

*Good Christian friends, rejoice!*

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4 at 11:00 A.M.**

**SERMON: "John's Conditions" TEXTS: Isaiah 10:33-11:10 and Matthew 3:1-12**

**William Shelburne, Sr., preaching**

**SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION**

**CHANCEL CHOIR PRESENTS HOLY LIGHT: A CANDLELIGHT SERVICE OF CAROLS at 3:00 P.M.**

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11 at 11:00 A.M.**

**SERMON: "Fear Not" TEXTS: Isaiah 35:1-10 and Matthew 11:2-11**

**Stephen Williams, preaching**

**SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM**

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### **THE PEOPLE WHO WALKED IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT**

We are feeling the darkness of a world where war rages and hunger stalks and illness has the upper hand. We are feeling the darkness as a local mosque receives a violent letter and the language of bigotry and hate is more often condoned than condemned. Some would say it is not possible to talk about birth and Christmas and light when this darkness is so real and troubling. Our faith says that it is precisely when we feel the darkness of life we can rejoice that Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

Think about the darkness, fear and oppression in Roman-occupied Judea when Jesus was born. Anne Lamott in her splendid book, *Plan B*, tells about a fellow writer who summed up the gospel, "It got darker and darker and darker and then Jesus was born." That is the message for your life and my life also. We need to remember that in our darkest experiences, God is at work bringing light and hope and healing.

These weeks of Advent can be tough for people. We think we should feel happy and joyful and instead we can feel pressured and stressed. If we are coping with grief and loss, it can be especially difficult. And for everyone, there is the tendency to cram too many activities into too few days. So let me give you some ideas that may help your Advent and Christmas observance.

First, listen for all these biblical themes of light and dark in your own experience between now and Christmas. They may appear more than you realize. They are also the themes in the Old and New Testament lessons that say why Jesus is important. We will quote one of those Scriptures as we light our candles on Christmas Eve, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not been able to overcome that light."

Second, remember what the novelist Sue Monk Kidd said—how the dark can be a holy dark and the idea is to journey through it to the true light that comes from God. Every life is shaded with light and darkness and it may well be that it is the times of darkness that fully form our faith so we learn to put all our trust in God.

Third, stay close to Christ and the light that is Christ. Stay close to the light these next weeks. Be in church and add your voice to our prayers and carols. Read the Scripture texts ahead for each Sunday. Attend the music programs and caroling parties. Listen to your CD of Handel's Messiah or better yet attend the concert at Butler Memorial Presbyterian Church on Friday evening. Handel was a musical genius who used mostly the words of Isaiah to ground us in the promise of light and hope and healing.

This is also a season of invitation, so bring a neighbor or friend to Sunday worship. And plan on attending the inspiring Christmas Eve service when we will each hold a candle and sing, "Silent Night, Holy Night, wondrous star lend thy light."

I close with a poem by Christopher Fry about the light which is Christ shining in the darkness.

*The darkest night of the year/The poorest place in the town/  
Cold and the taste of fear/Man and woman alone/ What can we hope for here?  
More light than we can learn/More wealth than we can treasure/  
More love than we can earn/More peace than we can measure/ Because one child is born.*

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### Sunday, December 4

9:30 a.m. Sunday School  
10:30 a.m. Chancel Choir, Coffee Fellowship  
11:00 a.m. Worship Service  
12:00 p.m. Covenant Class Christmas Party in Imlay House  
  
3:00 p.m. Christmas Concert  
4:30 p.m. Elder-Elect Orientation in Library  
5:00 p.m. Notabells-Youth Handbell Choir  
5:30 p.m. Youth Supper  
6:00 p.m. Youth Fellowships and Choirs

### Monday, December 5

9:00 a.m. Knitting Prayer Shawls  
12:00 p.m. Lunch Bunch at The Howlin Hound, 6730 Waters Avenue

### Tuesday, December 6

7:30 a.m. Morning Missions at Emmaus House

### Wednesday, December 7

1:30 p.m. Jail Ministry  
6:00 p.m. Wonderful Wednesday Dinner  
6:45 p.m. Christmas Carol Sing-Along  
7:30 p.m. Chancel Choir in Room 111

### Thursday, December 8

6:30 p.m. Agape Circle Christmas Party

### Friday, December 9

12:00 p.m. Prime Timers' Christmas Party

### Saturday, December 10

9:00 a.m. Pancakes with Santa

### Sunday, December 11

9:30 a.m. Sunday School  
10:30 a.m. Chancel Choir, Coffee Fellowship  
11:00 a.m. Worship Service  
12:00 p.m. Children's Tableau Rehearsal in Sanctuary, Timothy Class Christmas Party in Imlay House, Cider-on-the-Lawn  
  
6:00 p.m. Caroling Party and Reception

### Monday, December 12

9:00 a.m. Knitting Prayer Shawls  
6:30 p.m. Session Meeting in Stewart Hall

### Tuesday, December 13

7:30 a.m. Morning Missions at Emmaus House  
10:00 a.m. Jubilee Circle Covered Dish Party in Imlay House

### Wednesday, December 14

1:30 p.m. Jail Ministry  
7:30 p.m. Chancel Choir in Room 111

### Thursday, December 15

6:30 p.m. Grace and Joy Circle Christmas Party

## PRAYER CONCERNS, RECORD OF OUR FAITHFULNESS, ETC.

November 20: attendance at worship: 185; Sunday school attendance: 72; visitors: 40... November 27: attendance at worship: 144; Sunday school attendance: 53; visitors: 12... Backpack Buddies needs small cans of vegetables with lift tab tops, sleeves of crackers (Ritz or Saltines), and snacks. Bring your donations to the receptionist's office. Your support of this ministry is appreciated, especially by the children at Pulaski Elementary School who benefit from this program... First's Backpack Buddies ministry was highlighted by Marj Carpenter in her "Presbyterians in Action" column in the December 5<sup>th</sup> issue of *The Presbyterian Outlook*.

## HAVE YOU RESPONDED TO THE 2017 STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN?

To date, 98 households have gone on record and made pledges to support next year's budget. Thanks for this strong early response! We are on track to achieve the 2017 pledging goal. The Stewardship Campaign seeks at least 125 pledges and encourages every family to complete a pledge card and return it to the finance office.

## SCHEDULE FOR YOUTH FELLOWSHIPS AND CHOIRS

**December 4:** 5:00 p.m., Notabells-Youth Handbell Choir; 5:30 p.m., Youth Supper; 6:00 p.m., Youth fellowships and choirs... January 8 will be the next Sunday for youth to meet. Enjoy the holidays!

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR WITH THESE CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES...

**MOVIES IN THE PLAY YARD** Wednesday, November 30 the Kinder Choir and the Children's Choir (grades 1-2) will have a combined rehearsal, 5:30-6:00 p.m. in Room 215. After choir, instead of a Wonderful Wednesday dinner, there will be a movie night for children. Hot dogs will be served and families will watch "Frosty the Snowman" and Disney's "A Christmas Carol" in the play yard. Each film is about 25-minutes long and things will conclude at 7:00 p.m. Dress warmly!

**CHRISTMAS CONCERT** Come prepare your hearts for Christmas as the Chancel Choir presents a special program of music on Sunday, December 4 at 3:00 p.m. Familiar Christmas carols and choral anthems will be interspersed with poetic readings and scriptural readings. The First Ringers will accompany several carols, and a brass quintet, organ, and piano will add to the joyful Christmas music that will be sung to the Glory of God.

**CHRISTMAS CAROL SING-ALONG** On Wednesday, December 7, 6:45-7:30 p.m. join us for an evening of Christmas music where the Kinder Choir, Children's Choir and Junior Choir will sing a few Christmas songs, and the remainder of the program will feature beloved carols for everyone to sing. Dinner line opens at 6:00 p.m. and features baked chicken and rice, house salad, a vegetable, rolls, and dessert; \$6/adult, \$2/child under 12.

**PRIME TIMERS'** Christmas buffet will be held on Friday, December 9, Noon, at the Savannah Golf Club, \$16/person. Call the church office, 354.7615, for reservations and indicate if you wish to ride on the shuttle bus.

**PANCAKES WITH SANTA** will be held in Stewart Hall on Saturday, December 10, 9:00 – 10:00 a.m. Bring your children for a visit with Santa. Also, bring your camera... and your appetite for platters of pancakes! \$3/adult, \$1/child.

**CAROLING PARTY AND RECEPTION** The church will host the annual caroling party on Sunday, December 11 at 6:00 p.m. Bundle up warmly and bring a song in your heart as we visit two nearby nursing homes and sing carols, returning to the church for refreshments in Stewart Hall.

**RECRUITING FOR THE CHILDREN'S TABLEAU** A highlight of the Christmas Eve candlelight service is the reading of the Christmas story while our children—toddlers through fifth grade—form a Christmas tableau. Contact Will Shelburne, 354.7615 or will@savannahfpc.org, to indicate your child's interest. There will be brief rehearsals following worship on December 11 and at 10:00 a.m. on December 18.

**PLAN TO ATTEND CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON AND FAREWELL PARTY** After 29 years of dedicated service, Mary Louise Edleman, our loyal church secretary, is retiring at the end of December. We'll be honoring Mary Louise at a Christmas luncheon on Sunday, December 18. For those who would like to join in a gift of appreciation, please send a check to the church addressed to Barbara Roush prior to the luncheon. In addition, please think about sending Mary Louise a note of appreciation for her faithful service. For the many of us who have worked with her over the years, Mary Louise is an invaluable staff member and friend. Let's show her how much we care about her and appreciate her.

#### **TEN TIPS FOR A SIMPLER AND MORE MEANINGFUL CHRISTMAS**

1. Plan ahead. Discuss as a family your priorities. What does your family really want to do.
2. If you need a symbol for giving—in addition to Jesus and the magi—learn about St. Nicholas. Santa Claus has been completely taken over by commerce.
3. Avoid debt. Don't be pressured into overspending.
4. Avoid stress. You don't have to do things the same way every year.
5. Draw names rather than everyone giving something to everyone else in your giving circle. Give children one thing they really want rather than so many gifts.
6. Give appropriate gifts by getting to know the recipient.
7. Give alternative gifts by supporting crafts from developing countries or to organizations that help the needy.
8. Use Advent to prepare for the celebration of Christmas.
9. When your family opens presents, take turns opening them around the tree, not all at once, so that each gift can be admired and each giver thanked.
10. Make changes slowly and persistently. Don't try to change everything and everybody all at once.

--from the Bread for the World newsletter