

Manor Minutes
Volume 16 Issue 49
December 5, 2025

- Dartball – December 9, 7pm @ Laboratory Presbyterian
- Elders – December 10, 5pm
- Choir Practice – December 11, 6:30pm
- Drive-Thru Nativity – December 13 & 14, 6-8pm

Stay up to date at www.fairhillmanorchurch.org/calendar

THANK YOU!

“It takes a village” is no truer than here at FMCC. Your faith, kindness and willingness to help others reflect the heart of Christ. Thank you for being a light in FMCC and a blessing to others.

Thank you for your help in:

- Hanging of the Greens
- Setting up the scenes for the Drive-Thru Nativity
- Ringing of the Salvation Army Red Kettle Drive bells
- Purchasing gifts for the Salvation Army Angel Tree

DRIVE-THRU NATIVITY

The **Drive-Thru Nativity** is December 13 & 14, 6-8pm each night.



December 17, 7pm
Small Chapel

Christmas Party

The Bethany Class will hold their **Christmas Party** on Friday, December 19 at noon in the Small Fellowship Hall. RSVP to the Church Office by December 15. Everyone is welcome to join the party for food, fun and fellowship.



Breakfast at the Manger
December 21, 9am
Sign up in the Narthex.



Christmas Eve
7pm



Fairhill Manor Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
351 Montgomery Ave.
724-225-8610

Rev. Chris Stillwell, Senior Minister
Rev. Gena Sheller, Associate Pastor
Elders: Gary Ford, Bread
Jackie Nelson, Cup

December 7, 2025 – 10:15am

Prelude

Sam Johnson, organist

Welcome

Pastor Gena

Call to Worship

Rita Puskarich

Leader: May your earth yield prosperity for everyone, O God.

People: May the poor be defended, the oppressed delivered.

Leader: May enemies live in peace.

People: May no one hurt or destroy.

Leader: May all the world rejoice.

People: May we be agents of your joy and peace, for this is your mighty vision for our world.

Leader: May timid hearts turn bold.

People: May we believe it can be so.

Opening Hymn

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

Sam Johnson, organist

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here,
until the Son of God appear. Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

Lighting of the Second candle of Advent – Peace

Terry, Anna and Cori Houston

We light the candle of Hope.

Luke 1:78-79 (adapted from the easy reader version):

Our God will forgive us because he is very kind.

He will send someone from the highest place.

When this person comes, it will be like the sunrise for us.

He will bring light to people who are living without God.

He will show us how to live so that we will not be afraid.

We light the candle of Peace.

Leader: A dancing candle lights our path to peace.

People: Let us step into unfamiliar places so that we can learn the surprising ways of God!

Leader: May we dare to do hard things, so that we can feel what it's like to really live together.

People: Let us risk connecting to God who first connected to us!

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Rev. Stillwell

God of the ages, through the prophets and apostles you have challenged us to lay aside the works of destruction and prepare for your new creation. We confess that we continue to cling to our sinful ways—greed and lust, abuse and waste, envy and strife. Forgive us, Holy One. By your Spirit, lead us to live in a way that honors you, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ our Savior, who is coming in glory to reign.

Here we lift our hearts to you, praying: Come, Lord Jesus! O come, O come, Emmanuel! All glory and honor to you, O Lord, for the promise of your saving love— new life and hope springing forth from the stump of Jesse's tree; a world where wolf and lamb, leopard and kid, lion and calf will live together in safety and peace and a little child will lead us. Here we lift our hearts to you, praying: Come, Lord Jesus! O come, O come, Emmanuel! All glory and honor to you, O Lord, for by your grace you sent us a Savior— one who delights in worshiping you and brings equality and justice to people who are humble and poor, one who has destroyed the power of death and will be faithful and righteous forever. Faithful God, through the gift of your word you offer us instruction, encouragement, and hope. By the power of your Spirit teach us to live in hope, sharing joy and peace with the world; in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Prayer Response:

“Emmanuel, Emmanuel”

Emmanuel, Emmanuel, his name is called Emmanuel.

God with us, revealed in us, his name is called Emmanuel.

First Scripture Lesson

Isaiah 11:1-10

Serena Dube

Anthem

“Where Shepherds Lately Kneled,” by Craig Courtney

Choir

Children's Message

Rev. Stillwell

Adapted from Igniter Media - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNDtHdG5mVk>

I want to share with you a story I heard this week from a man who did not understand what his mother was trying to teach him until much later. He said:

Mama told me something when I was growing up that has forever changed my life. She played the piano at our little church. She tried to teach me to play the piano, but I wasn't very good. She would teach me the names of the notes, what a major key is, what a minor key is. She tried to teach me musical theory, but I was just bored. Then one day, she told me that the best news in the world is found by playing a simple scale on the piano. I had no idea what she meant, so she told me to play an eight note scale. So I did. I said, How is that good news? And she said, I played it incorrectly, and that I needed to play it the other way. So I did.

Again, I said, How is that good news? And she said, I played it the right way, but I needed to add the pauses, the pauses, she said, the pauses. Add them on the first, second, fourth, sixth, seventh, and the last note. Now I was frustrated, and said, How can eight notes with random pauses be the best news in the world? Then I got up, walked away and went outside.

Frankly, I didn't care what she was talking about. I didn't like playing the piano anyway. Well, years later, my mama got sick and passed away. As I was thinking about her, I remembered what she told me about the piano. Not only that, I still remember the notes she told me to pause the first, second, fourth, sixth, seventh and last note. So I sat down at her piano and played the scale with the pauses.

(Plays the opening stanza of Joy to the World)

That's when I realized the good news she was talking about.

Second Scripture Reading

Matthew 3:1-12

Rev. Stillwell

Sermon

“Getting to the Root of Hope”

Rev. Chris Stillwell

I'm sure you have seen the classic movie, A Christmas Story. It's the movie where Ralphie longs for nothing more than the Red Rider BB gun with the compass in the stock. He does everything he can think of to get one, but Christmas morning comes, and there is no BB gun. Instead, there is a pair of pink pajamas in the shape of a rabbit costume. Can there be any greater disappointment on Christmas morning than that?

On Christmas, the day when Santa comes and gives us our heart's desire, the day when all of our dreams come true, the day that we have been waiting for for 365 days, we can easily set our hopes high. When I was growing up there was a Santa Claus TV show in which Santa would read letters that he got from good boys and girls. I always found it amazing when I was young how many letters Santa would read that were from Wheeling.

When I got older, I would listen to the long list of items that a kid would want, and as Santa read each item, I couldn't help but feel sorry for their parents. For now, that the child had seen Santa Clause reading the list of presents on television, there was no doubt that they would be expecting to receive each and every present, otherwise there would be one very disappointed child come Christmas morning.

It is easy to be disappointed on Christmas day. We can want so many things and get so many things, and like the old Dennis the Menace cartoon, sit in the midst of a pile of wrapping paper surrounded by wonderful new toys and ask disappointedly, “Is this all there is?”

I have to think that this is a tradition that stretches all the way back to the first Christmas. It seems to me that many people were disappointed on the first Christmas. The expectations were so great. The people of Israel wanted so much for the messiah to come, and they wanted so much to happen when he did that I don't see how Santa could have possibly fit it all in his sled.

They wanted peace on earth. They were tired of wars and having to fight them. They were tired of worrying about their safety. They wanted peaceful lives. They wanted good will towards all. They were sick of stealing and cheating that went on even in the city of God. They wanted to be free. They had enough of the Romans ruling them after the Greeks had ruled them, after the Persians and the Assyrians had ruled them many years before. They wanted David or some other descendent of Jesse, David's father, to come to them and bring back those glory days that had passed them by.

Well, they did not get everything on their Christmas wish list. Perhaps God started shopping too late, and peace on earth was no longer in stock. Maybe God had ordered good will but it got lost in the mail. Possibly God went to the mall to get freedom, but some frantic, madly driven parent had gotten there first and taken the last bit of freedom from the shelf. We don't know what happened but God was only able to fulfill the last item on their Christmas wish list for Jesus Christ was a descendent of Jesse and of the great King David. God was at least able to do that much. It's not as exciting as a Red Rider BB Gun with a compass in the stock, but at least it wasn't as completely disappointing as a pink bunny pajama suit.

Still, you can't help but feel the people's disappointment. The Bible only mentions a few people's reactions to Christ's birth, and they all understand the good news, but I have to think that for the large masses Christ's birth was met with a yawn, and, as we see in the rest of the gospels, Christ life was met with the anger and rage that can only come from the disappointment of a hope lost.

Isaiah makes clear what was expected of the messiah. The coming of God's anointed was to bring about the Peaceable Kingdom. He was to be a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his root and he would come to kill the wicked. He was to cause:

⁶The wolf to live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. ⁷The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. ⁹They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

So many hopes and so many expectations, and, besides the few people who came to worship the Christ child- the wise men and the shepherds, most people probably saw the gift that God had left and said, "Is this all there is?"

Well, that wasn't all that there was. That boy grew to be a man, and though his life was short and in the eyes of the world a failure, the effect he had on the world extended far beyond the reach of his thirty or so years. Jesus was the root of Jesse, and now almost two thousand years later, we are the root of Jesus.

It doesn't make too much sense that we humans can be the sinful root of the divine stump. If God can become incarnate in this world and walk in it, then what need does God have for us?

It can be discouraging to know that God has placed the kingdom in the hands of mere mortals who are too often more concerned with themselves than God and who too often fight with one another rather than work together to build this kingdom, but this belief can also encourage hope.

It gives us hope to know that God thinks so much of us that God chose us to help in this awesome task. As we wait for the coming of Christ this advent the fires of hope are rekindled and we are more aware now than ever just how much we still hope for this Christmas.

It should give us hope that even though the son of God is no longer with us still the world is not God-forsaken. Do you want peace from war and violence; peace of mind and heart? Then God says, "I will help you create it." Do you want good will to all? Then says God, "Start with yourself" Do you want the Peaceable Kingdom for Christmas this year? Then God tells us, "Don't look at me. I am not Santa Claus. I will not give it to you, but you can have a hand in bringing it about." We simply need to remember to hope.

Sir Nicholas Henderson was the British ambassador to the United States during the Cold War. He was once interviewed at Christmas time for a feature by the Washington Post. The question for the feature was, "Mr. Ambassador, what do you want for Christmas?" Sir Nicholas was a man of British reserve and understatement and not wanting to appear greedy, but wanting to be truthful, replied to the reporter that all he really wanted for Christmas was a jar of fruit preserved in ginger, the kind that you can get at Harrods or some other store. That's what he wanted for Christmas, and hoped that Lady Henderson or somebody would give him such a jar.

A few days later, the Washington Post Christmas feature article described in detail what the diplomatic corps hoped for that Christmas. The Russian ambassador hoped for peace and goodwill. The Swiss Ambassador hoped for genuine disarmament around the world. The Spanish Ambassador hoped for Gibraltar to be given back. The Israeli ambassador hoped for peace in Middle East and so on and so forth and what have you. Sir Nicholas, the British ambassador, was recorded as having hoped for a jar of

preserved fruits. Obviously, of all those things that were hoped for, his hope was the most obtainable, and he was doubtless the only one who got what he wanted that Christmas, but by comparison, his hope seemed to lack a little in imagination and in courage. Sometimes it seems that we do not hope enough.

You cannot blame him for hoping for something simple. He was just being reasonable. The hopes of the others did not make much sense, but I think, when you get down to it, down to the root of hope, you find that hope, in and of itself, makes little to no sense at all. Hope goes against reason. It is the opposite of experience. It is the last shot for the truly desperate. It doesn't make much sense to hope in a sad world, but lest you lose all hope, remember that what God does doesn't make much sense, either. It never has. Create the heavens and the earth from nothing? Crazy! Create a nation and a people from two old nomads? Silly. Choose an old stammering murderer to lead these people out of the most powerful nation? Nuts. Send a child to save your people? Nonsense.

Everything God does, it seems is nonsense, and, if you think about it, Christmas is filled with nonsense as well. Cover your house with colorful lights? That's weird. Cut down a tree, take it from its natural habitat, and put it your house for it to slowly die and cover your carpet with needles? Foolish. Spend your time and money on presents for others? Ludicrous! Hope against hope yet again for the wolf to lie down with the lamb, for peace on earth and goodwill to all, for the root of Jesse to come again and fill the world with hope? Nonsense.

We should all hope for things that do not make sense. After all if all we hoped for was a Red Rider BB gun with a compass in the stock, and we finally got it certainly we would eventually become bored with it and wonder is this all there is? Peter Gomes, the former chaplain of Harvard, describes this feeling of disappointment by saying:

It is enough to actually make you dread Christmas day. Because we are living with the paradox of great expectation on the one hand and grim reality on the other. It is these hyped expectations of this season on the one hand, and their inevitable capacity to disappoint on the other, that creates the well-known seasonal depression to which for many people alcohol, or some other stimulant, alas, is the only solution.

It is easy for us to become disillusioned with material things, to become bored with stuff. It is also easy for mere optimism to be disappointed, but the root of hope runs deeper than that. The root of hope is first to believe in something that you know you probably will not get and secondly to still have the courage to do the unexpected and to go against the grain even when optimism is disappointed.

At its very root hope still exists when our optimism has failed, when Christmas comes and goes without good will and peace on Earth still we will hope for we will know that this is not all there is.

Communion Hymn

"Away in a Manger"

Sam Johnson, organist

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.

The stars in the sky looked down where he lay, the little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

Invitation to Communion

Pastor Gena

Wonderful Counselor. Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace. The prophet gave us many names to use when we speak of Jesus.

Communion. Eucharist. Heavenly banquet. The Lord's Supper. This meal is known by many names, but only one person prepares it, and invites us to partake of it, and that is Christ, our brother, our savior, and our friend.

Come to the table; it may be familiar, or it may be brand new to you. This table does not belong to us, it belongs to Christ Jesus, the one who can bring us a peace beyond our understanding - and it is he who invites us to share in the bread of life and the cup of grace.

Come share this joyful feast, for all is ready.

Prayer for the Bread & Cup

Gary Ford

Dear Lord, today we learned how John the Baptist, as a voice in the wilderness, urged us to repent of our sins. We come to this table, and as we eat this bread and drink this cup we remember Your suffering and we ask forgiveness for our sins. May this communion strengthen us to be worthy of your sacrifice and help us to live humbly and as a light to others as we await your coming Kingdom. Amen

Words of Institution

Pastor Gena

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.
(1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Sharing Holy Communion

All are invited to share in this meal. Please come forward down the center aisle, as you are able, take a piece of bread, dip it in the cup, and partake. Place your offering in the trays as you return to your seats by the outside aisles. If you are unable to come forward, the meal will be brought to you. Gluten-free wafers & individual servings are available in the Narthex.

Call to Discipleship

Pastor Gena

This is the promise of the gospel: God already knows you. God already loves you. God has already gifted you. God has already called you. You are invited— to deepen this knowledge, to feast in this love, to cultivate these gifts, and to follow this calling. There is a place for you among the people of God in this community of faith.

If you have come to know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior and you would like to profess that you intend to begin a life of faith, learning to walk in his way of Love, you are welcome to contact one of the Pastors to take this step. If you would like to join this part of the Body of Christ at Fairhill Manor Christian Church, to covenant to journey together in this life of faith, please reach out to one of the Pastors to learn more. We all take these moments to rededicate our lives to following Jesus.

Closing hymn

“Come, O Long-expected Jesus”

Sam Johnson, organist

Come, O long-expected Jesus, born to set your people free. From our fears and sins release us; Christ, in whom our rest shall be. You, our strength and consolation, come salvation to impart; dear desire of many a nation, joy of many a longing heart.

Benediction

Rev. Stillwell

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Go in Advent hope and peace.





Do you have a prayer request or need help? Please feel free to contact Rev. Chris (412-956-6590) or Pastor Gena (724) 263-0033 directly and confidentially. Or scroll down on the opening page of our website (www.fairhillmanorchurch.org) to "Requests for Prayer or Help." There you can send an email which will go directly to Rev. Chris. We are One Body in Christ!

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Sue Donaldson
Craig Dotson
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In the Military

Lance Dague	Andrew Gregg
Terrell McClain	Zachary Keene
Brandon Lipscomb	Sarah Lipscomb
Travis Ringer	Emily Chase
Dylan Demain	Noah Rudolph

The brave men and women who serve our country make incredible sacrifices every day. We are forever grateful for their service and dedication. Please remember the military members that are deployed and away from their family that they may return to their homes safely.