

First Presbyterian Church
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DECEMBER LINK

FROM THE PASTOR

Every year at this time we ask the question: Are our hearts prepared? Are we ready to receive the Christ child once again? God came to dwell among us. Pure love lay in the manger that night we call Christmas Eve. Love came to change the world.

Today, we might ask with Mary: How can this be?

Today, like the shepherds, we might be startled by a sky like none we've ever seen before. We might be dazzled by the baby born to be Lord and King. And, like the shepherds, we might go out praising God and telling all we've seen.

Or like Joseph, we might dream of something so wondrous that it seems impossible; and yet believe it with all our hearts because it fills us with hope and joy and peace and love and we know it to be a message from God.

The prophets foretold the coming of Emmanuel, God with us. The prophet Isaiah tells of God's baring of his holy arm -- the power of the Lord upon the earth.

"The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Isaiah 52:10).

In the birth of Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of that power of God became real -- power that was surprisingly tender and gentle and at the same time so filled with warning that the world must turn, believe, repent, and call on his name. Jesus Christ, the newborn king of glory, is the holy arm of God that reaches into human history.

Jesus Christ is God's holy arm touching us with blessings -- sometimes, yes, with stern warnings, but always with these dear words, given us in John's Gospel, ringing out in his promises and in his teaching, loud and clear like the bells of Christmas:

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him will not die but will have life everlasting. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but so that it might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17).

We know that God's love surrounds us even now, shining through dark and difficult times and glowing in times of joy. Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Word made flesh, gave his precious life to save us. Let us prepare to receive him again. Amen

Sending love and blessings to all of you in the season so filled with hope,

Joan

MUSIC NOTES

Dear First Family,

Greetings, to you and grace from the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! It has been such a dark year for so many people, that I wanted to bring you some bright words....and here they are:

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. “

The Message puts it this way:

“Get out of bed, Jerusalem! Wake up. Put your face in the sunlight. God’s bright glory has risen for you. The whole earth is wrapped in darkness, all people sunk in deep darkness, But God rises on you, his sunrise glory breaks over you. “

This is the message of Advent, which as you've read elsewhere, means “coming.” Truly the light has come, but in some respects, we must wait for it. I've listened to the radio for years, where broadcasters play Christmas music beginning in early November. By the time Christmas finally arrives, the average person is sick of Christmas carols and Christmas parodies.

But the truth remains that Christmas is worth waiting for, and sometimes we need to prepare ourselves. You might have noticed this past Sunday that over half the shutters on the Sanctuary were closed. This is symbolic, by the way, and each week, one of them will be opened....as the Light of Christmas draws ever nearer. You might have noticed also that the First Sunday in Advent contained some Christmas carols.

This was deliberate, as some of us have been exposed to so much darkness, from the election, to social unrest, to racial inequalities, and to the unrest related to the pandemic. Pastor Joan and I decided to begin singing Christmas hymns a little early. Because perhaps many of us need the joy, the passion, and the light-heartedness that comes with Christmas. I beg of you, embrace this joy. There is no greater joy than of knowing Christ. The Christ of Christmas.

Be filled with joy, and I hope the music contains some of it for you. Each week we will open the shutters a little more to let the light in. Bathe in it. It is God's visible manifestation of His power and might. That light far supersedes the darkness that would engulf us all.

He is King. Let us all rejoice. *Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light.* That is our God, waiting for us to seek Him. Through music. Through sighs. Through heartache and triumph. He is never far away.

Have a blessed day. Have a best day. Our God reigns forever.

In Christ,

Jon

PROPERTY COMMITTEE:

Jon Gates, FPC organist and music director, getting his hands dirty! A big thanks to him for helping Anne Willett and the Property Committee keep our church grounds welcoming and beautiful!



WORSHIP COMMITTEE NEWS:

Your First Presbyterian Church Worship Committee members continue to work hand in hand with the FPC COVID-19 Task Force. We are grateful and blessed to be in our beautiful sanctuary especially during this Advent season and we would like to thank each and every one of you for making this possible by following the guidelines set in place to keep all healthy. If you join us physically in the sanctuary, you will be greeted by one of our Social Distancing Ushers outside FPC with little friendly reminders (listed below) prior to entering the sanctuary. We love you and are doing our best to keep all healthy during these unknowing times.

Masks are required **at all times**, please bring your own mask – if you happen to leave yours at home, we do have them available at all doors.

- Practice **social distancing**.
- **Hand sanitizer** is available in pews and on the walls when entering the sanctuary.
- Please sit in the pews with the **YELLOW BOWS ONLY**.
- When entering/exiting the sanctuary **please do not linger** and remember to practice social distancing.

If you simply are not ready to physically return to the sanctuary, please know that you are dearly missed. We will be glad to deliver bulletins to you, if needed. Please call the church office if you would like to be added to the list.

**Healthy Christmas Blessings,
Cara Moody, Chairman FPC Worship Committee**

PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN:



Catherine Ratcliffe (l.) and Sally Jones (r.), decorating the Sanctuary.

REPORT FROM THE PRESBYTERIAN PLAYSCHOOL

Greetings,

What an exciting December we are looking forward to! This month, we will be concentrating on experiencing the holiday season through our senses. We will learn about the feelings, textures, colors and smells and the symbols that make this time of the year so special.

The Playschool will be closed on December 24th, 25th, and 28th. We will resume on Tuesday, December 29th. We appreciate your support this year.

Wishing you and your family a Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy New Year!

Aretha Davis, Playschool Director

REPORT FROM THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

On November 3 of last year, eighteen members of our congregation, including most of our teens, their parents, and others involved in youth ministry, met in our church library to brainstorm plans and ideas for the coming months. What new challenges we would be facing just four months later! But as I look back over the last eight months, I believe that despite a cataclysmic shift in how we conduct our activities, and despite the pain of separation, we have often collectively as well as individually, experienced spiritual growth. How could that not be the case, as each of us has been required to seriously examine how we best serve God during a time such as this?

As I reread Pastor Gandy's opening message in last month's November *Link* at <https://www.fpcnatchez.org/newsletter>, the words from Galatians 6:9 came to mind:

"So let us not grow weary in doing what is right,
for we will reap at harvest time,
if we do not give up."

Sunday School classes are open for all ages for those who feel it is safe to attend. Tuesday Bible study at 11:00 is in Stratton Chapel. And very brief youth Zoom meetings are happening at 6:00 on Wednesday evenings. If anyone needs encouragement, ideas regarding Christian education, or a partner to help achieve more consistent Bible reading, please give Joan or me a call at 337-781-6114.

Helen Smith, Chairman, FPC Education Committee

Organ concert: Jon Gates, FPC organist and director of music, will give an organ concert on Friday, December 4, at 7 p.m. in the sanctuary of our church. The concert will feature classical organ music as well as some delightful surprises. Jon also has planned to offer some beloved Christmas carols and an opportunity for all to sing along. Please come prepared to hear the church's beautiful organ shown off at its finest. Safety guidelines will continue, with masks and safe seating arrangements required. The balcony will be opened when all safe seating on the main sanctuary floor has been closed.

Musical Arts League program: On Monday, December 7, at 7 p.m., the Musical Arts League will present a program in the Sanctuary at FPC, featuring a variety of local artists. Join us! *For everyone's safety, masks are required inside the church. Pews will be marked off so we can observe proper distancing.*

8:15 Worship on Sunday: We will have an 8:15 a.m. communion service on December 6, in Stratton Chapel. The next early service will be January 3.

The December Stated Meeting of the First Presbyterian Session is Monday, December 14, at 5:30 p.m. by Zoom.

Caroling on the Steps: FPC's annual Caroling on the Steps will be Friday, December 18, at 4:45 p.m. You are invited to come sing carols outside on the steps before entering the church for more singing and scripture reading. *For everyone's safety, masks are required inside the church. Pews will be marked off so we can observe proper distancing.* Come celebrate the season with us!

Ordination/Installation of Officers: At 10:30, Sunday, December 20, FPC will ordain and install the officers in the Class of 2023. Elders are Lane Feltus, Hal Hicks, Mary Lessley, and Catherine Ratcliffe. Deacons are Ryan Sharp, Gwen Washington, and Ken Price.

Sunday Evening Prayer and Communion Service will be held in Stratton Chapel at 6 o'clock on December 20.

The Pastor's Bible Study meets on Tuesdays, at 11 a.m. in Stratton Chapel. The format will be the same as before. You may bring your Bibles or use the ones provided in the chapel.

Upcoming Holidays: The church offices and the Playschool will be closed Thursday, December 24; Friday, December 25; and Friday, January 1.

Stewardship: If you have not yet done so, you may still make a pledge for the coming year. This is your chance to make a promise to God for 2021 will include pledged monetary gift as well as your dedication to give time to the work of the church. You may call the church office to have one mailed to you or stop by and pick one up. Please give prayerful thought to those decisions in the days ahead.

Online Giving: For your convenience you now can give online through PayPal. You do not have to have a PayPal account. Just click the Online Donate button on our Give webpage at <https://www.fpcnatchez.org/give>. This is a great way to meet your regular commitments to the church or to make a special gift. Thank you for your faithfulness.

Prayer Shawl Ministry is not meeting during this time of keeping physical distance from one another. However, individual members continue to do their work separately and doing so, to love and comfort others with their hand-made gifts. Many thanks to those who take part in this ministry.

To have a copy of our prayer list emailed to you, please contact the church office. Hard copies are also available in the church office if you would like to stop by and pick one up.

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

December 2 **Claire Calhoun**
December 9 **Todd Mooney**
December 12 **Ginny Borum, Burne Sharp**
December 13 **Wayne Murphy**
December 14 **Lee Jones, Ron Jenkins**
December 17 **Wessye Heard**
December 19 **Howard Jones**
December 20 **Rusty Jenkins, Lane Rehms**
December 23 **Judy Moody**
December 30 **Daye Dearing**

ORDER YOUR POINSETTIAS NOW

The cost is \$20. We will place the order for you. Just fill out this form and turn it into the church office, along with your check (labeled "poinsettias"). Deadline for orders will be *Monday, December 7.*

TOTAL NUMBER of plants _____

In Memory of

1. _____

Given by: _____

2. _____

Given by: _____

In honor of

1. _____

Given by: _____

2. _____

Given by: _____

CHURCH STAFF

The Rev. Dr. Joan W. Gandy, Pastor
Jon P. Gates, Organist and Director of Music
Deon Buford, Sexton
Aretha Davis, Playschool Director
Pam McNeil, Office Administrator
Mary Ann Peoples, Financial Secretary

ELDERS:

Class of 2020: Leigh Anderson, Lane Feltus, Hal Hicks, Phyllis Mashburn
Class of 2021: Chuck Borum, Stratton Bull, Cara Moody, Anne Willett
Class of 2022: Marc Doyle, Rosemary Hall, Danna Mooney, Helen Smith

DEACONS:

Class of 2020: Edie Christian, Ryan Sharp, Gwen Washington
Class of 2021: Spencer Holder, Everette Ratcliffe, Frances Meason
Class of 2022: Sandra Burkes, Rusty Jenkins, Sarah Smith

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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