



GRACE NOTES



Volume 11, Issue 12
December 2022

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DECEMBER PASTOR'S PEN

"The True Story of Santa Claus"

Beloved Members and Friends of Grace EPC,

One of the saddest things about Christian holy days is that they have been hijacked by secular substitutes. In an effort to reverse that situation, I want to tell you the true story of one of the great figures in church history, Nicholas of Myra, known as Santa Claus. This will be a little longer than my usual Pastor's Pen, because it's impossible to tell this story without the important details I'm about to share.

The first recorded story in Nicholas' life takes place in 290 A.D. in the city of Patras, Turkey. An anxious father tosses and turns as he tries to figure how to support his three daughters during a famine, after losing his wife. The easy solution was the local brothel, but he couldn't bring himself to do that. He hears a loud noise from his daughters' room and rushes in, only to see a figure climbing down the latticework. He grabs a piece of wood and takes off after the intruder, chasing him through the city streets. When he finally catches him and prepares to hit him, his oldest daughter arrives, breathless. She tells her father not to harm the man because he left a sack of gold coins in the bedroom. "What is the meaning of this?" asks the father, "why didn't you come in the front door and give your gift?" "The Lord Jesus told us to give in secret, and that's what I tried to do." It was only after Nicholas' death that this story became known.

Nicholas was born in 273 A.D. to wealthy parents who died of the plague. Shortly after the previous story, he entered the Mt. Zion monastery to prepare for the priesthood. During a break from classes, he traveled to the Holy Land. As he stood on the hill of Bethlehem, where the shepherds heard the first announcement of the Messiah, he became convinced that Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, and determined to proclaim the gospel.

On the way home, his ship encountered a violent storm. He vowed to the Lord that if they survived, he would go to the first church he found and say prayers of thanksgiving for a week. Unknown to Nicholas, the Bishop of that seaport town, Myra, died just before Nicholas arrived. The local priests determined that the first outside clergyman to enter the cathedral after the death of the bishop would be crowned the new prelate. At age 21, Nicholas became the youngest bishop in church history.

But his tenure would be difficult. The famine moved from Patras to Myra and the local governor, Eustathios, had a barn full of grain, which he hoarded until the price went sky high. Nicholas exposed him and Eustathios tried to have the bishop killed. Only popular sentiment saved his life.



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However, revenge would come soon for the governor. In 303, the Roman Emperor Diocletian began the most vicious persecution of Christians in history. The Emperor demanded that Nicholas turn in his holy books so that they could be burned. His reply was, "Better for me to burn than the Holy Scriptures." Eustathios had Nicholas jailed and tortured for 20 years. However, in 323, a new emperor was crowned, Constantine, who was a Christian and issued the Edict of Toleration, granting full rights to believers.

A more insidious and subtle problem arose. During persecution, the church grew stronger, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." With legitimacy came heresy. A charismatic preacher, Arius, took popular tavern songs and put his beliefs to the music. Arius was an Adoptionist (a theology shared by modern Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses). He believed that Jesus was a great man, so great in fact that God adopted him to be the Messiah. But he was not God, nor was he eternal.

The Council of Nicea was called in 325 A.D. to address this heresy. Nicholas was invited along with a number of other bishops and priests who had been maimed, disfigured and blinded in the Diocletian persecution. Arius was called to the front of the assembly and began to sing one of his heretical songs. Bishop Nicholas of Myra calmly walked to the front and punched him in the mouth. Both men were removed from the council and Arianism was thoroughly dismissed by the Nicene Creed. The theological hero of the council was Athanasius. The practical hero was Nicholas.

After Nicea, Nicholas retained his bishopric and spent his remaining years building orphanages. He was best known for playing with children in the street and letting them use his staff and wear his mitre. Years later, the church recognized Bishop Nicholas of Myra as St. Nicholas. Tales of his generosity circulated throughout Europe. In the Netherlands, he was known as "Sinter Nicklaus." When Dutch settlers came to America, it was shortened to Santa Claus.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He was a man of tremendous generosity, a defender of the faith and a lover of families, though he did not have one himself. He would be deeply offended that he has become a replacement figure for Jesus Christ, whom he loved with all his heart and served faithfully.

Big love in Jesus,
Pastor Dave



A Note About Sunday School...

The Christian Foundations of Life has been a great Sunday School class so far. Very interesting and lots to talk about! Here is the December line-up if you would like to join in!

- 12/4—Truth Project "Sociology"
- 12/11—Restoration of Labor and Economics
- 12/18—Truth Project "Labor"
- 12/25—No Sunday School
- 1/1—No Sunday School

***Sunday School will resume on 1/8*

Evangelism Task Force

“As we read this article, it’s a good thing to remember Who is in charge. As we think about being more evangelistic, we can rest in the fact that even though we are commanded to do so, the work remains with God. We are to be obedient to His leading and stay close to Him.”

The Key to the Missionary’s Work

By Oswald Chambers

Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..." —Matthew 28:18-19

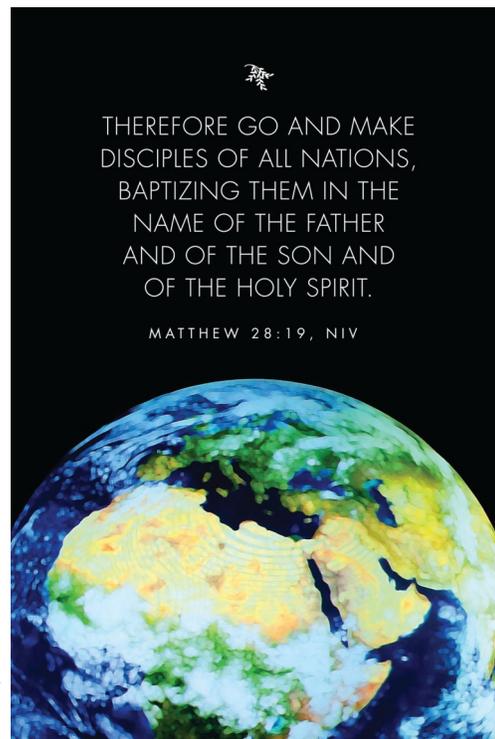
The key to the missionary’s work is the authority of Jesus Christ, not the needs of the lost. We are inclined to look on our Lord as one who assists us in our endeavors for God. Yet our Lord places Himself as the absolute sovereign and supreme Lord over His disciples. He does not say that the lost will never be saved if we don’t go— He simply says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...” He says, “Go on the basis of the revealed truth of My sovereignty, teaching and preaching out of your living experience of Me.”

“Then the eleven disciples went...to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them” (Matthew 28:16). If I want to know the universal sovereignty of Christ, I must know Him myself. I must take time to worship the One whose name I bear. Jesus says, “Come to Me...”— that is the place to meet Jesus— “all you who labor and are heavy laden...” (Matthew 11:28)— and how many missionaries are! We completely dismiss these wonderful words of the universal Sovereign of the world, but they are the words of Jesus to His disciples meant for here and now.

“Go therefore...” To “go” simply means to live. Acts 1:8 is the description of *how* to go. Jesus did not say in this verse, “Go into Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria,” but, “...you shall be *witnesses* to Me in [all these places].” He takes upon Himself the work of sending us.

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you...” (John 15:7)— that is the way to keep *going*. Where we are placed is then a matter of indifference to us because God sovereignly engineers our *goings*.

“None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus...” (Acts 20:24). That is how to keep going until we are gone from this life.



Thank you for all the friends who helped clean up after Hurricane Ian!



By Elder Linda Pool

ISN'T HE?

Isn't He beautiful,
Beautiful, oh isn't He?
Prince of Peace Son of God,
Isn't He?

Isn't He wonderful,
Wonderful, oh isn't He?
Counselor Almighty God,
Isn't He, Isn't He?

---John Wimber

How can we be friends with this infinitely holy, always perfect God? Even on good days, we probably make someone angry. Without even trying, we disappoint people. Between the cracks of our intentional living, careless words slip out.

Then there's our Friend: Beautiful. Spotless. Capable. Wonderful. Able to always counsel us. Almighty. How can He want to be with *us*?

Our relationship only works because Jesus knows how to lovingly deal with our sinfulness. over and over he treats us as His friends. When we are misled, make poor choices, or retreat into unbelief, Jesus still upholds our dignity. He is able to convict our behavior without assassinating our character. He never sacrifices being loving for the sake of being right.

How different this is from how Satan would treat us. Instead of giving us grace, he wishes to disgrace us. Satan's desire is for us to feel disapproved, disowned, and discarded.

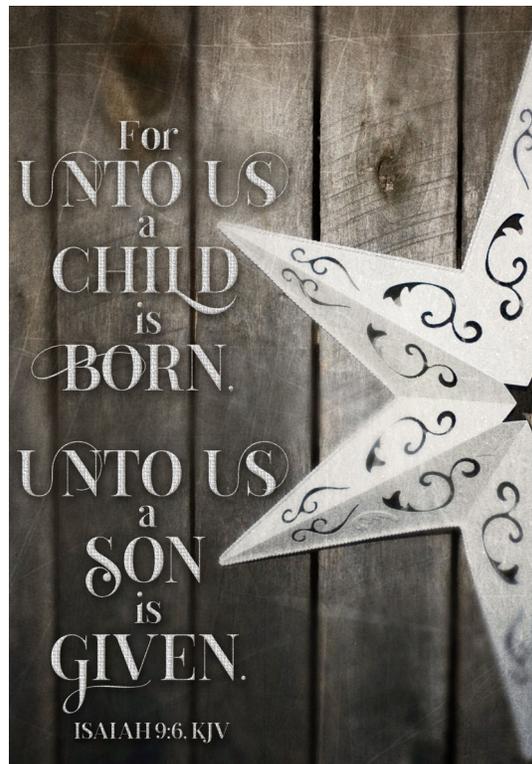
But not our wonderful friend, Jesus! No matter how marred or buried His image in us seems, Jesus still sees Himself in us. Underneath our woeful behavior, He sees beauty---beauty that He refuses to give up on until it is shined and polished and made perfect like Himself.

Your perfect friend believes in what He put in you. Such love is so far beyond words that all we can say is: "Isn't He wonderful?"

For unto 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. Isaiah 9:6

PRAYER: Express your gratitude for having a Savior who treats you with such dignity. Soak in His love for you until the image He sees becomes your vision too.

From: *Songs 4 Worship presents "Open the Eyes of My Heart"*



Ann Johnson would like to thank everyone for the prayers and special thanks to the Prayer Shawl Committee for the precious prayer mat they blessed her with!





Stephanie Kondo—2nd
 Marvin Robertson—8th
 Jan Bass—13th
 Jim Davids—13th
 Denise Carpenter—18th
 Lynda Spiegel—20th
 Jim Reed—21st
 Charlene Hagy—31st



Oswald & Joyce Lewis—13th
 Paul & Georgia McWilliams—15th
 Ben Schaeffer & Nancy Norwood—16th
 Rich & Holly Gailey—17th
 Craig & Cheryl Sexton—17th
 Dave & Pat Ghen—26th

We're looking for a few friends to help with cleaning! Can you spare one day a month to help keep Grace beautiful? Let Mandy know and she will give you details on what we need help with!



Want to know where you can serve with the gifts God has blessed you with? Just ask Mandy and she can give you a list of opportunities we have right here at Grace!



Last
 Friday
 Women's
 Breakfast

December 30th at 8:30am
 at Wolfy's in Leesburg



Pastor Dave Dorst
 Pastor John Fraser
 Pastor Rick Rosenkrans
 Bill Frakes (2024)
 Jack Homoney (2023)
 Wally Klee, Sr. (2023)
 Kris Ogden (2022)
 Marvin Pool (2023)
 Shelby Reed (2024)
 Al Rode, Jr. (2023)
 Jim Teets (2024)



Prayer Time with Pastor John
 December 1st only
 at 1:00pm

Tell us how we can pray for you!
 GraceEPCLeesburg@gmail.com
 (352) 552-0052.

***We will have the last prayer meeting on 12/1/22
 and then resume on 1/19/23*



The Widow's Luncheon
 will be on

Thursday, December 15th at 11:30am
 Pot Luck at Sue's House

Please let Sue know if you are attending by
 Sunday, December 11th.



Stewardship and
Finance Committee

STEWARDSHIP & FINANCE

WOW! December already. You are starting to think about Christmas and New Year's. I, however, am thinking about the financial stability of our church. The Stewardship & Finance Committee has submitted a proposed budget for 2023 to the Session for their consideration and approval. That budget is about 10% lower than this year's because we did not make our projected income target in 2022. So I am wondering what will happen next year as we try to expand our ministry to reach new currently unchurched Christians and more importantly those that have not accepted Christ as their savior.

Our current financial needs are about \$190,000 to cover salaries, maintenance, insurance, and office supplies like printing and postage. Then we add to that our missions support which is at least 10% of our collections and get to about \$209,000. The amount above that goes for our support of our EPC Presbytery who is working to plant new churches, choir music, outreach, publicity, and sometimes some unprojected expenses. For example, this year we spent \$5000 for roofing repairs over the front section of the building. Please keep in mind that this facility is quite old and therefore needs constant attention.

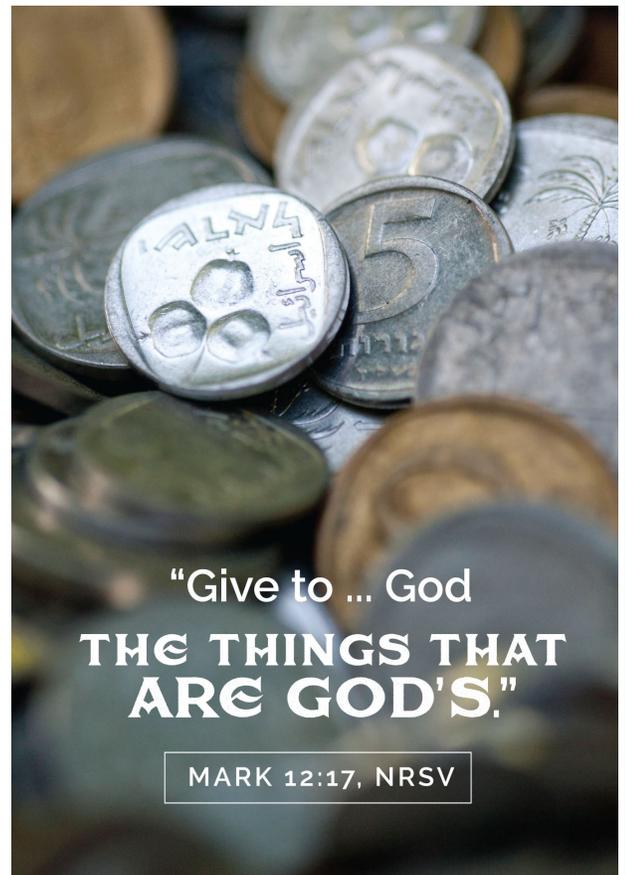
With this in mind, consider our desire to build a new facility on our property down the road and ask yourself how that will ever happen. In my opinion it will only happen if we all start to focus on that goal, pray about it and pledge to provide the financial resources necessary to make it happen. Realistically we will need about \$2,000,000 to complete the project. Currently we have about \$600,000 in our building fund. We need 100 of you to pledge to provide \$15,000 to \$20,000 over the next couple years specifically for this purpose while still supporting our current operations with your regular giving.

Think about this. With that level of commitment we could be worshipping in a new larger building with all the facilities that we need and it would be paid for. Stop now and ponder that for a moment. That is **AWSOME!**

Some of you, if you are like me, still have to take your RMD from your IRA's for this year. I have been waiting for the values to go back up but realize that there is not much time left. So, I am looking at a way to do that with the least amount of financial pain to me. I discovered that I can have my IRA broker issue a check on my IRA account directly to this church. Those funds never go into my regular checking or saving accounts and therefore they will **NOT** be counted to me as income, and I will not have to pay any taxes but they do satisfy my RMD requirement for this year. Please give that some thought not only for this year but also going forward as you prayerfully plan your continued support for the growth of our church. ****Please be sure to check with your tax advisor to be sure that this applies to you.*

One final thought, as we continue our search for a new pastor, please keep the search committee in your prayers.

Dave Hoffmeyer ~ Stewardship & Finance



"Give to ... God
**THE THINGS THAT
ARE GOD'S."**

MARK 12:17, NRSV

Access-Life Ministries

Access-Life had their “Fall Farm Day” in East Tennessee and what a blessed event it was!



The goal was to share the love and gospel of Jesus with individuals and families living with disabilities. They wanted to bless those who attended with respite, fun, fellowship, and hope. All in the name of Jesus!

There were animals including horses, archery, arts, crafts, games, airsoft, hay rides, candied apples, food and more! It was a real Farmbalooza!!



ShoeBox Update: We packed 68 ShoeBoxes!!!! WOO HOO!!!!

Thank you everyone!!!



This program features biblical, Christ-centered teaching that focuses on grief topics associated with the death of a loved one. The DVD seminar features nationally respected grief experts and real-life stories of people, followed by a small group discussion about what was viewed. Past participants have related how helpful the information and follow-up discussions were to them.

Many grieving people find they are only beginning the work of healing when friends or family have returned to their daily life routines. Too often people, including Christians, tend to stuff their grief instead of allowing it to do the God-given work for which it is intended. Don't allow fear of what others may think to keep you from what could help you. Confidentiality is very much a part of this program.

Your bereavement experience may be recent or not so recent. You will find encouragement, comfort and help in grieving the death of a spouse, child, parent, sibling, other family member, or friend. No matter what the cause of your loved one's death, this is an opportunity to be around people who understand what you are feeling. You will learn how to recognize the symptoms of being stuck in grief and that you do not need to live in bondage to certain emotions. You will learn valuable information about facing your new normal in life and renewing your hope for the future.

Weekly on Mondays, beginning January 9th from 10:00am—12:00pm
in the Tea Room

Cost: Free

Child care: No

Any questions, call 352-552-0052

To register, you can go online to GriefShare.org and search for our group, or call the church office at 352-552-0052



Reformation Sunday!!

What a blessed time we had together as we celebrated the Reformation! We were able to enjoy the wonderful sounds of the bagpipe which takes us back to our Presbyterian Scottish heritage. Such a lovely time of worship! If you missed it, you can go back and watch in on our YouTube Channel. Just search for Grace EPC Leesburg.



December 2022

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 1:00pm Prayer Time with Pastor John	2 Stephanie Kondo Birthday	3
4 Communion Sunday 9:00am Sunday School 9:45am Coffee & Fellowship 10:30am Worship	5 6:30pm Royal Highlands Small Group	6 8:00am Perkins Men's Bible Study	7 9:45am Women's Bible Study 2:30pm Villages Small Group 4:30pm Choir Rehearsal	8 10:00am Finance Committee Meeting 10:30am Plantation Small Group Marvin Robertson Birthday	9	10
11 9:00am Sunday School 9:45am Coffee & Fellowship 10:30am Worship	12 6:30pm Royal Highlands Small Group	13 8:00am Perkins Men's Bible Study Jan Bass Birthday Jim Davids Birthday Oswald & Joyce Lewis Anniversary	14 2:30pm Villages Small Group 4:30pm Choir Rehearsal	15 11:30am Widow's Luncheon Paul & Georgia McWilliams Anniversary	16 Ben Schaeffer & Nancy Norwood Anniversary	17 Rich & Holly Gailey Anniversary Craig & Cheryl Sexton Anniversary
18 9:00am Sunday School 9:45am Coffee & Fellowship 10:30am Worship Denise Carpenter Birthday	19 6:30pm Royal Highlands Small Group	20 8:00am Perkins Men's Bible Study 10:00am Session Meeting Lynda Spiegel Birthday	21 4:30pm Choir Rehearsal Jim Reed Birthday	22 10:30am Plantation Small Group	23	24 6:30pm Christmas Eve Service 
25 Christmas Day!! 9:45am Coffee & Fellowship 10:30am Worship 	26 6:30pm Royal Highlands Small Group Dave & Pat Chen Anniversary	27	28	29	30 8:30am Women's Breakfast	31 Charlene Hagy Birthday New Year's Eve 

Happy Birthday Grace!!

What a wonderful celebration we had!!



Thank You to Each One in Grace EPC

I wish to thank each one in Grace EPC for your prayers and compassion during Daisy's extended illness and her death. Thank you for your cards and your kind words of comfort. Thank you especially to those who attended the Memorial Service for Daisy. A special thanks to Beverly Sapp for playing the hymns Daisy had chosen and special thanks to Paul Chermak for sounding God's trumpet call. On her last day at the hospital, Daisy was alert enough to know God was calling her home. A special thanks to Pastor John for his visits and reading Scripture and prayer at Daisy's burial. Daisy McCoy Hoffman was buried at the Florida National Cemetary, near Bushnell. The inscription was limited, and Daisy's inscription reads: *Ideal Military Wife and Mother.*

Love, Wallace

**Wallace would like to let folks know that each of the books that he gifted were inscribed on the inside if you could check and make sure you have received the correct copy. If you discover the name of another member, you can return the book to Grace EPC and receive the correct book.*

December Sermon Schedule

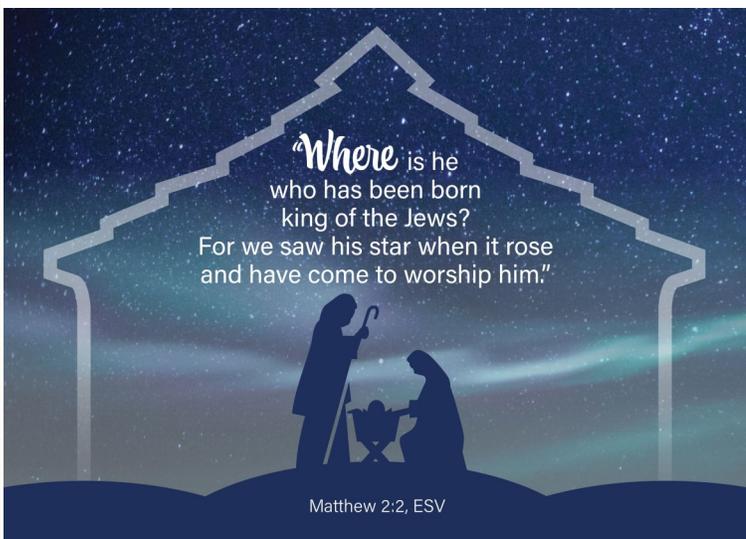
“Minor” Characters in the Christmas Story

- Dec 4th Herod
- Dec 11th Simeon
- Dec 18th Anna
- Dec 24th John the Baptist
- Dec 25th Jesus in the Temple



THE CHILD GREW AND
BECAME STRONG,
FILLED WITH
WISDOM;
AND THE FAVOR OF GOD
WAS UPON HIM.

Luke 2:40





2022 Christmas Stroll

Join us on **Friday, December 9th** from **6-8 pm** for a self-guided stroll around the 8 ministries of the **Christian Care Center**.

ENJOY

- ▶ Christmas treats
- ▶ Christmas music
- ▶ Christmas decorations
- ▶ Your favorite CCC characters

Save time by preregistering at www.ChristianCareCenter.org or by scanning the QR code to the right.



📍 **1210 West Main Street, Leesburg, Florida 34748**

Please park in the grass parking lot next to our Medical Center on the corner of Main Street and 13th Street.

Call **352-464-6373** with any questions.



The Star and the Cross

*“My command is this: Love one another as I have loved you.”
John 15:12*

December, the celebration of the birth of Jesus, our Lord and Savior.



Our Prayer Shawl ladies have been hard at work this year and the “Gift Of Love” has been spreading far and wide. We had a church wide blessing on November 13. I hope you stopped by to see the work of these ladies and know that these lapghans will be a blessing to many.

As you celebrate with your family this Christmas maybe you know of someone who would be blessed with a lapghan. We have cards in the back of the pews. Please fill one out if you know of someone in need of comfort and the assurance of God’s love.

In the last six months the Prayer Shawl Ministry has given 21 lapghans, 2 bracelets, 2 pocket crosses, and 2 mats to the congregation and the community. Your Prayer Shawl Ministry has touched a total of 52 folks this year.

MERRY CHRISTMAS GRACE EPC

Blessings from your Prayer Shawl Committee,
Molly Bod, Mary Arnold, Alice Crotty, Connie Deatherage, Gail Edelman, Peggy Ernest, Jill Fraser, Jean Howse-Henke, Lois Schielke, Judy Scott, Shirley Robertson



KNIT. CROCHET. PRAY.



Worship: 700 S. 9th St., Leesburg, FL

Mailing: P. O. Box 490001

Leesburg, FL 34749

352-552-0052

Rev. Dr. Dave Dorst

Email: GraceEPCLeesburg@gmail.com

Website: GraceEPC.church

Like us on Facebook: Grace EPC

All activities are tentative and subject to change.

SUNDAYS:

- 9:00 AM ~ Sunday School (*No Sunday School on 12/25 and 1/1*)
- 9:45 AM ~ Fellowship Time
- 10:30 AM ~ Worship Service

MONDAYS:

- 6:30 PM ~ Royal Highlands Small Group

TUESDAYS:

- 8:00 AM ~ Men's Bible Study & Breakfast @ Perkins (*None on 12/27*)
- 10:00 AM ~ Session Meeting (*12/20*)

WEDNESDAYS:

- 9:45 AM ~ Women's Bible Study (*only on 12/7*)
- 2:30 PM ~ Villages Small Group
- 4:30 PM ~ Choir Rehearsal (*No Choir on 12/28*)

THURSDAYS:

- 10:00 AM ~ Stewardship & Finance Committee Meeting (*12/8*)
- 10:30 AM ~ Plantation Small Group (*12/8 & 12/22*)
- 11:30 AM ~ Widow's Luncheon (*12/15*)
- 1:00 PM ~ Prayer Time with Pastor John (*12/1 only*)

FRIDAYS:

- 8:30 AM ~ Last Friday Women's Breakfast (*12/30*) ~ *Wolfy's*

SATURDAYS:

- 6:30 PM ~ Christmas Eve Worship Service