

The Spark



Celebrating Christ's Birth

It is difficult to believe that another year has passed and we are once again in the advent season. This is the time of year when Christians often engage in discussions about when Jesus was truly born, Was it on December 25 (or was it at another time of the year)? In reality, it was likely somewhat earlier in the fall; probably closer to the Jewish holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. However, it could also have been as late as the weeks that we know as Passover (which typically is in late March or early April).

In addition, some have suggested that Christians should not celebrate Christmas on December 25 because the event has become much more of a consumer activity than a sacred holiday. They also claim that the modern celebration of Christmas has too many Pagan roots behind it, in particular its date being very close to the winter solstice (December 21) and the ancient Roman celebration of a festival called Saturnalia.

I really do not find these to be useful debates, as they take our minds off the real question. As we consider all the challenges in life and humanity's great need for a Savior to free us from the eternal consequences of sin, shouldn't our discussion be focused on the fact that Jesus was born instead of *when* he was born? Shouldn't our

focus be about celebrating his birth instead of debating the *timing* of his birth?

As we go through this Advent season and enter the beginning of a new year, let us focus on the fact that Jesus was born, the reason why he was born, who he is, that he went to the cross, and that he rose from the grave. Let us remain focused on the great hope of the Christian faith which is that Jesus is coming again to receive all who believe. Let's not descend into unproductive speculations, because they lead us down dead-end roads.

May the celebration of Christ's birth truly be a time of peace in the hearts of men and women everywhere. Ask the Lord for his guidance and his blessing, and ask the Holy Spirit to bring his wisdom into all of our lives.

Merry Christmas and God bless you all,

Jim & Terri

Pastor Jim Huber

**December
2024-
January
2025**

**First
Union
Church**

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A Matter of Prayer

Christmas Prayer of Thanks: Gracious God, on this sacred day, we gather with hearts full of gratitude for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank you for the love that brought Him to us and for the hope that His birth brings to the world. As we celebrate Christmas, may our hearts overflow with thanksgiving for the ultimate gift of salvation. Amen.

Christmas Prayer for Peace: Prince of Peace, on this holy night, we lift our prayers for peace in our hearts, in our homes, and in the world. May the message of Christmas be a beacon of hope, guiding us to strive for harmony and understanding with one another. Let your peace reign in our lives as we seek to live in the light of your love. Amen.

Christmas Prayer of Joy: Heavenly Father, as we celebrate the birth of your Son, fill our hearts with the joy that comes from knowing Him. May the joy of Christmas be a constant presence in our lives, reminding us of the true source of happiness found in Jesus Christ. Let us share this joy with others and be a reflection of your love in the world. Amen.

Our church has been reeling with the deaths of two of our most faithful members within just days of each other.

**Randy Dunn and Dick Carr
are walking with Jesus now!**

Please keep praying for the following people:

Jack Hays has dealt with a lot of pain and suffering. his diabetic situation is critical, plus he has many other ailments, including mesenteric artery dissection. His sister, **Victoria Gulder**, asks for prayer for his healing and recovery.

Pray for continued recovery for **Norm Perkins**, who lost part of a finger due to an accident and infection.

Say an extra prayer for **Bertha Carr**, who lost her husband of many years and is no longer able to live alone.

Lynda VandeVusse is doing well following her knee replacement surgery, but it takes time to regain strength.

Joyce Vander Werp is recovering well from eye surgery.

Sherri Huff is zipping around on her scooter after having foot surgery but keep praying for a complete recovery.

Sherri & George Huff just became grandparents again with the birth of their son Jordan Huff's new baby.

Continue to pray for peace of heart for **Jordan and Miranda Sweeney** on the loss of their stillborn daughter.

Pray for **Janette Renaud** who has some health Concerns.

Lisa Zyble, Kim Dunn's niece, had a lumpectomy recently and will start radiation therapy in January. Please pray for healing and peace for Lisa and her family.

Pray for the staff and residents at Cedar Cove Assisted Living, Cedar Bay Camp & Retreat Center, Northwoods Christian Camp, Les Cheneaux Community Schools, and First Union Church.

The **Berryhill family** has been blessed with two beautiful great-granddaughters, both born in November. Their names are **Amelia Rose** and **Penelope Marie**. We prayed for Penelope prior to her birth, as it was thought she might have some health problems, but she does not and is doing well. The power of prayer is alive and well.

Madge Berryhill is still suffering with a very painful back. She is looking into seeing a new specialist for help.

Lynn Forrester has also had severe back trouble and had surgery December 13 in Grand Rapids. She is now recovering at home. Her sister, **Amy Bristol**, brought her down for surgery and is able to stay with her to help out and take her to appointments.

C.S. Lewis was a favorite author of my dad.
-Sue Rye

Marcia Perkins put this on Facebook, which I thought was a really good quote:

**"Your body does not have a soul.
Your soul has a body."**

C.S. Lewis

Board Highlights

The November meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m. and was opened with prayer by **Mike Bolcer**.

Attendance – Present: Jim Huber, Mike Bolcer, Mike Jellison, Rick Wilson, Mike Davis, Terry Moore, Del Jacob, George Huff, Jeremy Bigelow, Marcia Perkins.

Minutes of the October meeting were reviewed.

Jellison moved, **Jacob** second to accept as written. Passed.

Treasurer's Report – Rick Wilson

Brief review of current activity and processes.

See attached form. Balances look very good.

The end of month statement is not yet available as of meeting time

Discussion of a 7-month CD investment - 4 Front bank in Pickford

Quickbooks - ongoing discussion of future transition to a cloud-based version of the software.

An additional debit card has several hoops to jump through - details being worked out.

Moved **Davis**, second **Bigelow** to approve report as submitted. Passed.

Pastor's Report – Jim Huber

Numerous updates, many positive things

Attendance has been excellent (+/- 120). Very encouraging to see

Updates on health of two long-time members

Elder's Report – Mike Bolcer

Reflections on the Men's banquet in early November. Great event - well attended.

Deacon's Report – Rick Wilson (et al)

Outside stairwell to the Manse apartment (Jerry Dutcher to dismantle and rebuild).

Discussion of deck structural issues at the Manse (awaiting congregational meeting on December 8 to proceed).

Kitchen renovation and other future projects

Vacuuming out the baseboard heaters for safety and maintenance

Old leather sofa has been sent to Cedar Bay. Gene Nutter's sofa is now in the fellowship hall

Mission committee – Marcia Perkins and Jim Huber

Discussion from recent meeting of the Mission

Committee (Vander Werp, Perkins, Wilson, Huber)

Seeking ways to increase our support for missions (local and far away)

Women's Association – Sherri Huff

They are working on the upcoming caroling date as we near Christmas

Christian Education – Marcia

Anchor Club, Sunday School, and other programs continue to go well – attendance steady or growing.

Youth Programs – Marcia (for **Daniel & Solana**) Recent activities regarding Operation Christmas Child (with Glen Memorial Baptist in St. Ignace)

Old Business – None

New Business - None

Meeting adjourned at 7:38pm

The next scheduled board meeting is **Monday, January 27, at 6:30 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted, Jim Huber



Laurie Pearson
is our Primary Sunday
School teacher for 1st
and 2nd grades
Thank you, Laurie!

How About You? ... Mike Davis

We are familiar with the fact that red and green are the famous Christmas colors, but did you know that they are also two of the colors used on your bread ties? That's right. You can tell what day your loaf of bread was made by looking at the color of the little wire tie at the end of the bag. Green is for Tuesday and red is for Thursday. Monday's tie is blue, Friday's is white, and Saturday's is yellow. Sunday and Wednesday must be for rest and cleaning, as there are no tie colors for those days. Notice the colors are in alphabetical order.

How About Us? How can we relate that important fact to our faith walk?

God, Himself, had fun with colors in the Bible. Joseph had a coat of many colors, and of course there is His famous rainbow.

Even our Christian Advent candles are of multiple colors: purple, pink and white. Other colors we see quite often are blue, usually referenced as Heaven. Black equals sin, white is a symbol of purity, and red references the blood of Jesus.



So, as you decorate for this wonderful Christmas season, enjoy the colors. Even that old, old, 17th century tradition of the candy cane is said to have originated to honor Christ (although history does not confirm this): Red for the shedding of His blood, white for purity, and the cane refers to the Good Shepherd's staff.

Have a beautiful Christmas, and remember the birthday of our Savior while enjoying all of the wonderful colors the season brings. Merry Christmas!



DECEMBER



Hi, Everyone!

I loved the children's message that Rebeccah Hopkins did a few Sundays ago. She asked the kids if they knew how they got their names. I thought I'd tell you how I was told I got my name. My two brothers were 15 and 18 years old when I was born. Mom always said I was planned for, to which I'd snarkily reply, "Yeah, right, Mom." Anyway, my oldest brother, Marvin, was a paratrooper in the Army, ready to jump over Japan. He went to war at a very young age and was dating a girl named Mary, so he thought I should be named Mary, which my parents agreed to, even though it wasn't their name choice. The long and short of it was Marv and Mary broke up. He married Ruth, and I was named a name that I was never called. I went by "Suz" through college, and then my name morphed into "Sue." My personal choice of a name would have been Susan Jane, but a cousin called me last year and asked me if I knew that my parents had given me a different name at birth? On to Ancestry.com to find out what that name was...It's a conundrum!!!!

On to recipes...

Caramel Corn

One of my very best friends makes this yummy, delicious caramel corn, and she confessed they sometimes eat it for dinner, so I can't print her name and give away her secret!

LOL!

4 quarts popped popcorn
1 cup brown sugar
½ cup butter or margarine
¼ cup light corn syrup
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon baking soda

Place popped popcorn into a large brown paper grocery bag. Combine brown sugar, butter, corn syrup, vanilla, and salt in a large microwave-safe bowl. Microwave for 3 minutes, then stir until well blended.

Microwave for another 1-1/2 minutes. Remove brown sugar mixture from the microwave and stir in baking soda.

Pour over popcorn in the bag. Fold the top edge of the bag once or twice to close, then shake to coat popcorn.

Place the bag in the microwave and cook for 70 seconds. Shake the bag, flip over, and cook for 70 seconds more.

Pour popcorn out onto waxed paper and let cool until coating is set, 3 to 5 minutes.

Enjoy!!



Wisps from Willow Greg Wagner



An elephant and a dog got pregnant at the same time. Three months later, the dog gave birth to a dozen puppies. Six months later, the dog was pregnant again, and nine months later, she gave birth to another dozen puppies. And so the pattern continued. In the eighteenth month, the dog approaches the elephant to question her. "Are you sure you're pregnant? We got pregnant on the same date. I've given birth to a dozen puppies three times, and you're still pregnant. What is going on?"

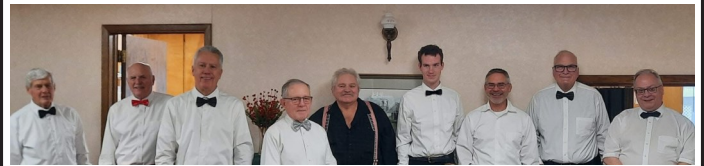
The elephant replied, "There's something I want you to understand. What I carry is not a puppy, it's an elephant. I only give birth to one in two years. When my baby touches dirt, the earth will feel it. When my baby crosses a street, humans will stop to watch in admiration. What I carry draws attention. So what I carry is mighty and big..."

Don't lose faith. When you look at others who receive their gratifications quickly, don't be jealous if you haven't received yours! Don't despair. Remind yourself, "My time is coming and when it does, people will be in awe."

MORAL :

God's timing is always perfect and everything comes when He wants it to come, not sooner or later... but at just the right time.

The 18th Annual Advent Tea



**Thank you, June Davis,
hostesses, and gentlemen,
who so graciously served us!**

Lukewarm Christians

It shocks me how many people would fall into the category of a lukewarm Christian. In Revelation 3:15-16, it uses the example of hot, cold, and lukewarm water to show how some Christians are. It basically says that hot and cold water is useful, but lukewarm water is not. Nobody wants to bathe in lukewarm water, they want hot water, and nobody wants to drink lukewarm water, they want cold water. In the same way, God doesn't want a "Christian" who is still of this world. Sometimes, I wish I could just yell at the lukewarm Christians and say, "What are you doing?" I feel like so many people treat this topic like it's not that serious, when it is actually the most important decision you will ever make. I want you to look out a window right now. If the rapture happened right now, would you meet Jesus in the air? You can't just go to church every Sunday and/or come from a Christian family and call yourself a Christian. It's about having a personal relationship with God.

I have a short story that represents a lukewarm Christian. There was a man who was sitting on a fence. On one side of the fence was Satan, and on the other side was God. God asked the man, "Who do you choose?" and Satan said, "You should choose me, I can give you things that God can't." The man looked at both of his options and told God, "I love you so much, but I'm not ready to let go of some things that Satan has to offer, so I think I'll just stay on the fence so I can get a little bit of both." Then everything went black and Satan grabbed the man's arm, and the man said in shock, "What are you doing? I didn't choose you! I stayed on the fence!" Satan looked in the man's eyes and smiled, "I own the fence."

Satan owns the fence. You can't be on the fence about your faith like that man who sat on the fence. I think some people don't believe this is all real. Satan is real and he wants to drag you down

with him. So I ask you to think about this this month. Is Satan dragging you down, or are you willing to sacrifice your life and give it to God?

Samantha Davis,
Member of First Union's youth group

The Advent Season



Dick and Sue Freel light the first Advent candle



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