



Community Presbyterian Church

December 2020 Newsletter

Greetings!

Can you believe that it is already December 1st? Time is flying by, and before we know it, the year 2021 will be upon us. If you are like me, the tree is up, the decorations are put in their places and Christmas music fills the house.

Last Sunday, November 29th, was the first Sunday of Advent, and within this Newsletter you will find an article by the Gospel Coalition about the history of Advent. Also, I have included the Advent readings for each Sunday. You will also see Scripture readings for each Sunday for you to read. I would encourage you to have your own Advent wreath at your home and to light the Advent candle each Sunday while reading the week's corresponding Advent reading.

The sermon series for Advent is entitled the *Miracle of Christmas*. On Sunday, November 29th we looked at the *Miracle of the Moment*; on December 6th we will hear about *The Miracle of the Message* (Heb. 1:1-3); December 13th, *The Miracle of the Method* (Romans 11:33); December 20th, *The Miracle of the Manger* (John 1:15-15; 9-14). And on Christmas Eve we will hear how *A Baby Changes Everything*.

At this time, the Worship Committee has not made definite plans for the times of our Christmas Eve Service(s); most likely we will have 2, possibly 3, services with one service being at the usual time of 7:00 p.m. We will be asking persons to reserve seats for all services. One service will be streamed live on Facebook and another service will be taped and posted on our website. As soon as final plans are made, I will ensure that you are informed.

Christmas is a joyous time, and for many it is. But there are those for whom the Christmas season is difficult. This may be due to childhood memories, the loss of a loved one, or "winter depression." If this is a difficult time of year for you, I would like to encourage you to reach out to someone (I am *always* available) to talk with, have a cup of coffee or hot chocolate with, and/or to pray with.

I will be leaving on Christmas Day to spend December 25th through January 9th with my family in California. Stewart Lewis has graciously agreed to preach on Sunday, December 27th, and Sunday January 3rd. I will have my cell phone with me and will be available for emergencies.

I would like to end with the lyrics from a song entitled My Christmas Prayer by Rob Thomas:

More from Diane...

*I pray for peace
Blessings and honor
Heaven right earth's despair.
This is my Christmas prayer.*

*For those that grieve,
God will bring comfort,
Laughter will rapture there.
This is my Christmas prayer.*

*I pray for you (Yes I know you do)
That your triumph and conquer
Poses the strength you need to bare.
This is my Christmas prayer.*

*For those who are in need
There would be plenty
And each other's burdens share.
Oh, this is my Christmas prayer.*

*So let hope fill our hearts
Shine the light through the dark
And everywhere
I will pray
This Christmas prayer.*

*See, I pray that love will rule and reign
And I pray that time will rid the pain of this world
As we learn to trust and care.
This is my Christmas prayer.*

May you experience anew the birth of our Lord Jesus the Christ, a baby who came to earth to save us from our sins. It is indeed a miracle!

Peace and joy,

Diane



PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN

We are now officially in the midst of the busy holiday season although this new normal doesn't feel very holiday-ish. I hope all of you had a truly blessed and totally awesome Thanksgiving with your family. I sincerely hope that you are all healthy and safe and remain so. I beg of you, as we watch the COVID numbers rise, please wash your hands frequently, wear your mask and visit from afar. Sanitize, sanitize, sanitize.

This month we will be doing Christmas and winter-ish crafts. Come and join us. Make a few new decorations for your house, have a good time, share some laughs and enjoy the fellowship of other Christian women. We learn so much from each other as we gather in His name and in His house. We would love to welcome you into our group on Tuesday mornings.

Georgia and I had the honor of attending the Living Hope Center's Appreciation Luncheon on November 18th. At that luncheon the staff presented the blessings from this year and their needs for the coming year. As one would expect, there is always a need for volunteers to work with the young women and families. I encourage anyone that believes in saving lives of unborn babies and giving young mothers a hand up, to contact this organization. It is invested in leading in growth so these mothers can have a home, an education, and a future while letting them know they have options other than ending their pregnancy.

Next Tuesday, PW will be having a cookie bake day. We will be baking cookies for the Living Hope Center. These cookies will help the center reach their goal of 500 cookies for their open house on the following Saturday, the 12th. There will be activities for the kids, goodies for all and a good time will be had by everyone. Plan to come and enjoy some mission work disguised as cookie making and good fellowship time.

I want to take this opportunity to wish each and everyone a safe, healthy, and holy Christmas season. Please consider joining PW for a time of welcoming God into our hearts and growing in love and the feeling of being blessed as we celebrate the greatest gift ever given- God's gift of his son. Merry Christmas!

In God's love- Wanda Gray-623-341-4984



ADVENT WEEKS 1 & 2

Week 1: November 29, 2020

This Place Is a Mess!

[Isaiah 64:1-9](#) & [Mark 13:24-37](#)

If ever there was a year we needed Advent, this is the year. We hardly know how to describe the year we have lived through. We hesitate to reflect on all the mess around us in 2020. All we know is that nothing seems right, nothing seems like it used to be, nothing. We need Advent!

The prophet Isaiah cried out for us, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down ... To make your name known ... so that nations might tremble at your presence." So tear through the mess, O Lord, and come down to us again. We long to be your people, a people of hope.

We light this first candle as a sign of our hope. Hope that you can meet us, even in the mess of our world. Hope that you still see us, though we feel we are lost in the rubble. Let this light be the guide that brings us to Emmanuel once more.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel.



Week 2: December 6, 2020

Waiting on the Threshold

[2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16](#) & [Luke 1:26-38](#)

We live on the brink every day. We stand on the threshold between this world and the next one. We live and move between the ordinary and divine, between the mundane and the mystery. Too often, we forget to look up and see the angels in our living room. We forget that the love we give and live is a sign of eternity, God with us, right now. We forget that company is coming.

Luke tells us that God's favor came to a girl, an ordinary girl. It might have been you or your daughter; it might have been the girl down the street or your grandchild. But the messenger of God came and greeted her and said, "The Lord is with you." What a gift and a promise: Emmanuel, God is with us.

We light this candles with peace in our hearts for the promise of proximity, the nearness of God. Even when we forget to listen, to lean into that presence, God is as close as our own breath. This, in a confused and confusing world, is a peace that passes all understanding. It is the peace that knows that company is coming.

ADVENT WEEKS 3 & 4 ADULT CLASSES



Week 3: December 13, 2020

Deck the Halls

[Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11](#) & [John 1:6-8, 19-28](#)

We want everything to look nice: the decorations of the season, our homes with their lights and tinsel, wreaths and ribbons. We want to lighten the darkness around us, bring beauty to the ugliness that wears us down. We decorate, because it is tradition. Because it lifts our hearts. Because it makes us feel like children again. We deck our halls because company is coming.

The prophet Isaiah smiled when he said, “God will give a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, a mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.” No matter how far we feel from the spirit of the season, God promises to decorate us with joy.

We light these candles as a sign of our joy in the beautiful things of this season – not just the things that glitter and flash, but the deeper things, the beauty of the heart and the soul, the beauty of love shared in service and hospitality. We light this candle of joy because company is coming.
O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

Week 4: December 20, 2020

[Isaiah](#) & [John 3:16](#)

Our lists are long, even in this strange mess where we live these days. And we want to do it right, we want to be safe, but we want to be able to enjoy the season. We’ve got work to do to put right what has gone wrong, to heal what is broken, to mend the relationships, to love all of God’s people, and to prepare for the way of the Lord.

The prophet Isaiah tells us of God’s great and unconditional love that says we will no longer be called forsaken or our land will be desolate. Instead, as God looks at us with pure, unconditional love we are called His delight.

So, we light this candles as a sign of the love of the God we worship is who is not far from us We light this candle because of the love we will experience because a baby who was called Emmanuel was born.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

ADVENT CHRISTMAS EVE

Christmas Eve: December 24, 2020

A Baby Changes Everything

Our Christmas Affirmation

Advent hope moves us; Advent joy stirs us; Advent peace stills us; and Advent love leads, that we might affirm our King Jesus.

It is time we set flame to this Advent affirmation by lighting the Christ Candle.

We believe that Jesus is the Son of God. He was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem of Judea. He was the long-awaited Messiah whose coming was prophesied. The same Jesus lives today in our hearts. He deserves our highest loyalty and total commitment. In Jesus Christ our hope is fulfilled; our love is consummated; our joy is complete; and our peace is sealed.

Rejoice, a Savior is born.

A savior is born, indeed. Joy to the world!



VETERANS FOOD BOXES



Many Thanks to Steve & Leora Knutson for all their hard work putting together the "Veteran's Food Boxes" and seeing to their distribution. All this was possible because of the generous donations of food from our amazing congregation! Thank you all so very much for honoring our Veterans with your generosity!

We will continue our efforts to provide food boxes to the Veterans for Christmas.

We will be collecting the same kinds of food as we did for Thanksgiving, which include: canned vegetables, instant mashed potatoes, gravy, canned cranberries, applesauce, pickles, and olives. Monetary donations are also welcome for purchasing of perishable items. We will need donations to fill 72 boxes by December 15, 2020.



INSPIRED ADVENT READING

This is some of the story behind Advent. An article by **Ryan Reeves** is Associate Professor of Historical Theology at [Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary](#),

Unknown Start

The earliest dating of Advent is impossible to determine. The start of Easter in Christian history is far more obviously tied to Passover (albeit with different methods for dating), and Christmas came to be associated with the birth of Christ as a result of it falling during the December Solstice, the darkest day of the year in the northern hemisphere. The coming of the Light of the World made a lot of sense in so much darkness. Within a few centuries of church history, both Easter and Christmas took on special meaning due to their use in commemorating the life of Jesus.

In the early centuries of the church, Advent almost certainly arose as a result of the fixed dating of Christmas. Once December 25 became Christmas, it was the center of gravity for the later half of the year—a perfect balance to Easter in the first half. In this way, Advent took on significance the same way Lent did: both were preparation for the more significant season on the horizon.

By the fourth century, the first written evidence of Advent is found in modern Spain and Europe (Hispania and Gaul). Probably the earliest official mention of Advent practices comes as the Council of Sargossa (AD 380) met to answer a gnostic-inspired movement called Priscillianism.

The heresy essentially held to a harsh form of dualism—light vs. dark, body vs. soul—so perhaps the celebration of the incarnation made theological sense as a counterbalance to this heresy. The council was not committed to any specific dating of Advent, though, and only suggested people attend church daily between December 17 and 29.

By the fifth and sixth centuries, more firm dating of the Advent season can be found in historical records—as well as Advent sermon series.

Double Meaning of Advent

Unlike modern Advent ceremonies, most celebrations of Advent in history had a twin focus. The Latin word *adventus* was the translation of the Greek *parousia*—a word used for both the coming of Christ in human flesh and his Second Coming. Advent, then, always tended to focus on both.

For the first two weeks of Advent, the church would reflect on the Second Coming. Disciples would chasten their hearts, confess sins, and spend time hoping for the quick coming of the

INSPIRED ADVENT READING

his double meaning in Advent history signals an important reality in the liturgical calendar: Advent and Christmas are never held as a full re-enactment of the life of Christ but point to our place between the Resurrection and Second Coming. Advent and Christmas are not merely about the coming of Jesus, but about everything since the birth of Jesus.

Advent Today

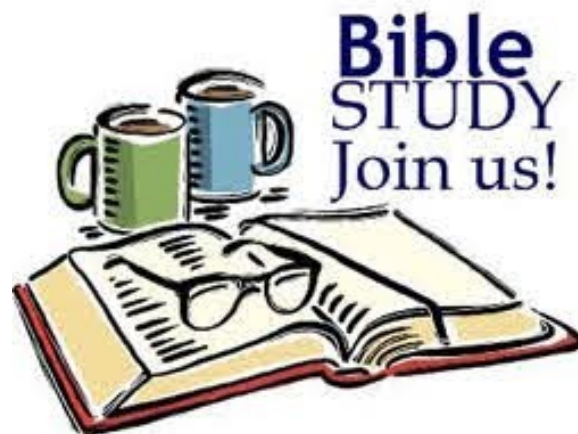
The rise of Advent services today are somewhat unique in Protestant evangelicalism. I cannot think of a single, large-scale controversy over the lighting of candles and reading of Scripture during these weeks. Perhaps this is due to the corporate nature of bearing witness to the commemoration of Jesus's birth, which fails to raise as many alarms as other traditional practices in the church.

Part of the rise of Advent, too, has been the widespread adoption of Christmas by so many in the West, religious or secular. For many churches, rather than wage a war for Christmas, they find it better to focus instead on the advent of the King of Kings, so lighting candles and reading appropriate passages makes more sense than merely assaulting holiday consumerism. Numerous Advent devotionals, calendars, and homespun methods of marking the season have sprouted up in recent years as a result.

One notable lack in modern Advent celebration, though, is the twin focus of both the Incarnation and the Second Coming. Both of these themes make Advent instructive, not only historically but also in terms of biblical theology. We are not a people who merely look to the one moment God broke into history. We await his coming again in glory, when the King's reign shall be on earth as it is in heaven.



ADULT CLASSES



We are going to begin the New Year with two opportunities to learn more about God's Word. These will be opportunities for adults to participate and grow in understanding faith and living as Christians.

First, beginning on Thursday, January 7, at 10:30 AM, we will begin a four-session study "The Faith of Jesus." This class will look at where the faith of Jesus came from and how he lived it out each day as he ministered to the people. We will talk about the Tabernacle, Temple, Judaism and what we understand of Jesus' faith that we read of in the Scriptures.

Our other class will be a study of the Gospel of Matthew. This will be held at 9 AM on Sunday morning and will be a 75 minute class. We will begin on Sunday, January 10th. We will look at Matthew's Gospel and cover about two chapters per week. Material will be available prior to the class.

For each of these classes, we will be following the church's guidelines with social distancing and masks being worn. If you have any questions please contact Stewart Lewis at 480-323-8400.

PRAYER GROUP

Prayer is such a vital instrument and part of our church community. In John 5:14-15 we read, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.”

Pastor Diane would like to invite you to join her each Wednesday at 7:00 p.m., via Zoom beginning on January 20, 2021, via Zoom for a time of prayer. This will be a time for us to gather and pray for our church, persons within our church and our nation.

The link for every Zoom meeting is:

[https://zoom.us/j/99140645396?
pwd=T0ovVFVxeFJzQzF2ZEp4QzFxaei8wZz09](https://zoom.us/j/99140645396?pwd=T0ovVFVxeFJzQzF2ZEp4QzFxaei8wZz09)

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Pastor Diane at Pastor.diane@cpcpinetop.org



NOVEMBER SESSION MINUTES

The Regular Session meeting was called to order and opened in prayer by the Reverend Diane White at 2:00 pm via Zoom. Elders present were: Marc Traeger, Caroline Cox, Jim Snitzer, John Marble, Laurie Yost, Steve Knutson, and Jerry Kinsel. Judy Bee and Patrick McKinley were excused.

Clerk's Report: Communion was served November 1, 2020. MSP to approve the minutes from the October 13, 2020, Regular Session Meeting.

Pastor's Report: Pastor Diane discussed increasing her housing allowance to \$30,000, taking it from her salary to housing for tax purposes. She has requested to take vacation from December 25, 2020, to January 9, 2021. Stewart Lewis has offered to preach both Sundays she is gone. MSP to approve Stewart to fill the pulpit in Pastor Diane's absence. Diane stated that worship services are going well, and she is still working on some items.

Worship: No report

Finance: Giving was down in September. The budget for 2021 will be discussed and approved at the December Session meeting.

Building & Grounds: John Marble stated they need to start working on the Cottage to get it ready for the MOPS program.

Christian Education: Caroline Cox stated the Committee will possibly have a Zoom meeting. Jerry Kinsel, as head of Adult Education, said he has talked to Stewart Lewis about having a new Bible study after the first of the year.

Nominating Committee. A Nominating Committee for this year was not elected at last year's Annual Congregational Meeting. After discussion, MSP was made to bypass this year's Nominating Committee for Elders and Deacons at the Annual Meeting.

Calendar Review: Communion will be served December 6, 2020. The next Session Meeting will be December 13, at 2:00 via Zoom. The Annual Congregational Meetings will be Sunday, January 31, 2021, following Worship service.

New Business: Annual Committee Reports are due to Lynda or Tammy no later than January 3, 2021.

MSP to accept and receive all report. The meeting was closed at 3:08 p.m. by Steve Knutson.