

Dear Friends,

Simeon and Anna had both been waiting all their lives for the Messiah, and each had reached an old age, but still had remained faithful. Some experts put the life expectancy in Jesus' time at 35 years, but others say it was more likely near 50. Even so, Anna and Simeon had far outlived the expectations for a mortal life, but their expectations were spiritual.



I like the word "expectation." It means a strong belief that something will happen or be the case in the future.

All of us are growing older, and at this time of the year we may find ourselves looking back at the past and ahead to the future and evaluating our expectations. We may find some disappointments, but I pray that you also find much joy - both in your past memories and in what you are anticipating in the future.

You see, Simeon and Anna both must have experienced disappointments and hardships. Anna was a widow and in Jesus' time would have needed to rely on charity and the goodwill of others to meet her daily needs. Both Simeon and Anna trusted in God and in God's promises. Finally Simeon could say, "These eyes of mine have seen your salvation,... a light for revelation to the nations, and glory for your people Israel." Luke 2:30,32

This letter is dated "The week of December 25" – Christmas. Christmas is God's promise, a promise kept to all humans that a Savior, the Messiah, Emmanuel (God with us) would come to save his people. Anna and Simeon were waiting for that Savior with positive expectations.



Like Anna and Simeon, we can have positive expectations. Let us keep a positive faith, a trust in God, and an expectation of the good in life. Jesus Christ is born! May we all open our eyes so that we might see the light of Christ, the salvation that God offers each of us, and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

*Merry Christmas &  
Happy New Year*

Love in Christ,  
**Patti Miller**

## Time for Great Expectations

*But when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent his Son, born among us of a woman. Galatians 4:4*

The calendar has turned a page;  
A new year has begun.  
No matter what our place or age  
Hope blooms for everyone.  
We know that God has ordered time  
And set our world in motion;  
God formed the clouds and every clime  
And filled the seas and ocean.

At last God sent our Savior Christ  
Born as a tiny babe,  
Who for our sins was sacrificed  
And conquered sin and grave.  
Now we are children of our Lord,  
Adopted, loved, forgiven.  
All humankind has been restored  
And has a place in Heaven.

The joy we feel on Christmas Day  
Should last the whole year through,  
For such great love that comes our way  
Remains forever new.  
The new year dawns, the old has passed -  
Rejoice with all creation -  
For now the time is here at last  
For hope-filled expectation. Patti Miller

*Blessings* ***in the new year!***

## 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 on January 14<sup>th</sup>!

~Communion on January 14<sup>th</sup>!

# Great Expectations

*Salvation*   **Mercy**   Eternity

**Life**   **Faith**   **Joy**

*Peace*   Love

**Hope**   **GRACE**

*Goodness*

Grace United Church of Christ

100 Fourth Street

Hanover, Pennsylvania 17331

717-632-1146

December 31, 2023

Gathering Music  
Welcome/Announcements  
Westminster Chimes  
Prelude

**\*\* Call to Worship**

Lector: The new year is approaching.

**People: We are ready for constructive changes, new beginnings, and positive expectations.**

Lector: As we enter into this new year, let us be open and expect the working of the Spirit.

**People:** When we turn the pages of the calendar, let us turn our eyes to see the wonder of Christmas and the new year every day.

**All: Come, Lord Jesus, enter our hearts. God be present with us as we worship you, and may the Holy Spirit guide us into the new year and to the many adventures that await us.**

**\*\* Opening Prayer (Together):**

Dear Lord, we rejoice that the new year offers us so many opportunities to serve you and to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Help us to seize these opportunities and not to waste them in fearing the future, criticizing others, or clinging to the past. As the Christ child came to change the world and to bring your kingdom on earth, send your Spirit to encourage us, inspire us, and lead us into the future that you have planned for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**\*\* Song: "Light of the Stable" ~ Selah\***

Sharing the Peace of Christ

Joys and Concerns

Prayers, Lord's Prayer (debts, debtors)

Assurance of Pardon

**\*\* Hymn:** TBD

Thank you for sharing your tithes and offerings

**\*\* Doxology**

**\*\* Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Sermon Texts: Galatians 4:4-7 (The Message)

Luke 2:22-40 (The Message)

**\*\* Hymn:** TBD

Poem: "Time for Great Expectations"

Special Music: "The Goodness of God" ~ Deb Rickrode

**\*\* Statement of Faith:** "The Nicene Creed"\*

Video: "Little Drummer Boy (West Wing)"\*

Message: "Great Expectations"

**\*\* Song:** "Praise You Anywhere" ~ Brandon Lake\*

**\*\* Benediction**

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

Postlude

\*On the screen

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

Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 24, 2023

## Scripture Reading: Luke 1:26-38

*Pray, and let God worry. —Martin Luther*

Almost 40 years ago, songwriter Mark Lowry scribbled down some lyrics for a Christmas song about Mary. After all, people were singing carols about the angels, the shepherds, and of course about the baby Jesus born on this holy and silent night. But few carols paid homage to the teenage girl who gave birth 2,000 years ago in the little town of Bethlehem, Judea.

The song that Lowry wrote reached Number 6 on CCM Magazine's Adult Contemporary Chart. At the time, Lowry was with the Gaither Vocal Band, and he himself recorded his song on their 1998 Christmas album, *Still the Greatest Story Ever Told*. Today, the song has become a modern Christmas classic, recorded by hundreds of artists over the years, and different versions have periodically reached the top 10 in the Billboard R&B and Holiday charts.

His song consists of questions.

*Mary, did you know  
That your baby boy will one day walk on water?  
Mary, did you know  
That your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?  
Did you know  
That your baby boy has come to make you new?  
This child that you've delivered  
Will soon deliver you?*

Let's answer Lowry's questions.

No, Mary didn't know.

She was clueless. She was young. "How can this be?" she asks in verse 34 of our reading. Later, there were many things she would "ponder" in her heart. She didn't know what it would be like having to raise a boy who was always going about "his Father's business." She didn't know what it would be like to watch him suffer and die.

We don't know everything either, do we? We can't know what lies past this Christmas Eve Sunday. But Mary was a woman of faith: "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

This is a good verse for us to take with us into 2024.

—Timothy Merrill

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, today you are a baby in a manger. You will grow to be the Savior of the world. And you will be raised in triumph and glory! I worship and bow before you. Amen.*

## Daily Bible Readings

Sunday: Ecclesiastes 7-10

Monday: Song of Solomon 1-2

Tuesday: Song of Solomon 3

Wednesday: Revelation 19

Thursday: Revelation 20

Friday: Revelation 21

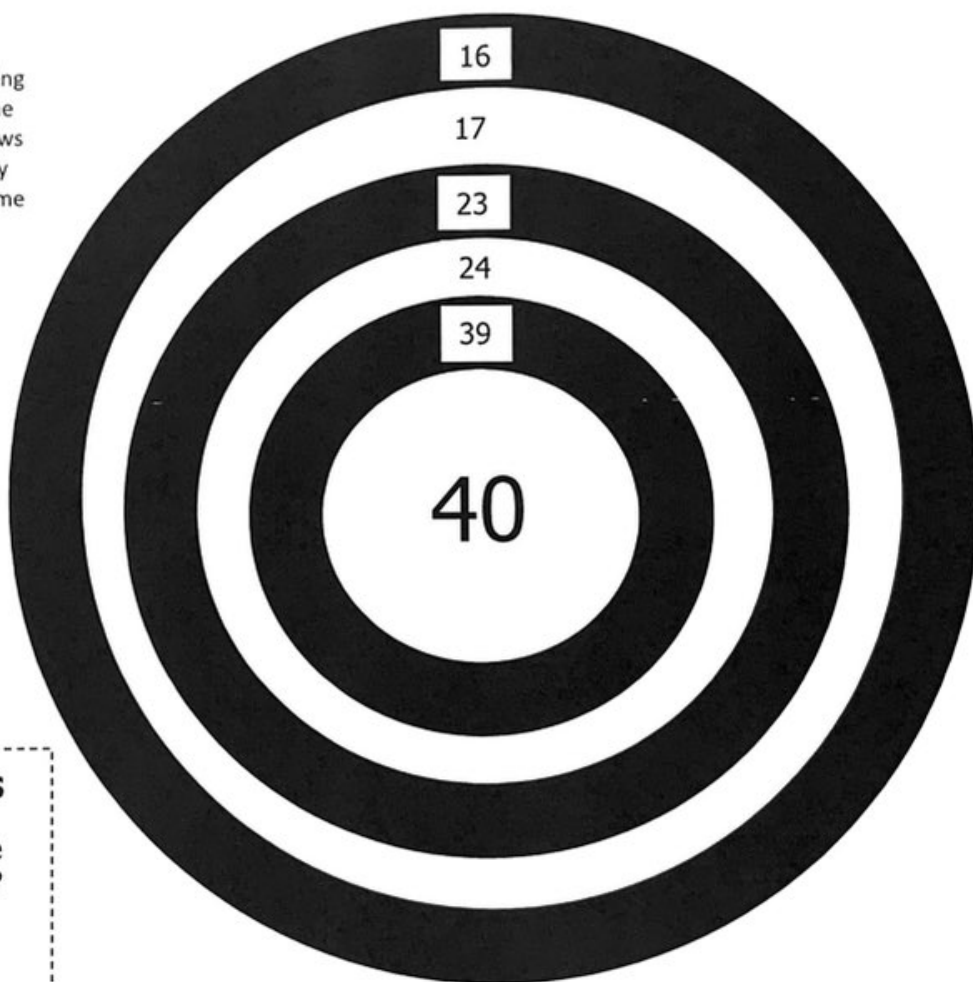
Saturday: Revelation 22

## VERSE TO REMEMBER

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.* —Isaiah 7:14

## TARGET PRACTICE

Robin Hood is having trouble shooting his arrows into this target so that the total is exactly 100. How many arrows will he need to shoot? HINT: He may need to shoot his arrow into the same ring more than once!



## Word Pictures

What phrases do these word pictures suggest?

Once  
**TIME**

**EATING**  
**Run**

Answer to  
Word Pictures:  
Once upon a  
time; Eating on  
the run.  
Answer to  
Target  
Practice:  
six arrows,  
16, 16, 17, 17,  
17, 17.



# The Best Place to Have a God Encounter

*That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified.— Luke 2:8-9*



In the 1940s, the pastor of a tiny church in a rural town ordered a sign for their outdoor manger scene. The sign company was in another city and needed to know the dimensions and wording of the sign. So for clarity purposes, the pastor decided to send a telegraph of the text and measurements of the sign.

The next day, a Western Union employee was going about her normal routine when she was shocked to see this message come across the wire: "For unto us a child is born. 8 feet long, 3 feet wide."

What a surprise! But could you imagine the surprise of the shepherds in the fields so long ago on the night our Savior was born? Imagine, just going about your normal daily routine when, all of a sudden, a figure in bright light appears and begins to speak to you. Then thousands of those figures fill the sky and begin chanting. Could you imagine the shepherds going home to their wives and having to answer the question, "How was work?"

**But the reality and truth of Christmas is that God meets us in the ordinary of life.** As we go about our days, God is intricately working in our lives and meets us in the mundane. Our job is to simply be open to His leading in our lives. So even in the ordinary of life, look to encounter God in a big way.

## ***Prayer Challenge***

Ask God to reveal Himself to you in the ordinary moments of everyday life.

## ***Questions for Thought***

Why is it so easy to segment the "spiritual" from the "ordinary" in our lives? Do you think God sees those boundaries?

What might God say to you if you opened yourself up to hearing from Him every day?

# Luke 2:22-40

J	S	E	R	V	A	N	T	P	G	H	R	M	P	C	F	V	T	F	V
P	A	L	V	I	K	G	E	H	A	O	C	G	U	J	I	L	C	Y	E
P	Y	I	J	Y	B	K	C	B	Q	K	D	J	M	Y	P	R	R	M	G
Z	I	F	I	R	S	T	B	O	R	N	G	W	I	S	D	O	M	F	A
J	F	M	P	S	C	A	G	M	X	O	Y	B	M	M	O	S	E	S	P
C	D	L	Z	L	A	P	E	B	D	T	S	I	M	E	O	N	R	J	Y
D	G	E	N	T	I	L	E	S	F	M	F	C	T	L	O	R	D	A	Z
D	B	S	Q	E	A	Y	V	F	H	P	M	B	E	C	N	K	E	C	S
H	L	P	Q	S	R	B	A	A	N	U	F	S	M	S	Y	C	D	H	N
X	F	I	U	B	P	I	D	G	T	R	F	T	P	C	A	E	I	M	Q
N	C	R	W	Q	R	S	L	B	W	I	Z	C	L	O	M	R	C	F	G
X	E	I	F	L	O	Z	A	A	I	F	O	M	E	J	X	E	A	X	F
J	M	T	L	C	M	T	W	X	F	I	H	N	K	S	O	M	T	I	H
O	M	E	S	S	I	A	H	G	H	C	O	P	V	L	K	O	E	H	T
M	B	L	E	S	S	I	N	G	S	A	I	O	R	A	Q	N	D	Z	B
F	I	S	R	A	E	L	J	B	P	T	N	R	E	A	X	Y	P	G	O
K	K	V	K	W	Q	U	J	P	N	I	T	B	Z	I	Y	M	B	Z	L
U	Z	F	Y	E	B	T	R	F	J	O	Q	A	I	Y	H	I	H	S	G
M	T	K	M	S	F	A	S	T	I	N	G	K	D	Q	S	P	N	Y	Y
N	J	S	O	D	N	F	Y	G	D	V	J	N	Z	E	V	C	I	G	B

BLESSINGS

FASTING

GOD

LAW

MOSES

PURIFICATION

SIMEON

WISDOM

CEREMONY

FIRST BORN

ISRAEL

LORD

PRAYING

SALVATION

SPIRIT

DEDICATED

GENTILES

JERUSALEM

MESSIAH

PROMISE

SERVANT

TEMPLE



# Psalm 148

M	B	X	T	N	K	K	E	W	I	N	D	S	E	F	V	R	B
K	W	V	L	Q	B	Q	D	D	D	O	K	V	J	H	T	O	M
D	S	A	S	F	C	S	T	A	U	U	Z	L	O	K	D	S	W
M	T	T	T	P	T	D	I	U	U	X	K	O	B	B	U	E	D
O	R	K	W	E	N	J	N	Y	S	Y	C	R	P	G	I	A	H
U	O	V	R	L	R	Y	L	A	H	Q	O	D	R	L	F	N	E
N	N	N	D	B	K	S	I	H	I	L	M	C	T	Z	G	G	A
T	G	N	U	E	M	M	G	A	N	U	M	P	V	O	T	E	V
A	M	O	W	P	D	H	H	K	I	A	A	W	P	M	R	L	E
I	I	O	S	W	Q	B	T	W	N	H	N	D	X	A	P	S	N
N	O	E	O	H	C	U	N	Q	G	F	D	A	X	J	H	O	L
S	Y	N	W	N	U	Y	I	R	S	N	E	K	Z	P	I	X	Y
O	S	P	H	H	W	H	N	O	T	E	D	Y	I	T	L	P	A
J	E	A	R	T	H	N	G	Q	A	F	Y	M	A	R	L	D	R
U	K	I	N	G	S	S	K	X	R	K	Z	N	O	E	S	P	M
R	L	I	B	X	A	L	K	G	S	U	N	A	U	D	P	A	I
R	Z	N	H	A	I	L	C	R	E	A	T	E	D	H	K	P	E
W	P	R	A	I	S	E	N	X	H	E	A	V	E	N	S	M	S

ANGELS  
EARTH  
HEAVENS  
LIGHTNING  
MOUNTAINS  
SEA  
SNOW  
WATERS

COMMANDED  
HAIL  
HILLS  
LORD  
NATION  
SHINING STARS  
STRONG  
WINDS

CREATED  
HEAVENLY ARMIES  
KINGS  
MOON  
PRAISE  
SKY  
SUN

# Happy New Year

L	T	R	A	D	I	T	I	O	N	S	Q	P	J	I	S	C	F	R	
A	I	B	G	K	W	B	Y	F	J	N	J	C	Q	F	J	I	P	E	
M	P														R	D	T	R	
M	L		O	M	Y	O	B	H	T	L	K	N	P		E	Q	E	S	
C	P		J	I	D	J	Q	S	C	S	P	U	N		S	C	F	D	
A	O		J	I								V	M		O	O	O	H	
L	L		A	X		F	V	Y	C	V		J	H		L	U	N	F	
E	V		N	B		A	Y	F	F	B		N	L		U	N	Y	E	
N	O		U	E		M	E		W	P		R	E		T	T	A	S	
D	D		A	B		I	S		K	G		D	X		I	D	P	T	
A	E		R	O		L	F					B	L		O	O	W	I	
R	C		Y	Y		Y	J	G	B	X	V	M	K		N	W	C	I	
S	E		G	T		F	F	T	P	P	I	M	T		S	N	J	T	
Y	M		R	C											M	D	U	I	
T	B		C	E	L	E	B	R	A	T	I	O	N	S	O	C	G	E	
A	E		B	A	V	H	C	L	N	R	J	M	Z	V	H	T	V	S	
Z	R																E	O	
E	Y	B	A	A	N	Z	N	P	H	T	I	P	P	R	H	G	X	K	L
D	R	L	P	I	J	N	M	F	W	G	N	O	D	G	M	Q	K	P	N

CALENDAR  
DECEMBER  
JANUARY

CELEBRATION  
FAMILY  
RESOLUTIONS

COUNTDOWN  
FESTIVITIES  
TRADITIONS