

Manor Minutes
Volume 12 Issue 52
December 24, 2021

No CW&W or Sunday School – December 26

No Dartball – December 28

No Choir practice – December 30

Happy New Year January 1, 2022

Church Office closed January 3, 2022

Elders Meeting – January 12, 6pm

Board Meeting – January 12, 7pm

Stay up to date, check www.fairhillmanorchurch.org/calendar



PRAYER REQUEST

Do you have a prayer request or need help? Please feel free to contact Rev. Chris (412-956-6590) and 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 and Pastor Gena. We are One Body in Christ!

Homebound Members:

Phyllis Cimino
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Abby Blanchard
Susan Britko
Mabel Brooks
Denise Charles
Wanda Chicone
John Collar
Emily Cope Robinson
Ruth Cox
Irma Davis
Jessica Duke
Libby Eberhard
Fred Engle
Jay Freudenberg
Jett Fuller
Derek Gardiner
Lois Gayman
Joe Greene
Bonnie Gregg

Linda Hainer
Kyle Hallam
Connie Hanning
Judy Hanning
Aryn Hess
Ed Jackman
Dallas Jacobovitz
Family of Pam Kloss
Ty, Kerri, Allie, Ivy &
Ty James Lacock
Bob Lanning
Marylee Lawrence
Libby LeDuff
Lee & Betsy Martin
Dave McConnell
Don Melvin
Michaela Nixon
Ruth Mikuta
Georgette Murray
Deborah Patterson
Bo & Patty Pryor
Kayda Richards
Cathy Rentgen
Betty Jo Riggle
Dave Ross
Jim and Barb Roupe

John Shadeck
Theresa Shape
Hannah Simpson
Doug and Tracy Smith
Cathy Stewart
John Stewart
Beth Teagarden
Nadine Teagarden
Gary Weaver
Nikki Wells
Tom Williams
Chuck & Mary Wiseman
Sarah Wittenberg
Marcie Yocum

In the Military

Lance Dague
Terrell McClain
Brandon Lipscomb
Daniel Robinson
Shawn Dallatore
Andrew Gregg
Zachary Keene
Sarah Lipscomb
Travis Ringer
Emily Chase
Dylan Demain



Fairhill Manor Christian Church
(*Disciples of Christ*)

351 Montgomery Ave.
724-225-8610

Rev. Chris Stillwell, Senior Pastor
Rev. Gena Sheller, Associate Pastor
December 26, 2021

Prelude

Audra Allen, organist

Welcome

Pastor Gena

Call to Worship

Serena Dube

People of God, holy and beloved, put on compassion and kindness this day.
Praise God in the highest heaven. Praise God in the deepest sea.
Children of the Most High, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves in humility and gentleness.
Praise God with the winged messengers. Praise God with the heavenly host.
Disciples of Christ, holy and beloved, find unity through the bonds of love.
Let all creation sing God's praise. Let all creation worship the Lord.

Opening Hymn

"Joy to the World"

Audra Allen, organist

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!	Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!
Let earth receive her King;	Let all their songs employ;
let every heart prepare him room,	while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
and heaven and nature sing,	repeat the sounding joy,
and heaven and nature sing,	repeat the sounding joy,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.	repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Pastor Gena

O praise God, O praise God, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

This morning we come praising you, our great God. You, who created us and all of the wonders of our world, have come near in your son, Jesus, the newborn baby. You who are Creator have become a part of your own creation and moved into our neighborhood with us. We praise you!

O praise God, O praise God, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Together with Simeon we praise you, for we too have seen your salvation. Thank you for loving the whole world so much that you came to live among us - a light in our darkness, the good news of your love for all people made flesh. Thank you for the glimpses of your love that we see in our lives, the ways your love is made real to us - the unconditional love of a family member or friend, the willing sacrifice of another's comfort for our well-being, the generosity of those who give us undivided attention, the hand that reaches out in connection and comfort just when we need it. We praise you!

O praise God, O praise God, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Together with Anna we praise you, for we have been looking for a Savior and we have found all we need in Jesus. Show us how to live like him - noticing the outsider and the overlooked, speaking for those who have no voice, offering healing and connection to those who have been excluded. Show us how to lift others from never-ending hunger and thirst, ways to break cycles of violence and abuse, how to speak

words of truth even when we stand to lose something. Comforting God, show us how to be with those who are suffering – those who are sick and dying, those who are lonely or grieving, those who are in pain or despair. We name before you now these who need your special care.... O God, you are always about the work of renewing and restoring us and all of your creation. We praise you!

O praise God, O praise God, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

We praise you, Wonderful Counselor! We praise you, Mighty God! We praise you, Everlasting Parent! We praise you, Prince of Peace! We praise you for making yourself known to us in Jesus the Christ, who teaches us to pray, saying...

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.

Refrain from "All Creatures of Our God and King," Chalice Hymnal #22.

Prayer Response:

"Lord, Listen to your Children Praying"

Lord, listen to your children praying, Lord, send your spirit in this place;

Lord, listen to your children praying, send us love, send us pow'r, send us grace.

First Scripture Reading

Psalm 148

Amy Caldwell

Special Music

"O Little One Sweet," by S. Scheidt

Jim Cope

Children's Message

Rev. Stillwell

I hope you had a good Christmas. Did you get nice presents? The days after Christmas are fun as well since you do not have school and you can spend time playing with the toys you got and enjoying your gifts, but what if someone came and tried to take those presents? What would you call such a person? A thief? Or maybe a Grinch? I'm sure that most of you have read the story of "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" or seen it on tv. If so, you will remember how everyone in Who-ville loved Christmas. Everyone, that is, except the Grinch. The Grinch hated Christmas and made up a plan to spoil the joy of Christmas in Who-ville. His plan was to dress up as Santa Claus and go into Who-ville and steal all of their Christmas presents, all of their Christmas trees, and even the food for their Christmas dinner.

What a terrible thing to do! Do you know why the Grinch hated Christmas so much? Well, according to the story, it was because his heart was too small! He was so selfish that he hated to see anyone else who was happy and enjoying themselves. But, as you know, the Grinch's plan did not work. Why? Because the people in Who-ville knew that the real joy of Christmas does not come from the presents, decorations, and food -- it comes from a heart filled with love.

Did you know that there was a Grinch in the Bible? He was not called that, but he acted much the same way. His name was Herod, and he tried to take away the gift that God had given the world in the form of Jesus Christ. As you know he was not able to because the Magi and Joseph listened to God and were able to save Jesus, but he caused much pain and sadness at a time when people should have been filled with joy and hope.

And so, we see that since the very first Christmas, Grinches have been trying to steal the joy of Christmas. There may be some "Grinches" that are trying to steal your Christmas joy. It will never work -- unless your heart is too small. Make sure that your heart is big enough to share the love and joy of Christmas with everyone you meet -- not just at Christmas -- but all year long.

Sermon

“The Darkest Time of the Year

Rev. Stillwell

We have gathered this morning on the cusp of the darkest time of the year. Now, technically, the darkest time of the year was last week on December 21, which was the winter solstice. On that day our hemisphere is tilted as far away from the Sun as it could get, therefore the night was the longest it would be all year. It is difficult to have such short days and long nights, but it could be worse. My sister in law lives in northern England, and I always forget how much further north England is than we are. She is probably on the same latitude as some of the Canadian Maritime Provinces so that around her house it gets dark about three o'clock and the sun comes up around 9:30. So there is not a lot of daylight where she lives at this time of year and of course there are places where it is darker still.

We have past the longest night as far as the nighttime is concerned, but a British psychologist named, Cliff Arnall, did a study and he determined the third Monday of January is the saddest most depressing day of the year. So much so that he calls it Blue Monday. How he came up with the equation is broken down into seven variables. The first was the weather. The second was debt from the holidays that begins to come due. Third was average monthly salary. The fourth factor was the time since Christmas past. Then came the time since failed resolutions, which is my favorite one. Finally comes low motivational levels. So what he found was this. Whole the days technically start getting longer after December 21 the change is minuscule so we don't really notice it. They're still pretty dark and pretty short, and then, come around the middle of January, cyclonic weather systems take hold and bring a deep winter, but in particular they bring low dark clouds. Then the bills from Christmas come due. Meanwhile, it is estimated that the majority of people break their healthy resolutions six to seven days into the new year. So if you can last to the end of the month you are better than most people. By the middle of January they have taken off their nicotine patches, they have eaten the fridge empty, and at that point also is when any residual dregs of holiday cheer are gone.

I don't know if professor Arnall is exactly the right but it sounds right to me. I know that January is a hard month. January is a hard month, and I say this especially as a minister, because every year I think that this is going to be the year that the Christmas momentum carries over into the new year. We have a good Christmas for many, many reasons, not the least of which is an increase in attendance and then January comes and people get sick. People get afraid of the ice or the weather. People are tired while it is dark outside and the gloom often reaches people's hearts well. All of this can be attributed to the factors that have been mentioned already but also we must confess that we do put a lot of expectations on Christmas, so that, even when we have a good Christmas, we never get all that we want. I'm not talking about physical gifts. We do hope that this will be the year that we see peace on earth goodwill to all. When that doesn't happen, at least not as we would like it to, the world seems darker still.

So we will need in the days ahead to be reminded of the light that was born in the stable that still shines today. For our Christmas story is filled with this image of light over and over again. It is Jesus as the light of the world. John calls him that. It is images of the manger in which Jesus is pictured as radiating a light, and sometimes you see a halo of light you see in paintings or on icons to show the holiness of the subject.

Then there are the wise men whom we celebrate today. They found the light of the world by following the light of a star. It was dark as they travelled. Darker than anything we have probably ever known. and it was a dark story that takes place at night that mostly takes place at night what with Jesus being born in the early hours of the morning and the shepherds being out in their fields at night. It was also dark for reasons that had nothing to do with physical season or the weather. The Magi arrived in Israel completely oblivious to anything really that was going on as far as we know. They came at a time when Israel was at its lowest being governed now by the Roman Empire, after having been governed by the Greek Empire, after having been governed by the Assyrian Empire, after having been governed by the Persian Empire.

They're beginning to suspect that this promise of Messiah perhaps was not going to happen. And the wise men came in the time of King Herod who was a cruel puppet of an empire and knew that he did not have the support of the people.

So the visit of the wise men was not a ray of light to him. Instead, Matthew writes that when the Magi came, they told him of the good news the, King of the Jews was born, and they wanted to find out where he was. Matthew says that when King Herod heard this he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, and I think that is a powerful sentence. It's more that the nation was frightened because of him, and what they fear that he may do upon hearing these words for good reason. I say for good reason because no sooner had the Wise men left then King Herod plots to kill the new baby. So determined he is to do away with this threat that he sacrifices many innocent lives. In order to get to this one baby he orders all the male children of less than two years to be killed. Herod recognizes something about Jesus that in our sentiment we sometimes fail to see and that is the birth of this child is beautiful and serene and peaceful, but it is also a threat to the very power that rules our world. It was a threat to the kind of domination and rule by which Herod operated and a challenge to the very power structures that put him in place.

This is a child who radiates light into the dark, bloody history of this nation in the human race. But we don't often think about Herod very much. We often don't even get to him in our scriptures, or in our Christmas stories for Herod represents the dark side of the gospel or not the dark side the world, the darkness from which Jesus came to save us. So he is an essential part of the story, but even the gospel writers don't talk about him very much. He disappears pretty quickly from the story and the Herod we read about at Easter is in fact his son. But for now Herod reminds us that Jesus did not enter a world of sparkly Christmas cards.

Instead, he entered a world of real trouble, dysfunction, and brokenness. Jesus was born an outcast, was homeless at birth and became a refugee in order to escape from Herod, as he and his family flee to Egypt, and he becomes later on as a man a victim of the powers that be, both religious and political. As a result, he becomes for us the perfect savior; the savior for outcasts and the disposed, the savior for nobodies and for people who are oppressed or struggling for people who are in need. That's how the church is described in scripture time and time again, not as the most powerful and the best or the most loved and the most popular who, in their weakness, became a sign for the world of God's strength.

30 or 40 years later, his apostles would get into trouble for preaching the good news of Jesus Christ to those outside of Israel, not just outside of its borders, but outside of its cultural norms. These people were called Gentiles. What we see here in the visit of these men is that this was how it was to be even from the beginning.

God sent a light not just to the nation of Israel. God sent a light to the world, and we need that light for we live in a world that is still very much dark, although we have invented many, many ways to make it bright. Have you seen the picture of the world from space at nighttime? It's an amazing thing how bright the world can be, but, despite all of our improvements and technological advances, and sometimes because of these advancements the world is so dark.

Christmas reminds us that our God has come into our dark and broken world, and because of this human judgments are not the last judgement, human justice is not the last justice and what appeared to be weakness or meekness when the child would later die on a cross instead was love, and love is the greatest strength of all. Love is the greatest source of life as well. An important lesson from the story of Herod is that he had might and fear on his side, yet could not overcome the light.

Another important lesson is that there will always be Herods in the world and in our life. These are people who see our light, and rather, than want it for themselves, try to put it out. That there will always be Harrods as long as the world exists. It is better that we know this now and remember that there will always be God in the world to help us deal with them.

We have celebrated the truth of God with us and now let us hold to that truth especially at this time; a time that is often the darkest time for many people. When Christmas is over and the artificial lights of our houses and our trees is gone or will be gone soon and there'll be nothing left to distract us from the cold reality of winter where will we turn then for our light?

We could install another spotlight on our house or buy another lamp for our living room. We could turn a nightlight on in the bedroom hoping for just a little bit of light to last until spring, or we could come here where we will find a better kind of light for Epiphany soon will be past still the light that God has given to the world and to us shines. The light of the Christ candles still burns even though electric bills, heating bills and credit card bills come pouring in along with the dark and the cold.

Soon we will find out if our love of Christmas is just a love of decorations and songs and presents or if our love of Christmas is because on that day. Love came to life and the life was the light of all people. Light shines in the darkness still in the darkness did not overcome it.

Let me leave you with some words of one of my favorite songs. Josh Ritter is a songwriter, and he has this one song called "Lantern". The chorus goes like this

So if you got a light, hold it high for me
I need it bad tonight, hold it high for me
Cause I'm face to face, hold it high for me
In that lonesome place, hold it high for me
With all the hurt that I've done, hold it high for me
That can't be undone, hold it high for me
Light and guide me through, hold it high for me
I'll do the same for you

We have a light. It is not ours, but it has been given to us by God to keep us warm and guide us through this life, but we also need to use it for each other, to be the light for each other so that we may get through these days until we come to the place where the light never ends and the darkness holds no sway. Until then hold your light high for me. I'll do the same for you. Together these dark days will be a fleeting shadow.

Call to Offering

Serena Dube

Each year, Hannah would bring Samuel a small robe when she returned to offer sacrifices to the Lord—a simple gift from a generous heart. May we, who have been blessed with so much and with so much to be thankful for, offer our own simple gifts from hearts touched by Hannah's generous spirit.

Doxology

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow! Praise God, all creatures here below! Praise God above, ye heavenly hosts! Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dedication of Offering Prayer

Rev. Stillwell

God of overflowing abundance, we bring you our simple gifts this day to show our gratitude and wonder for your marvelous gifts. May these offerings bring hope and unity to a world torn apart by anger and despair. May these simple gifts be symbols of our commitment to be a people of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and grace, through the one who is coming and who lives eternally in our hearts. Amen.

Invitation to Communion

Rev. Stillwell

Two Christmases ago I remember it being unseasonably warm like it has been this year. While that lessened the Christmas atmosphere a bit, I was relieved to think that I wouldn't have to worry about any

travel problems caused by the weather on the way to and from Christmas Eve service. It wasn't a white Christmas for sure, but I didn't count on the warmth combining with the moisture in the air to provide the foggiest drive I ever experienced.

We could have used Rudolph that night for as we drove home we used the lines of the side of the road to keep us on course. Then when we followed the bright red tail lights of the cars in front of us, trusting that if we followed them we would stay on the road. Finally, there came a time when no car was in front of us, and all we could do was follow our lights. It was Christmas Eve, but I tell you felt like Epiphany.

I say that because Epiphany is the day that we celebrate the wise men arriving in Bethlehem to see the Christ child, and the only way they got there was by following the light. All they saw was an extraordinary star, but the men from the east were true seekers. Despite the uncertainties, they had a hunger in their heart that spurred them on. They knew that there was truth beyond the obvious. They had faith that signs in the natural world pointed them to the supernatural one. They knew, before Jesus said it, that those who seek will find.

So often in life we feel lost and without direction, or we are overwhelmed by the distances we must travel to get from where we are to where we want to be. It is important in those moments to remember that we too would be wise to simply follow the light. For Jesus is the light of the world. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

That light leads us to this table where we come to have that light renewed within us and where we see that when we share the light that we have found with others the world indeed becomes a much brighter place. As we share in this meal let us let our light, which is His light, shine in our life and let us continue to follow the light until we, like the Magi before us, meet Jesus face to face.

Communion Hymn

“Angels From the Realms of Glory”

Audra Allen, organist

Angels, from the realms of glory,	Shepherds, in the fields abiding
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;	watching o'er your flocks by night,
You who sang creation's story,	God with us is now residing,
Now proclaim Messiah's birth:	yonder shines the infant light:
Come and worship, come and worship,	Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King.	Worship Christ, the newborn King.

Prayer for the Bread & Cup

Connie Sheller

Our Father, you have blessed us with so many wonderful gifts as love, hope, joy, peace, forgiveness, as well as many others. We thank you for the greatest gift that you have given to each person, your son, Jesus the Christ! Through his life, death, and resurrection, each is promised eternal life with you. Grant us, as we partake of the bread representing Christ body, and the cup, his blood, the Courage to reflect deeply upon what Christmas can really mean to each of us. Amen

Words of Institution

Rev. Stillwell

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

Call to Discipleship

Rev. Stillwell

Closing Hymn

"It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"

Jody Mullis, pianist

It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold;
"Peace on the earth, good will to all,
from heaven's all gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
with peaceful wings unfurled,
and still their heavenly music floats
o'er all the weary world;
above its sad and lowly plains
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o'er its Babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.

Benediction

Rev. Stillwell

Go forth into the new year, trusting in God's promises. And may God, the alpha and the omega, be with you always.

Recorded worship services can be found on the Church website or on YouTube,
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmlH3qzih_fzHCC2X0Jhc_sfniJ7C1O3X

Zoom Worship will continue to be live at
10:15 am each Sunday.

"Join a Meeting" on Zoom at 9:45am using the
meeting ID and password.

Meeting ID: **932 4557 4206** Password: **026316**

Fellowship with other "Zoomers" from
9:45 – 10:15am.

Text your prayer concerns to be shared during
worship to Rev. Chris at
(412) 956-6590.

Church Office hours:

Karen is working from home on Monday, Tuesday and Friday,
9 am – 2 pm. She will be in the Church Office on Wednesday &
Thursday, 9 am – 2 pm. The Church phone is forwarded to Karen's
cell phone and can be reached anytime.

Pastor Gena is off on Friday. Pastor Gena is working from home and
comes in to the church as needed. Feel free to text, call, email or set
up a time to meet with Pastor Gena.

Rev. Chris is off on Tuesday during the school year.

If you need anything at any time, please call the Church Office phone
at 724-225-8610.

Merry Christmas