

The LINK



UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF PATCHOGUE

Since 1791

December 2018



Celebrate The Real Christmas

It's beginning to feel a lot like Christmas. Really? As I write this *Link* article it is the morning after Thanksgiving. I haven't even had a chance to digest the turkey I ate last night—and people are already storming the doors of retailers trying to get the best Black Friday deals as they shop for Christmas.

I sure don't feel as if it is beginning to feel a lot like Christmas. I feel as if the retail community has cleverly manipulated the whole meaning of what we celebrate on December 25th.

Listen, I have nothing against exchanging gifts on Christmas. In fact, I think it is part of a beautiful tradition we follow every year. Yes, I have nothing against decorating Christmas trees, putting lights and decorations on our houses and listening to Bing Crosby singing "I'll be home for Christmas." I do

all of these things and enjoy every one of them.

However, is this what Christmas is all about?

When I see the frantic pushing and shoving and snatching of the last sweater on the rack by shoppers. When I witness exhausted shoppers struggling to get to their cars with so many bags they look more like pack mules trudging through the rugged trails of the Amazon. I think of another crowded and hectic place two thousand years ago—I think of what Mary and Joseph witnessed when they entered the town of Bethlehem.

A census was decreed by Caesar requiring everyone from the area to return home to be accounted for and it was absolute mayhem. It must have felt like when we go down to Rockefeller Center every year to see the huge Christmas tree on display. One can barely turn around in the crowd to take a photo with one's iPhone.

Well, sometime during that night, Mary who was heavy with child, gave

birth to the Savior of the world in a barn or a cave—but it certainly wasn't a Hampton Inn. Our Savior came into a crowded and noisy world taking his first breath in a cold cave to be amongst us. Shepherds and kings came to pay tribute to Him. Angels sang on high. Manger scenes even show the animals resting in awe at this miracle that took place. There was a pause of humble adoration by a few while the noisy world continued on with their activities.

My prayer is that this Christmas, folks would take some time out of our noisy world and pay humble tribute to the Savior of the world as the shepherds and three wise men did.

Continued on Page 2

WORSHIP IN DECEMBER

Dec. 2—The Rev. Dr. Charles Ferrara,

Luke 21:25-36

Dec. 9—The Rev. Dr. Charles Ferrara,

Luke 3:1-6

Dec. 16—The Rev. Dr. Charles Ferrara,

Luke 3:7-18

Dec. 23—The Rev. Dr. Charles Ferrara,

Luke 1: 39-45

Dec. 24—Christmas Eve—The Rev. Dr. Charles Ferrara,

Luke 2:1-20

Dec. 30—The Rev. Dr. Charles Ferrara,

Luke 2: 41-52



Circle of Concern

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Melissakis family

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Henry Prince, Marjorie Bates, Jim Davis, Katie Graves, John Puk, Baby Luca, Scott Rosenburg, John Gamber, Baby Ben Ruddy, Jim M, Fran Knoedl, Michael Becker, Bill, Cathy Halliwell (Lauren's mother), Helen Smith's grandson, Jim McHugh, Ernie Titus, Cathy, Melisa, Rebecca, Katie Cabrera, Bruce Kirschner, Katie, Jerry

These at Home:

Lee Hollowell

These in Rehab or Nursing Care

Facilities:

Geri Sheridan in Brookhaven Health Care Facility, 801 Gazzola Dr., East Patchogue

Alice Zahnd in Gurwin Jewish Nursing Facility, 68 Hauppauge Rd., Commack, NY

Pray for our church and her future directions!

Prayer cards are located at the usher's station at the rear of the sanctuary.

Make a prayer request at
PatchogueUMC.com

December Birthdays

Dec. 3 Janet Alt

Dec. 8 Gavin Reese Bende

Dec. 14 Steven Rice

Dec. 19 Michelle Ryan

Real Christmas (From Page 1)

To pay first attention to Jesus and then move on to the festivities. To take time out in the midst of the family celebration to give thanks for Jesus breaking into our busy and broken world to offer us hope, grace, forgiveness and redemption.

You know what? As I am writing this on my iPad—it's beginning to feel a lot like Christmas than when I first started this article. Indeed, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come!" He has—and He is coming again. Prayerfully, we'll be ready when He does.

An early Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to everyone!

In His Grip,

—Pastor Chuck

A Prayer to Remember

What Christmas is About

Lord, I thank You for coming to earth so You could redeem me. When I think of the extent to which You were willing to go in order to save me, it makes me want to shout, to celebrate, and to cry with thankfulness. You love me so much, and I am so grateful for that love. Without You, I would still be lost and in sin. But because of everything You have done for me, today I am free; my life is blessed; Jesus is my Lord; Heaven is my home; and Satan has no right to control me. I will be eternally thankful to You for everything You did to save me! I pray this in Jesus' name!

—Rick Renner, crosswalk.com

A Journey

In the Christian church, we now enter into the seasons of Advent, then Christmas.

Coming at the end of the spiritual and secular celebrations, twelve days after Christmas, is a story of an incredible journey— that of the Three Wise Men, or Three Kings.

Imagine those dignified men, dressed in elegant clothing, traveling by camel (presumably), for an unknown distance from countries to the east, bringing really expensive gifts, fit for a king, to a little poor child living in what was essentially a backwater of the Roman Empire.

Amazing really, that wealth and power should humble itself to someone, who, in the worldly scheme of things, was nobody.

And that star. I remember reading that, around that time in history, there was a rare alignment of two or three major planets, which would have produced a brilliant light, that helped to guide the three "over field and fountain, moor and mountain", to quote the hymn.

Who were these guys? They were called wise men or magi from the Greek word magoi. They were literate, learned men, often the officials of royal courts, in lands to the east of Judea. They may well have studied the stars—early astronomers. Where they came from is questionable—perhaps Persia, which had a traditional belief concerning magi and a star which would predict the birth of a ruler.

Then again, they might have been from Arabia, or Armenia, or even as far as India which had a trade relationship with Palestine long before the birth of Jesus. We don't know.

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United Methodist Church of Patchogue December 2018

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1 3:00 p.m.—UMW Holiday Tea
2 10:00 a.m.— Communion Worship 12:30 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 5:00 p.m.—AME	3 Office Closed 7:00 p.m.—AA	4 9:30 a.m.—Al Anon 10:00 a.m.—Noon— Food Pantry 7-9 p.m.—Pentecostal MF 7:00 p.m.—AA	5	6 7:30 p.m.—AME	7 10:00 a.m.—ESL 7-9 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 7:30 p.m.—NA	8 10:00 a.m.—Pilot Club Craft Fair 4:30 p.m.—Bell Tower Tour
9 10:00 a.m.— Worship 12:30 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 5:00 p.m.—AME	10 Office Closed 7:00 p.m.—AA	11 9:30 a.m.—Al Anon 10:00 a.m.—Noon— Food Pantry 7-9 p.m.—Pentecostal MF 7:00 p.m.—AA	12	13 7:30 p.m.—AME	14 10:00 a.m.—ESL 7-9 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 7:30 p.m.—NA	15 9:30 a.m.—UMW
16 10 a.m.— Worship 12:30 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 5:00 p.m.—AME	17 Office Closed 7:00 p.m.—AA	18 9:30 a.m.—Al Anon 10:00 a.m.—Noon— Food Pantry 7-9 p.m.—Pentecostal MF 7:00 p.m.—AA	19 11:00 a.m.—Head Start Christmas Party	20 7:30 p.m.—AME	21 10:00 a.m.—ESL 7-9 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 7:30 p.m.—NA	22
23 10 a.m.— Worship 12:30 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 5:00 p.m.—AME	24 Office Closed through Jan. 2 7:00 p.m.— Christmas Eve Service	25 	26 10:00 a.m.—Noon— Food Pantry	27 7:30 p.m.—AME	28 10:00 a.m.—ESL 7-9 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 7:30 p.m.—NA	29
30 10 a.m.— Worship 12:30 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 5:00 p.m.—AME	31 New Year's Eve 7:00 p.m.—AA					

A Journey (From Page 2)

What we can know is that those three men, representing knowledge, wealth, and power, traveled a long, long way to honor Jesus with rich gifts and deference, as if he was a king.

So, is this account of the Three Kings, found only in Matthew by the way, historically accurate? Or could it be an apocryphal tale, told to make a point, but not entirely factual?

To me, it doesn't matter, because the story speaks to me of something beyond bare facts. It speaks to me of the profound and universal longing of human beings to know God, to know there is God, to feel connected to the Divine, even in the midst of this insanely contradictory material plane of existence.

I like to imagine those men, in the years before their journey, studying the heavens, studying the wisdom of theirs and other cultures.

Looking, always looking for the key, for the moment when all the signs and prophecies and knowledge converge and point the way to the Divine.

Imagine the hope blossoming in their hearts as they realized the moment had come; imagine them making plans, starting their journey, traveling for perhaps as long as two years, sustained always by the hope in their hearts.

Imagine their joy as they beheld the Child, and perhaps appreciate the irony, as they presented their symbols of earthly wealth to the

beautiful child, who had no need for the rich gifts, who transcended earthly values.

I like to think of them as they began their journey home, (wisely avoiding King Herod, as I'm sure they understood that earthly power doesn't like to share), as transformed by their experience, uplifted by the presence of Emanuel—God with us.

Aren't we like those magi in our deep longing for God? As it says in Psalm 42: "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you O' God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?"

Is there a human being in this world that doesn't thirst for the living water? And yet, too often, we fool ourselves by channeling that need into a desire for material things, into a competition for wealth, power, status. We fill up our lives with stuff, and then wonder why we feel so hollow.

The journey of the wise men didn't end when they presented their gifts to the Christ child, just as our spiritual journey shouldn't end when we leave church on Sundays. It should continue into even the smallest aspect of our daily lives. If we can remember that we are loved by God, accepted by that which is so much greater than ourselves, then we can undertake our spiritual journeys with glad and hopeful hearts.

—Barbara Becker

Migrant Caravan Members Seeking Better Lives

While some have labeled Central American migrants headed to the U.S. as criminals or opportunists, many people of faith see them as children of God escaping desperate situations in their home countries.

One of those people is the Rev. Gavin Rogers, an associate pastor at Travis Park United Methodist Church in San Antonio, Texas. He joined the migrant caravan on Nov. 9 for a few days because he wanted to hear the migrants' stories and understand why they are risking so much to leave their home countries.

In an article in the San Antonio Express-News, Rogers noted that some people hear the asylum-seekers say they're seeking a better life and translate that into "They're going to steal our jobs." But for refugees, a better life just means life, he said.

"They're not out to steal anything," Rogers said.

The Rev. Samuel Murillo, a pastor with the Methodist Church of Mexico, said the first group of about 6,000 people was welcomed into Mexico City in early November.

"When they were in Mexico City, we came together as a collective of churches and faith groups and NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), trying to provide from our own backgrounds any kind of a pastoral, psychological support to them," Murillo, who is the youth and young adult president for the World

Methodist Council, told United Methodist News Service.

Those in the U.S. who call the people in the caravan a threat are using fear as a way to justify closing the border, Murillo said. From a Christian and societal viewpoint, the issue is how to address the desperation of those seeking asylum in the U.S. They will risk as much as they can “not to go back to the violence they are running from,” he pointed out.

Bishop Felipe Ruiz-Aguilar of the Methodist Church of Mexico said shelters are being prepared in Tijuana.

“Unfortunately some of the citizens (of Tijuana) have expressed a strong rejection to the caravans. I think it’s the result of the negative publicity that they’ve been given,” Ruiz-Aguilar said. “In general, the church’s participation has gone fairly well, there’s great organization, we know that the shelters are prepared and what kind of capacity each one offers.”

He said the church was working with the Salvation Army shelters for men and women as well as Movimiento Juventud 2000, a nonprofit shelter in Tijuana’s Zona Norte.

“Lord willing, we’re initiating a Methodist soup kitchen this week that will offer meals to at least 400 people, seven days a week,” he said.

The first group of migrants to reach Tijuana were a group of LGBTQ migrants, Ruiz said.

“Things are going better for them in comparison to the others. Upon arrival, someone rented a very large

and nice house in an upper-middle class area,” he said.

United Methodist Bishop Grant J. Hagiya, who leads the Los Angeles Area, said Methodists are extending “biblically rooted Methodist hospitality to those who come from afar.” He issued a call for support and compassion with asylum seekers and refugees.

A number of organizations in the California-Pacific Conference work with migrants.

Safe Harbors Network, a coalition of congregations, charities and individuals based at Christ Ministry Center, San Diego, is preparing to form a “wall of welcome,” said the Rev. Bill Jenkins, director.

Jenkins has been helping waves of immigrants since Christ United Methodist Church was closed as a church in 2011 and reborn as an immigration center. Over the years, the growing need to provide more beds led to the formation of Safe Harbors Network.

Nine churches in the San Diego area and one church in Portland, Oregon, are members of the network and will be taking in migrants. Jenkins is enlisting help from several other churches in San Diego, El Centro and Yuma, Arizona.

The Rev. John Fanestil, a U.S. United Methodist pastor, and Guillermo Navarrete, a lay leader in the Methodist Church of Mexico, hold church every Sunday on the beach that separates Mexico and the U.S. On Nov. 12, Guillermo and Fanestil blessed a pair of young Honduran newlyweds.

Guillermo and his ministry team

are opening a day center near the San Ysidro Port of Entry into the U.S. to help shelter and assist migrants from the caravan as well as people deported from the U.S. to Mexico, Fanestil said.

The California-Pacific Conference is working in coordination with the Conferencia Anual del Noroeste de Iglesia Metodista de Mexico supporting the efforts of the ministries related with migrants.

There is a growing network of Immigrant Welcoming Congregations, District Welcome Centers, Cal-Pac Neighborhood Immigration Clinic and “No Estan Solos” Camps and Retreats, Hagiya said.

Hagiya emphasized words from a statement recently released from the United Methodist Council of Bishops: “Above all, we call upon our congregations to be agents of God’s mercy toward the migrant.”

Bishop Minerva Carcaño, a member of the General Council on Finance and Administration board, prayed about the caravans at the board’s November meeting in Nashville. She is co-chair of the United Methodist Immigration Task Force.

She said those in the migrant caravan are fleeing from violence and hunger and want to protect their children.

“It’s not unlike what Mary and Joseph did for baby Jesus when Herod came against him and children of his age and of his gender. As the migrants come, we are reminded of Jesus. We are reminded of the fact that we are called to love God and make it real by loving our neighbor,” she prayed.

—Kathy L. Gilbert, UMNS

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Don't Forget Your Pledge

“What a morning! The angels were devils and the wisemen were wise guys.”

The deadline for the January issue of **The Link** is Dec. 21
 Please email your copy to gbhoag@optonline.net.

For security purposes, the Church St. entrance is now locked as soon as Sunday services begin. If you are running late, be sure to use the Sanctuary entrances.

Jesus In Unexpected Places

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.
(Luke 2:6-7 CEB)

Because my family didn't decorate our tree until Christmas Eve, the primary Christmas decoration in my childhood home was the crèche. In addition to the figurines of people and animals, our family nativity set includes an interesting stable to represent that place outside the inn.

Hidden beneath the roof is an orange Christmas light bulb that gives the manger a warm glow when illuminated.

There is also a music box attached to the back of the stable that plays "Silent Night."

The figurines are not ornate, but simple and beautiful.

Being a weird, nerdy, church kid who was fascinated with the Christmas story, there were times I turned off the lights in the house, clicked on the orange bulb, wound the music box, and took in the scene.

Nativity sets are a fantastic teaching tool, filled with symbolism that supersedes what they lack in historical accuracy. But there is something else about the scene I am reflecting on this Christmas.

A little off

Before moving to Nashville in 2014, I had only visited once before, more than 15 years earlier. My wife

and I enjoyed our visit so much that we missed many of the gatherings at the convention for which we came.

One afternoon we went for lunch on Broadway, an area famous for country music. We were pleased to see musicians playing in venue after venue, and spent the rest of the afternoon enjoying live music.

One artist made an impression on me, not because he was good—everyone was good—but because of his accent. When he told stories between songs, it was clear this country crooner was from Australia—not the accent one expects to hear on their first visit to Nashville.

It seemed, with apologies to Keith Urban and others, just a little off. In some ways the same thing is true for the story our nativities tell. At his birth, Jesus was surrounded by unexpected people in an out-of-the-way place.

Shepherds

One might expect to find representatives of the best and brightest greeting the newborn Jesus. Instead, shepherds are there. While we might picture them as quaint, peaceful figures, the first readers of the story would have thought differently.

Shepherds had a less than stellar reputation. They were poor, unkempt, and sometimes shoplifted the supplies they needed to get by. They were considered so untrustworthy that their testimony was not welcome in court.

The figurine in our family nativity set of the clean-cut, strapping young man with the lamb across his shoulders, would have been unrecognizable to the people in Jesus' day.

The town of Bethlehem was filled that night with people registering for the census and paying their taxes. Yet God sent the angels to a group working the nightshift on the outskirts of town.

Instead of having well-respected businesspeople in my nativity, I set up shepherds on one side of the stable.

Magi

On the other side, I set up some wealthy people who seem to fit the bill better. The wise men, or magi, were educated people of some means.

But the wise men are outsiders. They're not Jewish, as one might have expected, and may not have been particularly religious. They most likely noticed the Star of Bethlehem while looking for life-direction from the celestial bodies, a pagan practice. They don't belong, yet there they are on that silent, holy night.

Mary & Joseph

Inside the stable, under the orange glow of the Christmas bulb, is a young couple. Joseph, a descendant of King David, has royal blood in his veins, as the genealogy that begins Matthew reminds us. But he is hardly living a life of privilege. He is a blue-collar craftsman eking out a living. Mary, Jesus' mother, is from a priestly family, which sounds promising. But it is her relative Elizabeth who is married to a priest, not Mary.

A stable in Bethlehem

Jesus' birth, which our crèches depict, takes place in Bethlehem, an unlikely place. Jerusalem, the heart of the Jewish world, is just over 5 miles away. Even the Wise Men assume the

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Sunday Worship and Sunday School—10 AM
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Unexpected Jesus (From Page 7)

messiah would be born there, which is why they stop in Jerusalem for directions.

Finally, Jesus' bassinet is a manger, a feeding trough, presumably out in the stable, because there was no room for them inside, where a pregnant woman belongs.

Just missed

The whole scene has this "just missed" quality to it. It doesn't quite fit expectations, like an Australian accent from a country singer.

I've been reflecting on this quite a bit this Christmas. Racial tension and mistrust are making news across the United States. Fears over the spread of Ebola

are sparking conversations about how much risk we should take to help people in danger. Immigration law is a prominent topic, causing many to reflect on our responsibility for the well-being of the "outsider."

I can't help but wonder this Christmas if Jesus is in places I might not expect still today.

I expect to find him in the warmth of a secure home, but he's out back in the stable.

I expect him to occupy a seat of power, but he's lying in a manger. I expect to find him among the rich and powerful, but instead he is surrounded by working folk, petty thieves, and those who don't know where to go for direction.

This Christmas, I don't want to miss Jesus. And I'm concerned I've been looking in the wrong places.

—Joe Iovino, UMNS



KEEP SEEKING HIM