

Dear Friends,

This is the week of New Year's Day, a time of reflection and fun! Remember the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas"? It actually stems from the Christian calendar. From Christmas to January 6th, Epiphany Sunday (Three Kings Day), is twelve days. The custom was to give a present each day to celebrate Christmas, the birth of Jesus, and to anticipate the visit of the three wise men.

Now that you are humming along and ending with "and a partridge in a pear tree," you might wonder what all those gifts – birds and performers and gold rings – might cost. In 2022, if you wanted to stay true to the song and get your "true love" each day's gifts the number of times they are mentioned in the song, that was 364 gifts, for a whopping \$197,071.09!



Humor aside, this week is a good time to reflect on the past year and make plans for the new. We often make New Year's resolutions as the new year begins. We can always try to be better Christians and make wiser and more compassionate choices in our daily lives. I always choose a Bible verse for the year and post it in several places where I can be reminded of its message. This year my verse is: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths* (Proverbs 3:5-6). Why don't you choose a verse to guide you this year?

We can also reflect on the gifts that we do have. We have family and friends, health care, enough food and clothing, as well as the gift of Jesus Christ from a loving God and the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit.

We have Grace United Church of Christ as well, and as we enter the new year, we will be led, encouraged, advised, and uplifted by the Rev. Dr. Fred Young in his yoked ministry between us and Trinity UCC in Gettysburg. Many of you will have the opportunity to have him visit in the coming weeks. That will certainly be a gift!

Love in Christ,
Patti Miller



Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Matthew 2:11

First Sunday after Christmas Day, December 31, 2023

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:22-40

Let him into the mire and muck of our world. For only if we let him in can he pull us out. —Max Lucado

One of the most comforting and reassuring verses in the Bible is not found in Psalm 23, but in Matthew 1. There we read: “‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us’” (v. 23).

As we peer today into the year that looms before us, it is a comfort to know that in the baby of the manger, whose birth we celebrated only a few days ago, is the Savior who is still with us. What’s more, he has promised never to leave us (see Matthew 28:20). God in the person of Jesus Christ is always with us whatever our condition, whatever our need.

Lutheran Bishop Stephen Bouman explains. He tells of standing behind an altar in a crypt of the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth in the Holy Land, the place where Mary heard that she was going to have a baby. He saw some Latin words carved into the altar, *Verbum caro factum est*, “The Word was made flesh.”

But then he noticed that there was one other little word in Latin. That word *hic*, meaning “here.” *Verbum caro HIC factum est*. “The Word was made flesh *here*.”

Probably whoever authorized that inscription meant for it to refer to that specific location, but the word hints at a larger truth.

In reality, the Incarnation means God became flesh here on earth, for all of us. The Incarnation means that we can speak of the *hicness* of God, the nearness of God. Incarnation means that God walks with us on earth, and that if we are saved anywhere, it is right here on earth, right now in the here and now. God is involved in the minutiae and details of my life.

I find that comforting, and I find that reassuring.

How about you?

—Timothy Merrill

Prayer: Lord Jesus, be with me in 2024 and now and forevermore. In your name. Amen.

Daily Bible Readings

Sunday: Ecclesiastes 11

Monday: Ecclesiastes 12

Tuesday: Song of Solomon 4-5

Wednesday: Song of Solomon 6

Thursday: Song of Solomon 7

Friday: Song of Solomon 8

Congratulations!

*You have completed reading
through the Bible in one year!*

VERSE TO REMEMBER

*Remember your creator in the days of your
youth, before the days of trouble come.*

—Ecclesiastes 12:1

Jumbled Words: The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7 and Luke 6:17-49 is a collection of sayings spoken by Jesus that encapsulate his moral teachings. Matthew's version begins with what are called The Beatitudes—perhaps one of the most widely quoted sections of the gospels.

Test your vocabulary! All eight words below are taken from Matthew 5. Using the clues provided, and the jumbled letters, write the word in the spaces provided. The first one is done for you.

1. **Clue:** to be made happy

B L E S S E D

L B S E D S E

2. **Clue:** severely harass

E P U C R T S E E

3. **Clue:** commits atrocities

V O R E I E D L

4. **Clue:** foretellers of events

P T S H P O R E

5. **Clue:** the quality of having virtue

E S S U E R G O N T H S I

6. **Clue :** old

C I T E N A N

7. **Clue:** Someone we love

E O N R B H G I

8. **Clue:** celestial

E A E L Y V H N



Answers:

1. blessed; 2. persecute;
3. evildoer; 4. prophets;
5. righteousness;
6. ancient; 7. neighbor;
8. heavenly.

Avoiding the cancer of concealed sin

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.— James 5:16



Robert Wood Johnson, former chairman of Johnson & Johnson, had a reputation for being especially stringent when he inspected his manufacturing plants. One day, a plant manager got a tip that Johnson was on his way and would arrive at the plant in 30 minutes.

The manager hastily had things spruced up by ordering several large rolls of paper transported to the roof of the building. When Johnson arrived, he was furious. His first words were, “*What in the world is all that junk up there?*” Unbeknownst to the manager, Johnson had arrived by helicopter and landed on the roof!

Many times in our lives, we can find ourselves in a similar situation where we feel the need to clean ourselves up in order to impress someone else. Perhaps we’re meeting with someone whom we see as “extra spiritual,” so we move some things around in our lives to make it look like we have it all together.

But the truth is, when we rearrange our lives to look cleaner, we’re doing nothing more than concealing the very things that need to be dealt with in our lives. So instead of hiding the ugliness, find safe people who can help you address it. **Open the doors of those unkempt closets in your life and invite others to help you clean them out!**

Prayer Challenge

Pray that God would open your eyes to any sin you’ve been concealing so you can deal with it in a healthy way.

Questions for thought

Why do you think it’s so tempting to sweep our sins under the rug so we appear to have it all together?

Who is one person you can invite into your life to help you expose those sins and deal with them in a healthy way?

Announcements

~Financial Summary from December Consistory Meeting

General pledge November 2023: \$7,517

General pledge November 2022: \$11,472

YTD income: \$172,156

YTD expenses: \$203,534

YTD deficit: \$31,378

~If anyone is interested in joining the Homewood Auxiliary, please contact Linda Bixler. Membership dues are \$3 for singles and \$5 for couples.

Grace Outreach Activities

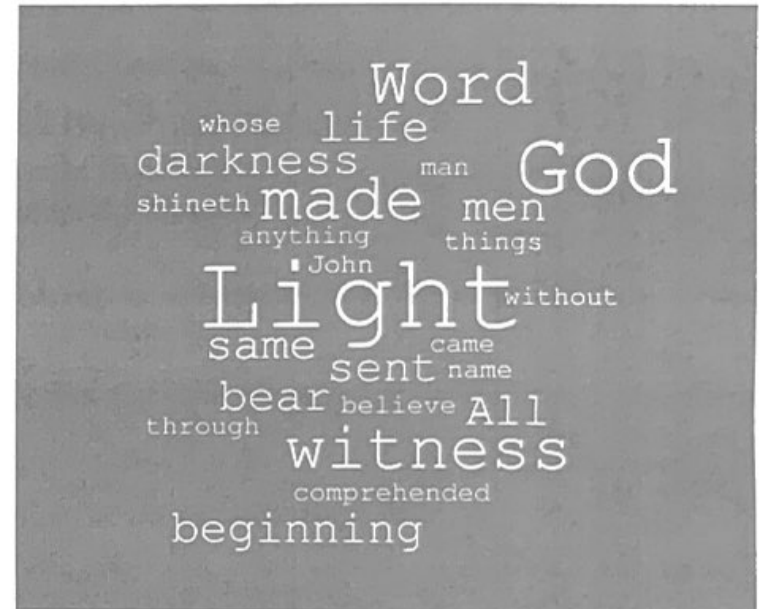
~The Outreach Committee decided to assemble lentil brown rice soup mix jars January 27. They will be donated to HACC. Donation of ingredients will be welcome. The recipe is posted on the bulletin board by the elevator with a collection box for ingredients under the coat rack next to the sound room. The goal is to assemble 60 jars.

~February 25, immediately after the worship service, there will be a gathering for anyone interested in signing cards for any Grace off site saints, college students and those serving in the military.

~Upcoming Events:

~We welcome Pastor Fred Young next week!

~Communion next week!



Grace United Church of Christ

100 Fourth Street

Hanover, Pennsylvania 17331

717-632-1146

January 7, 2024 –Epiphany Sunday

Gathering Music

Welcome/Announcements

Westminster Chimes/Prelude:

**** Call to Worship**

Lector: Let us acknowledge the power of God's creative voice that echoes through the ages.

Congregation: We come together to worship the One whose voice brings forth light and life.

Lector: "In the beginning, God spoke, and creation unfolded. The psalmist declares, "GOD thunders across the waters, Brilliant, his voice and his face, streaming brightness— GOD, across the flood waters." (Psalm 29:3)"

Congregation: We stand in awe of the majestic voice that shaped the heavens and the earth.

Lector: Together, let us listen to the echoes of creation and find inspiration in the timeless words of Genesis. 'And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.' (Genesis 1:3)

Congregation: "May the light of God's Word light our way and guide our steps."

**** Opening Prayer:**

Gracious God, On this day of Epiphany, we gather in awe and wonder of Your glory in Jesus Christ. As the Magi followed the star to find the newborn King, guide our hearts to seek You earnestly. Open our eyes to see the light of Your truth, and lead us on a journey of discovery and understanding. We thank You for the gift of Your Son, our Savior, and pray that His light continues to shine brightly in our hearts. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

**** Hymn: TBD**

**** Sharing the Peace of Christ**

Song: Light of the World ~Lauren Daigle

Joys and Concerns

Lord's Prayer (debts/debtors)

Prayer of Confession

Assurance of Pardon

Thank you for sharing your tithes and offerings

**** Doxology** 625

**** Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Sermon Text: Psalm 29; Genesis 1:1-5

Poem: "Defining Moments"

**** Statement of Faith**

**** Hymn: TBD**

Message: "Words and Wonders: Beyond Sticks and Stones"

**** Song: Here I Am to Worship ~Hillsong**

**** Benediction**

Please remain standing to sing "A Choral Benediction" (Inside front of hymn book or on screen).
Postlude-

**** Please stand, if you are able.**

Defining Moments

"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Mark
1:11

The moments in our lives define
Who we are called to be.
We may not see a flashing sign
That points to destiny,
But special moments God can use
To give us purpose true;
We take this instant, freely choose
To learn and grow anew.

A graduation, marriage, death,
A new job or promotion,
Some leave us joyful, some bereft,
Some many mixed emotions.
Our faith gives us resiliency,
Courage to face our fears,
Strength to defeat adversity,
And hope for future years.

Our Savior, too, faced hard decisions,
And could have voiced his, "NO!"
The future held pain, grief, derision,
And yet he chose to go.
Let us with faith like Jesus Christ
Take moments that we face,
And know that God's love will suffice –
Defined by hope and grace. Patti Miller

