt Robinson	12/5	Arthur Spencer	12/16	Dalton Green	12/28
Natalie Caudle	12/6	Will Trogdon	12/16	Alexandra Kessell	12/28
Ralph Kendrick	12/6	Charlie Hall	12/18	Mike Wallace	12/28
Chip Withers	12/7	Heather DuBois	12/19	Michael Wallace, Jr	12/29
Mary Frances Hite	12/8	Stuart Whitley	12/19	Sarah Wentz	12/29
Mark Kunkle	12/11	Anna Robinson	12/20	Sarah Park Rankin	12/30
Kay Nesheim	12/11	Jack Current	12/21	Lauren Schultz	12/30
Jennie Williams	12/11	Henry Current	12/21	Chad Johnson	12/30
Miles Keeny	12/12	Susan Garrett	12/22	Victor Vaughn	12/30
Cynthia Machuga	12/12	Wyatt Keeny	12/22	Pierce Deason	12/31
Lexie Roberts	12/12	Chrisie Pierce	12/22		

Condolences to:

Sarah McLean and Brian Levy upon the death of Jerry Keith Deal on November 4, 2020.

The family and friends of **Mary Rebecca “Becky” Glenn** upon her death on November 5, 2020.

Priscilla Kendrick-Quinn and Molly Kendrick-Randolph upon the death of **Ralph Kendrick, Jr.**, November 11, 2020.

Our Joy is With:

Katie and Ed Reese upon the birth of their grandson Brody Matias Reese on November 22, 2020.

Opportunities for Worship, Study, and Fellowship during Christmas and Advent



Tuesdays, December 1, 8, and 15, at 12:00 p.m.

All Marked Up: A Study on the Gospel of Mark

Zoom lunchtime gatherings with Rev. Fred Lyon.

Meeting ID: 841 3511 7333

Passcode: 910579

Wednesdays, December 2 and 9, 6:00 p.m.

The Redemption of Scrooge Video presentations available via E-Blast on Wednesday afternoons.

December 2—Sylvia Seawell

December 9—Bob Blake



Thursday, Friday, Saturday, December 3, 4, and 5

Black Mountain Home for Children Thrift Store Truck

Drop-off items to the Fellowship Hall on Thursday and Friday evening from 4:00-6:30 p.m. and Saturday morning from 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. All donations will go to the Mountain Home Thrift store and proceeds of their sales will continue to support the children of Western North Carolina.

All items must be dropped off in boxes or plastic bags and must be carried/handled by the donor.

Sunday, December 6—Second Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Worship Service

Sunday, December 13—Third Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Worship Service

Music Ministry Christmas Concert available by E-Blast.

Sunday, December 20—Fourth Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Worship Service

Special Music by the Choir and Carolina Brass.

Monday, December 21

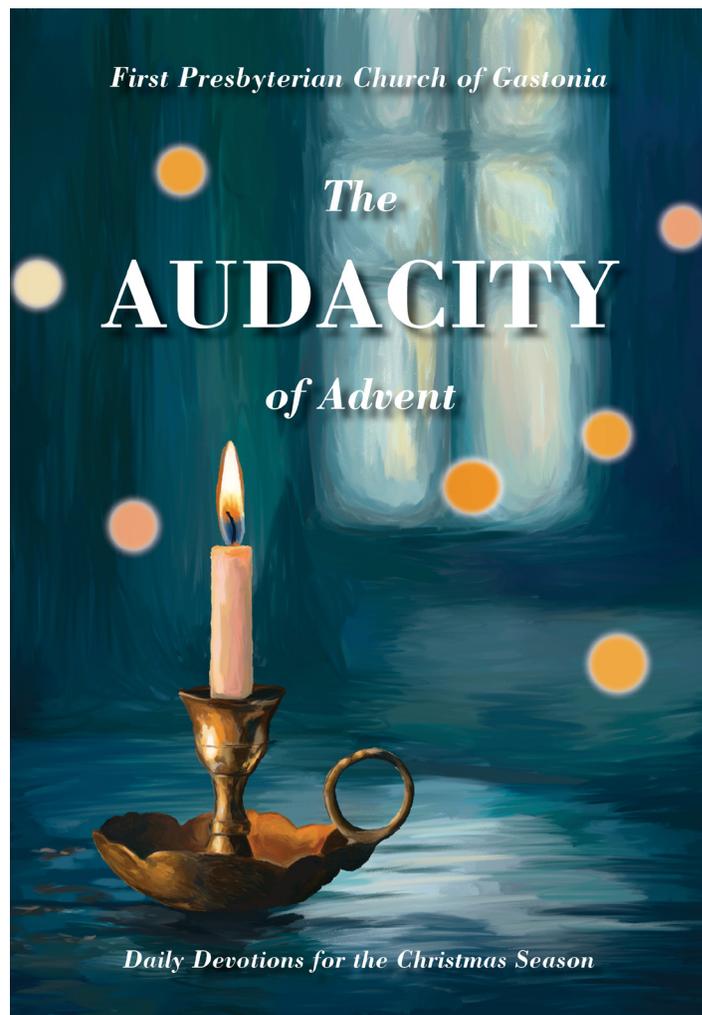
The Longest Night: A Service of Hope

Join us via Livestream at 6:00 p.m.

Christmas Eve Worship Opportunities

11:00 a.m. E-Blast Christmas Eve Festive Worship with Lessons, Brass, and Strings.

5:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Festival of Light In-Person (Outdoor worship in front circle.)



Advent Devotional Booklet

Advent Devotional Booklets for every day of Advent through Christmas Day have been mailed to individual households. If you did not receive a copy, please call the church office. Each day features a selection from the common lectionary accompanied by a brief devotional and prayer written by an FPC member. Printed copies are available in the vestibule by the Reception Desk or you can download an electronic version by visiting www.fpcgastonia.org/adventdevotional.

All Marked Up: A Study on the Gospel of Mark

Tuesdays, December 1-15, and January 5-26

Beginning **Tuesday, December 1, at 12:00 p.m.**, Fred will teach “All Marked Up,” a 7-week overview on the book of Mark. We encourage you to bring your lunch and click on the Zoom link in the Friday E-Blast or register on the church website to join us for “table fellowship,” prayer, and study on Tuesdays at 12:00 p.m.! Even if you can’t Zoom for every lesson, gather when you are able as together we will share “Food for Thought.”

**Please note that we will not be meeting during Christmastide break on December 22 and 29.*

Guatemala Microloan Card Fundraiser

This is a time that staying connected, being in touch, is deeply meaningful. Sharing stories of hope and encouragement with others lifts us all. The Guatemala Microloan Project is making available two sets of three notecards each with photos of Guatemalan women who despite their struggles have faith and hope for themselves and their families and communities. Each set of three cards costs \$10.00 (or one card for \$4). These are blank on the inside for your own notes.

In addition, alternative Christmas cards are available with a \$10 minimum donation. These specify they are given with a donation in honor of the person to whom they are sent and include a Christmas greeting.

Any of the cards can be purchased and sent to you by contacting: Susan Maveety at susan.maveety@gmail.com; Ellen Dozier at ellendozier@hotmail.com or Mimi Michael at mimimichael@charter.net.



Thank you for your continued support and prayers for this Project and our sisters in Guatemala.

Presbyterian Women Scholarships Available

A new school year may have high school seniors thinking about college scholarships for 2021. Some families may need financial help more than ever this upcoming year. The Presbyterian Women of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina offer college scholarships in the amount of \$1,500 per academic year. Scholarships are funded by the Presbyterian Women but is available to men as well as women. Applicants must be members of a Presbyterian Church of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina, and are available to high school seniors or those already in college. The criteria for awarding scholarships are: need for financial

assistance, scholastic ability, leadership of applicant in church, school and community.

Packets containing information and application forms are available at the reception desk - please call Donna and she will make it available for pickup. The scholarship application is also posted on the website of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina, <https://www.presbyterywnc.org/ministry/presbyterian-women>

Application deadline is February 15, 2021.

First Presbyterian As It Was

We are going through our photo archives! If you can tell us anything about the photo shown below, contact communications@fpcgastonia.org. In our next edition, we will reveal the details of the picture and share your responses!



Last month's photo was features Bob and Dottie Blake preparing for Family Promise in 2018. Congratulations to Esther Nelson for correctly identifying this photo!

Holiday Office Hours

With Christmas fast approaching, please note adjustments to the church office hours during the holiday season.

Thursday, December 24, Christmas Eve	Open 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Friday, December 25, Christmas Day	Closed
Monday, December 28	Closed
Tuesday, December 29	Open 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Wednesday, December 30	Open 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Thursday, December 31, New Year's Eve	Open 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Friday, January 1, New Year's Day	Closed

If, over the holiday, you need pastoral care in the event of an emergency or due to the hospitalization or death of church member, please call the church office at (704) 864-2651, and please press 5 to be connected to the pastor on call.

We wish you a safe and happy holiday!

2020 End of Year Contributions

All 2020 contributions must be postmarked by the U.S. Postal service or delivered in-person to the church office by 1:00 p.m. on December 31, 2020. Any donations received with a postmark of January 1 will be credited to 2021. Contribution statements will be mailed in December showing your 2020 giving activity from January 1-November 30. Your complete tax statement record will be mailed in January.





Nickel-A-Meal

Can you spare a Nickel-A-Meal to feed the hungry? The Nickel-A-Meal offering supports both international and regional hunger programs as a way to show compassion and do justice for those in need. This program provides an avenue for outreach and ministry that allows every member of presbytery to participate equally. Large or small, every gift can make a difference.

Our next collection will be **Sunday, December 13**. Let your coins jingle as the red buckets pass your way!

Wednesday Night Alive! Advent Series

Join us as we continue our Wednesday Night Alive! Advent series, *The Redemption of Scrooge*, from author Matt Rawle. From the ghosts of Christmas past, to the Life of the present, and the resurrection of Christmas future, this Advent study will “bless us every one” and reinvigorate our spiritual journeys as we look at this familiar story through the lens of faith. Here is the line up for the upcoming Wednesdays:

December 2: Sylvia Sewell will teach the Life of Christmas Present

December 9: Bob Blake will teach the Hope of Christmas Future

Salvation Army Kettle Bell Ringing

Volunteers are needed for **Saturday, December 12, 2020, 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.** when members of the Diaconate will be collecting donations for the Salvation Army. We are asking for sign-ups for two adults per hour. Children are welcome, but do not need to sign up. Please use the link below to find a time that will work for you!

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0548a5a72ea0fc1-salvation>

Thank You from Adult Ministries!

Who knew in March when we began video recording Sunday School lessons, that we would still be doing so in December? And who could imagine that Wednesday Night Alive! would not be meeting in the Fellowship Hall for dinner and a program into the Advent season? And yet, Sunday School and WNA not only survived but thrived.

Because of the creativity and determination of countless volunteers we have, in fact, been able to keep adult education at First Presbyterian in the time of COVID-19 truly alive and well.

There are many people to thank: Bob Blake and Celeste Crowe for having the technical smarts to get our video program operating and running smoothly. The Adult Ministries Committee: Lauren Sease Vanacore, Janet Spencer, Beth Bolin, Beth Silvers, Betsy Keith, Sylvia Seawell, Stephanie Buie, and Leslie Wallace. Our dream team of outstanding teachers from First Presbyterian Church who really came through with inspiring presentations: Pat Glenn, Craig Whitley, Roger Rizk, Russ Keaney, Beth Silvers, Sylvia Seawell, and Bob Blake. Incidentally, if you missed the Bible

studies on “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “The Redemption of Scrooge,” as Janet Spencer says, you really missed it! But these videos can still be seen online.

The Matthew 25 presentations by guest pastors David Bonnema, Jill Isola and Dwayne Burkes are must-sees for everyone in our congregation and also can be viewed online. Sadly, the Zoom presentations by Dr. Rebekah Davis and Dr. Rodney Sadler from Union Theological Seminary can no longer be viewed.

The 2021 Adult Education committee, under the leadership of Roger Rizk, is lining up more speakers with topics that will inspire and challenge our congregation. A sneak preview is that in February Lisa Marisiddaiah and Russ Keaney will teach two classes about dealing with anxiety in the time of a pandemic, and Bob Blake and Cookie Brenner will teach a five-part Bible study on St. Peter during Lent.

Blessings to you all and stay well,

Mary Layton

Parish Nurse Updates



Support for Parents During a COVID Christmas

On Thursday, December 3, at 7:00 p.m., Russ Keeney, MA, LPC, will lead a Zoom discussion and offer support for parents as we begin the holiday season. For many families, this Christmas will be different in a number of ways. Families may be unable to travel, host guests, or give in the same way that they have in years past. Learn how you can prepare your child for a COVID-19 Christmas.

Join the Zoom meeting using the information below.

Meeting ID: 881 0725 0463

Passcode: 794416

COVID-19 Testing

Do you want to have a COVID-19 test?

Visit covid19.ncdhhs.gov/about-covid-19/testing/find-my-testing to find a testing center near you! The NC Department of Health and Human Services will help you to identify where you can go in your area to receive a COVID-19 test. COVID-19 testing is provided at some local health departments, doctor and clinician offices, many hospitals and clinics, many pharmacy sites and retail outlets, and other community locations. Some sites even offer free testing. However, most sites require advance online registration, so be sure to make an appointment before going!



Recycle for Sight and Prayer Beads

As you are cleaning your house and closets during your time-at-home, please consider donating items to our Parish Nurse Ministry. We are collecting:

- Old eyeglasses or sunglasses for the “Recycle for Sight” program. Your old glasses can bring a new view to someone else in a developing country, perhaps allowing them to read, go to school, or gain employment.
- Jewelry with beads or charms for the Prayer Beads Ministry.

Please contact Lisa Marisiddaiah at nurse@fpcgastonia.org for more information!

Faith Formation Updates



Children's Ministry Advent Boxes

Family Advent Boxes are now available for our children's ministry families! Sign up online or email Susannah and come by the front desk to pick yours up. Each box includes a devotion booklet complete with coloring pages, paper crafts, and an Advent activity calendar, as well materials to make your own Advent wreath. As we enter into this season of waiting, let us all take time to slow down and reflect on the coming of the Christ child.



FPC Youth participated in "Hobby Day" where church members shared a few of their favorite pastimes.





Thanksgiving Dinner Boxes

FPC's Rise Up Youth Ministry joined forces with the youth group from First United Methodist Church to pack Thanksgiving Dinner boxes for the Gastonia community. The two groups gathered in FPC's parking lot on November 22 to sort and pack green beans, sweet potatoes, macaroni and cheese, soup, and much more into boxes to share with Crisis Assistance Ministry and the Boys and Girls Club. Together, the youth were able to gather the items for and pack 75 boxes! After packing, the youth enjoyed some socially distanced fellowship and fun.



Children's Christmas Pageant

"Do Not Be Afraid," we wouldn't dream of skipping our Christmas pageant, even in a year like 2020! Be sure to keep an eye out for first every virtual Christmas pageant, coming to your email inbox this Advent season. Our preschool and elementary children will be putting together a prerecorded video to bring the wonderful news of Christmas into each of your homes. We pray that our show, entitled, "Do Not Be Afraid," will bring tidings of comfort and joy to all. If your child has not already signed up and would like to participate, please contact Susannah Bryant (sbryant@fpcgastonia.org).

THE FIRST PRESS

First Presbyterian Church

1621 E. Garrison Blvd.
Gastonia, N.C. 28054

Return Service Requested

PERIODICALS
US POSTAGE PAID
Gastonia, NC



Service Views and Attendance

Date	In-Person Worship	Livestream
November 1	69	90
November 8	75	163
November 15	66	115
November 22	70	73
November 29	75	104

**Please note service views do not include those watching via closed circuit television at Covenant Village.*