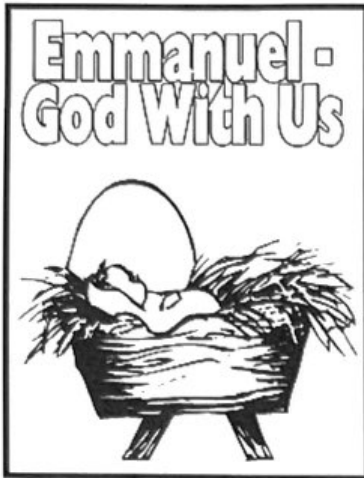


Dear Friends,



Emmanuel, God with us! What a comforting and reassuring thought! God is not some cold harsh divinity sitting on a throne, removed from the human world. God is with us, in our joys and in our sorrows. Perhaps we feel God's presence especially at Christmas.

In 1885 poet Christina Georgina Rossetti wrote:

***Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas;
Star and angels gave the sign.***

Jesus is the very embodiment of God as love. John 3:16 tells us, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." That love is the message of Christmas and the symbol of the fourth candle of Advent.

The word "love" is mentioned over 50 times in the books of John that tell us that "God is love." Of course, we know that love comes in many forms: romantic love for a partner, love for family and friends, love for others, and the love and gratitude we feel toward God, Creator, Savior, and Counselor.

IS
God Love

I feel especially blessed by the love I receive from the members of Grace Church and by the love I can give in return. Perhaps love defines what it means to be a Christian: to follow Jesus, to look to the star of Bethlehem like the magi so long ago, and to find that Christ Child – in our hearts and in our lives. Let us offer the baby Jesus the gifts of our love, our devotion, our service, and our commitment to share the love Jesus embodies with all we meet.



MERRY CHRISTMAS!



Love in Christ,
Patti Miller

Possibilities

"Nothing, you see, is impossible with God." Luke 1:37

Hope, joy, peace, and love can rule
In hearts and minds and lives.
Although the world seems dark and cruel
In Christ, each person thrives.
The angel Mary reassured
That she would bear a child,
And she believed the spoken word -
Brave, humbled, undefiled.

The darkness should not cause us angst
Nor give us fear or doubt;
Let's live each day with sincere thanks
For that's what faith's about:
To live each day in gratitude
To God, our Savior, King.
God's love no person will exclude,
To all salvation brings.

The Christmas bells ring out with joy
And hope for Jesus' birth.
In Bethlehem, that little boy
Brings peace and love to earth.
Like Mary, let us in God trust;
This miracle let's seize.
A Savior that is given to us
Brings possibilities! **Patti Miller**



POSSIBILITIES!

HOPE

PEACE

JOY

LOVE

Announcements

~Christmas cards from Mrs. Claus's mailbox will be distributed today.

~Please remember during this holiday season that others may be grieving and experiencing loss. Let us be mindful and support each other with the love of Christ.

~The Homewood Auxiliary dues are \$3 for singles and \$5 for couples. If anyone is interested in joining the auxiliary, please contact Linda Bixler 717-632-5606.

~The Sharing God's Grace donations for 2023 were \$1916.35. The consistory voted to give \$83.65 to make the total \$2000. The money will be given to the Hanover Area Council of Churches to be used for the Provide A Lunch (PAL) program.

~This 2023 comedy/drama is about an unhappy and cranky man who was laid off for early retirement & misses his wife who passed away. He gets new neighbors who drive him crazy, until they slowly win him over. It will be shown Friday January 12, at 3 PM in Fellowship Hall. **Warning:** This film is rated **PG-13** due the main character considering suicide to join his wife. The film runs 126 minutes. Snacks provided.

~The Outreach Committee will assemble lentil brown rice soup mix jars January 27. They will be donated to HACC. Donation of ingredients are 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.

The Miracle of Love



Grace United Church of Christ

100 Fourth Street

Hanover, Pennsylvania 17331

717-632-1146

Gathering Music

Welcome/Announcements

Westminster Chimes/Prelude

Tithes and offerings

** Doxology 625

** Prayer of Thanksgiving

** Call to Worship

Lector: We are waiting on you, God. We are still waiting.

All: The darkness is deep, but look! The star is beginning to shine.

Lector: The everlasting light is coming closer.

All: Hope is in the air. Peace is promised. Joy is on the tips of our tongues. Love is coming.

Lector: Love divine, all loves excelling. The Christ Child is about to be born.

All: We are waiting for Love, and Love is waiting for us.

Let us open our hearts to be loved and to give love.

** Opening Prayer (Together):

Dear Lord, thank you for your gift of love. Thank you that in spite of our many sins, you still loved us and came to save us. You came to teach us what it is to love and how to practice it each day. Remind us that love is unconditional and sacrificial, and comes from you. Give us the wisdom we need to love well, the mercy to forgive ourselves when we neglect to love well, and the hunger to always learn more about love. We ask in the name of Jesus, born in Bethlehem and in our hearts, Amen.

Lighting of the Advent Candle: LOVE

** Hymn: "Hope for Everyone" ~ Matt Maher*

Sharing the Peace of Christ

Joys and Concerns

Prayers, Lord's Prayer (debts, debtors), Assurance of Pardon

** Song: "Hope Was Born This Night" ~ Sidewalk Prophets *

** A Christmas Statement of Faith: We believe God, the Creator, is the source of all life. We each bear within us God's image. We believe Jesus Christ, God's own son, is our Savior and Redeemer, born of the Virgin Mary to be Emmanuel, God with us. In Christ's death and resurrection we are promised eternal life. We believe the Holy Spirit is God's tangible presence in our lives, guiding, inspiring and nurturing us. In life, in death, in life beyond death, we are not alone. God is with us, on Christmas Day and every day.

Poem: "Possibilities"

Video: "Breath of Heaven (Mary's Song)" ~ Amy Grant

Message: "The Miracle of Love by Anne, Mary's Mother"
Scriptures read by Brad Arnold and Jenn Weaver; Song sung by Amy Fawks

** Hymn: "Silent Night" (lighting of candles; Christ candle)

** 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.

Third Sunday of Advent, December 17, 2023

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God.

— *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

Terry Sanderson, 76, a retired optometrist, and Academy Award-winning actress Gwyneth Paltrow had been in litigation for seven years, ever since a collision between the two of them took place in 2016 on the slopes of a Utah skiing resort. Now they faced each other in court.

Witnesses were called. Statements were made. Both litigants took the stand. And when the dust settled, Paltrow prevailed and the long ordeal was over.

Except for what she said as she left the courtroom. Her words have become an internet meme. According to Sanderson himself, her exact words were: “Wish you well.”

She had walked behind his table, paused, placed a hand in the small of his back and whispered words intended for his ears only. He replied, “Thank you, dear.”

Although some critics wondered if she wasn’t sticking it to him, most observers agree that the exchange was genuine. She did, indeed, wish him well.

If you have Advent candles in your home, the candle in the wreath is not blue or purple; it is pink. It symbolizes joy. On this third Sunday of Advent, we celebrate joy. Today is also known as Gaudete Sunday, from the Latin, *Gaudete*, meaning “rejoice.” *Gaudete* is also the first word of today’s epistle reading: “Rejoice.”

The text goes on to urge: “Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil” (vv. 17-22).

All of these phrases are important: “Pray without ceasing.” Or, “Give thanks.” “Test everything.” “Hold fast to what is good.”

Gwyneth said, “Wish you well.” Three words. And on Gaudete Sunday, and during all of Advent and the Christmas season, we wish people well. It’s what we do. We send best wishes. We hope for the best as the year comes to an end.

—Timothy Merrill

Prayer: May I be your servant, O God, in spreading joy and good cheer today. Amen.

Daily Bible Readings

Sunday: Proverbs 15-18
Monday: Proverbs 19-21
Tuesday: Proverbs 22-24
Wednesday: Proverbs 25-28
Thursday: Proverbs 29-31
Friday: Ecclesiastes 1-3
Saturday: Ecclesiastes 4-6

Verse to Remember

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." —Luke 2:10-11

Directions: Fill in the word square below using these 9 letters: Two O's, two I's, two R's, and one each of D, B and E. The resulting words can be read both across and down.

P	A	R	T	S
A				E
R				N
T				D
S	E	N	D	S

**WORD
BOX**



ANSWERS:
adore,
robin, tried.

It is Christmas in the heart that puts Christmas in the air. —W.T. Ellis

The first confirmation that Jesus is God

All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us'). — Isaiah 7:14



Long-time television show host Larry King was once asked by a reporter, *"If you could interview only one person in history, who would it be?"* Larry responded, *"Jesus Christ."*

"And if you could only ask Him one question," the reporter continued, *"what would it be?"*

"I would ask Him if He indeed was virgin-born," King replied, *"because the answer to that would define history for me."*

For centuries, theologians have debated the necessity and significance of the virgin birth of Christ. Could the Son of God have indeed been born out of natural relations? Why is it so important for Him to have been born to a virgin?

Well, while there are many reasons put forth for why Jesus was virgin-born, the most compelling is that Jesus' life was remarkably different from the very beginning. And to Mary, Joseph, and those closest to them, this would've been a bold confirmation that this birth was from God, not man.

If the virgin birth is true, it changes everything. And as believers, it's the first confirmation in the life of Christ that He is no ordinary human being... but God Himself. So this Christmas, thank God He did not leave Christ's identity a mystery, but made Him known as God from the very beginning! Merry Christmas!

Prayer Challenge

Thank God today that Jesus' true identity was no mystery, but that He was confirmed as God incarnate from His very birth.

Questions for Thought

Why is it so important that Jesus was both fully God and fully human?

How might a stronger faith in the virgin birth strengthen your belief in who Christ claimed to be?

Christ's Birth Luke 1: 26-38

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

ANGEL
 BLESSED
 BLESSED
 ELIZABETH
 GABRIEL
 GRACIOUS
 JESUS
 KING
 LORD
 MARY
 NAZARETH
 PREGNANT
 SERVANT
 VIRGIN

Nativity Word Search

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

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ANGELS
BETHLEHEM
DONKEY
FRANKINCENSE
GOLD
JESUS
JOSPEH

LAMB
MANGER
MARY
MYRRH
NATIVITY
SHEPHERD
STAR

THREE KINGS
WISE MEN





Advent word search



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

ANGEL
ANTICIPATION
CANDLES
EMMANUEL
FOUR
HOPE
JESUS

JOSEPH
JOY
LIGHT
LOVE
MARY
PEACE
PINK

PREPARATION
PURPLE
REJOICE
SAVIOR
WAITING
WREATH

