



TheLink



The United Methodist Church of Patchogue



December 2013

Edited By George Hoag

Hope In Past Mercies

Dear Family in Christ,

This time of year provides lots of opportunities to stop and reflect on the months that have gone by and to think about what is still ahead. If it's the Lord will, we will live to see in 2014. Wow! Every review of the past affirms to the truthfulness of the great hymn by Puritan pastor, Samuel Rutherford, "With mercy and with judgment my web of time He wove, and, yes, the dews of sorrow were lustered with His love. ("The Sands of Time Are Sinking")

I agree that we cannot live without some level of regrets. The presence of sin in the world and in our hearts means that we have not yet finished a day in which everything we did was exactly right. We cannot live as a Christian without the thanksgiving that overshadows the sorrows. Think of it; when you look back over your life, you see many reasons to praise and thank the Lord for His grace and goodness to you. We see how He has been faithful in keeping His promises and how gracious in dealing with us kindly.

Past mercies help undergird our present hope for the future. As we consider God's ways with us over the last twelve months, we are encouraged to trust Him

Continued on Page 5

Worship In December

Dec. 1—Rev. Ernesto Sanchez. *What's Your Vision For Life?*, Isaiah 2:1-5, Matthew 24:36-44.

Dec. 8—Rev. Ernesto Sanchez, *A Vision of Hope*, Isaiah 11:1-19, Matthew 3:1-12.

Dec. 15—Rev. Ernesto Sanchez, *The Impossible Vision?*, Isaiah 35:1-10, Matthew 11:2-11.

Dec. 22—Rev. Ernesto Sanchez, *God's Reason For The Season Is Us*, Isaiah 7:10-16, Matthew 1:18-25.

Dec. 24—Rev. Ernesto Sanchez, *At The Right Time A Savior Is Born*, Isaiah 9:1-6, Luke 2:1-14.

Dec. 29—Guest Speaker Barbara Becker, Isaiah 63:7-9, Matthew 2:13-23.



*come, let us
adore him!*

Circle of Concern

For Guidance:

Janice, Louis D'Amico and family, Colleen Smith, Tim and Jen Mansfield, Carolyn Willis, Kathy, Bruce Clamser, Douggs Douglas, Robin, Bridget and Jesse Fitzgerald, Gloria and Louis D'Amico, Charleen and family, Sheila Dreaper, Renie Meadowcroft, Patty Dudek, Charleen, Terisa John, Abigail Springhorn, Rocky Miller, Robin.

These Who are Hospitalized:

James Hayward, Keyana White, Richard Vining, Patricia Dudek

These at Home:

Kathie Wells' aunt Gail, Wilfredo Franco, Michael Curtis Sr., Sandy Burrell, Chester Gibson, Grace Cruger, Dave Hollowell.

These who are in Rehab or Nursing Care Facilities:

Alice Zahnd in Patchogue Nursing Center, 25 Schoenfeld Blvd., Patchogue, NY.

Esther Davies in Brookhaven Health Facility, 801 Gazzolla Drive, E. Patchogue, NY 11772 Room 78D, 631-289-3150.

Ted Davies in Brookhaven Health Facility, 801 Gazzolla Drive, E. Patchogue, NY.

Ed Dew in Sunrise Assisted Living.

Pray for our church and its future direction.

Make your Prayer Request on line at PatchogueUMC.Org

What's Cool In Sunday School

Happy holidays everybody!! Our Christmas pageant is coming up quickly. We are going to have rehearsals right after church on the following dates: Dec. 1, 8, and the 15th. We need kids who want to have speaking parts, kids who don't mind wearing costumes, and kids who can play an instrument. The pageant will be held on Dec. 22 during the service. There will be no Sunday school that day so we can get the kids in their costumes and solve any last-minute problems. Any help that you can give on any of those dates would be greatly appreciated.

Please see me or any of our Sunday School teachers if you want to help our wonderful kids.

May you have a wonderful Christmas filled with family and good times and may you have a safe and prosperous new year.

Blessings to you and yours,

Elizabeth Biederman, Sunday School Superintendent

An Advent Prayer

Father God, since childhood Christmas has evoked in us all manner of feelings: joy, excitement, anticipation.

But as our understanding of Christmas has grown, what happened at that first Christmas now causes us to stand amazed — that you, the sovereign Lord of all the universe would come in search of us, to relieve us of our burden of sin, to rescue us from hopelessness, and to offer us entrance into your presence and a role to play in the unfolding of your purposes.

Father, thank you that Christmas tells us just how much you have set your affection on us.

May we never take lightly what you have done on our behalf through the life, the death, and the resurrection of Him who became as we are that we might become as He is.

We offer our thanks to you in the name of Jesus the Christ, the visible expression of the invisible God.

—*MethodistThinker.com*

Special Music In Our Church

Sunday, December 15
Moriches Choral Society and
Orchestra
Handel's *The Messiah*
3:00 PM
Conducted by our Music
Director *Martha Campanile*

The deadline for contributions to the January edition of **TheLink** is December 13. Please e-mail your copy to gbhoag@optonline.net.

Lift up your church with your prayers, presence, gifts and service.

Christmas Around the World

Christmas brings to mind images of snow, Christmas lights and “chestnuts roasting on an open fire” in the United States, but Christmas is a worldwide celebration. The Interpreter staff asked several of our co-workers at United Methodist Communications what Christmas is like in their home countries.

There are many differences ... and many similarities.

Korea

Christmas was introduced to Korea, along with Christianity, by American missionaries 110 years ago. There was no holiday similar to Christmas in Korea, so ways of celebrating Christmas are very similar to America.

Christmas reminds older generations of American soldiers. During the Korean War, we suffered a famine and were very poor and had lots of orphans. Many people survived only by food and aid from American soldiers. Now, Korea has developed pretty much, and younger generations know a lot of America. We can say that they have been “westernized.” They do just like Americans do in the Christmas season.

—*The Rev. Sang Yean Cho is a native of Seoul, South Korea, and director of Korean resources.*

Mexico

Christmas is a special time in the Mexican culture. My father was a United Methodist minister who came from Mexico.

My family would gather at Christmas to make tamales, menudo (spicy stew with hominy and tripe) and champurrado (hot chocolate with corn

meal). Making tamales was a community family event with everyone in the house with spare hands helping out. This was our time to tell stories and humorous anecdotes and recount the family history.

Mexicans celebrate Las Posadas, the journey of Joseph and Mary to seek shelter for the birth of the Christ Child. On Jan. 6 Mexicans celebrate the Day of the Kings (El Día de los Reyes), when the three kings arrived to pay homage to the Christ Child, and children sometimes receive additional gifts on that day.

—*Bilba Alegria is a native of Monterrey, Mexico, and an information consultant with InfoServ.*

Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe and most commonwealth countries, Christmas presents are opened on Dec. 26, known as Boxing Day. On Christmas Day, there is a lot of eating and shopping. Those who can afford them will buy new clothes to wear to church on Christmas Day. It is also customary for your friends in the congregation to buy you presents and leave them under a tree. During the service, someone announces that you have a present under the tree.

—*Tafadzwa Mudambanuki is a native of Mutare, Zimbabwe, and a training developer with the Communications Resourcing Team.*

Bolivia

In the southern hemisphere, the Christmas season occurs during our summer. Because La Paz is 12,000 feet above sea level, the weather at Christmastime is warm in the day and cool at night.

In the city’s “open markets” a few

days before Christmas, there are street vendors everywhere, displaying all kinds of imported toys, wrapping paper, bows, ribbons and colorful lights. Americans aren’t the only ones doing last-minute shopping!

At midnight on Christmas people walk out of their homes and hurry to the nearest church. They take a baby Jesus figure to the temple and seek the priest’s blessings after the service. When they arrive home, they lay it in the manger of their Nativity display, light candles and pray. Children are allowed to open their presents that baby Jesus brought for them.

As the influence of the media became stronger, so did the influence of goods and cultural traditions from elsewhere. Even though you can still see baby Jesus figures for sale on the street markets today, sadly, He is becoming less popular than the pine tree and Papá Noel.

—*Amanda Mostajo-Bachus is a native of La Paz, Bolivia, and director of Spanish resources.*

—*Repinted from The Interpreter*



Celebrate your life! Witness for your faith!

Past Mercies (from Page 1)

for whatever He brings into our lives in the year ahead.

As we consider how the Lord has helped us thus far, we are strengthened in our faith to depend on Him as we move into the future. Past grace guarantees future grace.

The foundation of this hope is found in Romans 8:32. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Paul is saying to us, "Look back at all that God has done in giving us Jesus Christ." He did not spare Him, which is a calculated way of reminding us that He did send Him to the horrible death on the cross. God "delivered Him up" to that painful and shameful death so that we, His people, could have our sins forgiven and lives transformed.

If God did not spare even His Son in order to provide for us, how can we think for even a moment that He would fail to give us anything we need in the future? The cross of Jesus Christ guarantees that God will graciously provide for us all that we need both in this life and the life to come.

That is why Jesus Christ came to earth. That is why He was born. So as you celebrate Christmas, with whatever traditions and activities you and yours enjoy, take advantage of the opportunity to praise God afresh for the great, what Paul calls the "unspeakable," gift of His Son.

If you have Christ you can be sure that, from your heavenly Father's kind hand, you have and will have everything you need. Have a blessed and merry Christmas! In Christ,

—Pastor Ernesto Sanchez

A Christmas Reflection

I love Christmas! I love the sights, the sounds, the smells of something good in the oven. I love the cards, the carols, and the crèche with shepherd boys and patient cows. I love the music, the magic, the mystery of God becoming flesh. I love the lights, the laughter, and the look on people's faces when they stand before a lighted tree. I love the presents, the people, and the pressure to get things ready on time. I love the food, the frolic, the fun of keeping secrets and hiding gifts. I love Christmas!

It seems to me that Christmas really is the best time of the year. Most everything around gets a red bow tied with long streamers. Doorways are lighted with bright white lights so that a wreath may be seen from the road. Ordinary trees and shrubbery come alive with lighted color, branches draped with lights. We all try to make our surroundings and ourselves look a little better at Christmas: red jackets, vests, shiny clothes, and extra glitter.

It seems to me that Christmas brings out the best in most folks. Those who never entertain a thought for anyone else begin to think of what they can do for the mailman, the newspaper carrier, the family down the road who is having a hard time. People you haven't heard from all year will take time to send you a card with a handwritten greeting inside. A lot of people smile more and shed a tear or two over things they'd never notice any other time of year. Our joys seem larger and our sorrows feel heavier at Christmas time. Perhaps this is why we seek out and plan parties, dinners, and get-togethers with other folks; we are able to share our joy, and the weight of our sorrows is lightened for a brief time. Some folks you

Continued on Page 8

United Methodist Women's Christmas Wine & Cheese Fundraiser

You are invited to attend!

When: Saturday, Dec. 14, 3:00–5:00 PM. Cost: \$20 Donation

Here's how it works: Each person brings an hors d'oeuvre (plated, with accompanying utensil) and a bottle of wine/or soda. When you leave, you take your wine/soda and your hors d'oeuvre home with you.)

Goal: To raise funds for the United Methodist Women's Society, while enjoying a Christmas party with like minded Quinipet and church women. No work involved! (No shopping, no baking, no wrapping!) Oh my! How wonderful!

Where: Joan Curtis' home (142 Evergreen Lane, East Patchogue, NY)

RSVP: jc1316@optonline.net.

birthdays

Dec. 3 Megan Schwartz

Dec. 10 Katelyn Schaaf

Dec. 24 Jaden Keeley

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United Methodist Church of Patchogue

December 2013

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 9:00 a.m.—Bible Study 10 a.m.—Communion Worship/Sunday School 11:30 a.m.—Sunday School Meeting 12:30 p.m.—Salvation Army Class & Service 2:00 p.m.—Chrysalis	2 7 p.m.—Prayer Ministry 7 p.m.—AA	3 9 a.m.—Al Anon 10 a.m.—Noon—Food Pantry 7:00 p.m.—AA	4 11:00 a.m.—Bible Study 7:30 p.m.—Adult Study	5 7:30 p.m.—Choir Rehearsal	6 7:30 p.m.—N/A	7 9:30 a.m.—UMW
8 9:00 a.m.—Bible Study New Member Class 10 a.m.—Worship/Sunday School 11:30 a.m.—Finance Committee Pageant Rehearsal	9 5:00 p.m.— <i>Messiah</i> Dress Rehearsal 7 p.m.—Prayer Ministry 7 p.m.—AA	10 9 a.m.—Al Anon 10 a.m.—Noon—Food Pantry 7:00 p.m.—AA	11 11:00 a.m.—Bible Study 7:30 p.m.—Adult Study	12 7:30 p.m.—Choir Rehearsal	13 7:30 p.m.—N/A	14 3:00 p.m.—UMW Christmas Wine & Cheese Fundraiser, Joan Curtis, 142 Evergreen Lane, E. Patchogue
15 9:00 a.m.—Bible Study New Member Class 10 a.m.—Worship/Sunday School 11:30 a.m.—Pageant Dress Rehearsal 12:30 p.m.—Salvation Army Class & Service 3:00 p.m.—Choral Society of the Moriches: <i>Messiah</i>	16 7 p.m.—Prayer Ministry 7 p.m.—AA	17 9 a.m.—Al Anon 10 a.m.—Noon—Food Pantry 7:00 p.m.—AA	18 11:00 a.m.—Bible Study 7:30 p.m.—Adult Study	19 7:30 p.m.—Choir Rehearsal	20 7:30 p.m.—N/A	21 9:00 a.m.—Decorating the Christmas Tree
22 9:00 a.m.—Bible Study New Member Class 10 a.m.—Worship/Christmas Pageant 11:30 a.m.—Trustees 12:30 p.m.—Salvation Army Class & Service	23 7 p.m.—Prayer Ministry 7 p.m.—AA	24 9 a.m.—Al Anon 10 a.m.—Noon—Food Pantry 7:00 p.m.—AA 7:00 p.m.—Christmas Eve Service	25 MERRY CHRISTMAS	26 5:00 p.m.—Wesley Dinner	27 7:30 p.m.—N/A	28
29 9:00 a.m.—Bible Study 10 a.m.—Worship/Sunday School 11:30 a.m.—Trustees 12:30–5:30 p.m.—Salvation Army Class & Service	30 7 p.m.—Prayer Ministry 7 p.m.—AA	31 9 a.m.—Al Anon 10 a.m.—Noon—Food Pantry 7:00 p.m.—AA				

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Jesus Versus the Zombies



When I was in seminary, we spent time in our preaching class constructing catchy sermon titles. This was back in the day when it seemed that every church in the country updated its outdoor marquee at midweek with the sermon topic for the upcoming Sunday.

Our assignment? Write titles so compelling that commuters would get off the bus passing the church to check it out.

The hands-down sermon title winner that year? “There’s a bomb on your bus!”

University United Methodist, where I serve as senior pastor, is at one of the busiest corners of “The Drag,” a popular strip that borders the sprawling University of Texas at Austin campus. Each day, thousands of students walk by our church on the way to class, and thousands more stroll by to check out local eateries and shops. We’ve found our best bang-for-the-buck advertising is a huge 5-foot-by-8-foot vinyl sign on the church lawn.

The end of August is back-to-school time, and I work with the staff to create a sermon series theme that might not get people off the bus, but will at least get them thinking.

Late one night as I was leaving church, I heard some strange noises. Creaking gates. Some shuffling sounds. And the idea came to me.

Zombies.

They’re everywhere. Since the late 19th century, in literature and films,

zombies have become a sub-genre of horror. Zombies now inspire hours of panel discussions at Comic Cons. What’s more, these brain-chomping, undead monsters even have their own end-time scenario: the Zombie Apocalypse.

Our fall sermon series would have to be about zombies. But how?

My communications director and I began brainstorming through a lengthy string of stream-of-consciousness text messages and came up with a title, “Jesus Versus the Zombies: How the Dead Ideas of the Church Keep Coming Back and Back and Back ...”

A new field of biblical inquiry was born: Zombie theology.

Rather than focusing on zombies as campy characters in B-movies, our sermon series reimagined zombies in a more symbolic way. Zombies became the bad ideas that have popped up at various misguided moments in the church’s history and, for whatever reason, can’t seem to die off. They keep coming back and, in some cases, exert a kind of stranglehold on the life of Christians and the ministry of the church.

How we fight zombies

And the way we fight off these zombies is with better ideas — with good, solid theology that reflects the grace of God, the compassion of Jesus and life of the Spirit.

During our six-week series, we exhumed and battled all kinds of zombies. One Sunday morning, we focused on belief. As Christians, does it matter what we believe? Most would answer in the affirmative. But are there times in the church’s life when Christian faith

has become only about believing certain things to be true? Absolutely. Many de-churched folks can trace their journeys out of their congregations to the day that they stopped believing all of the fantastical things they were being asked to believe.

Part of what’s happening is that the meaning of words has shifted. What we have created with our language is a huge distortion—I’d call it a zombie—of the ancient meaning of the word “believe.” You can trace the earliest meanings of the word “believe” to the Old English *be loef*, which means to hold dear. To believe someone was to belove them, to hold them dear.

There’s a light year of difference between saying, “I believe in God,” meaning, I believe certain things to be true about God, and “I belove God,” meaning that I trust God with my whole heart. When we focus on all the things we have to believe about God, we risk losing the lively sense of being in a trust-based relationship with a living God.

Here in Austin, a town that prides itself on keeping Texas weird, we found that the zombie series struck a chord. We saw new people in the pews. We watched pedestrians pause at our lawn sign and take pictures. Conversations about the meaning of faith were engaged. The church created an open, sacred space where words might actually heal and where ideas might bring us more fully into the life of God and alongside Jesus’ way of shalom.

Rev. John Elford, UMNS

Elford is senior pastor of University United Methodist Church in Austin, Texas.

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Christine Saas, Office Assistant
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Christmas (From Page 5)

never see around the church will turn up one Sunday or two during December to participate in hymn-singing and candle-lighting. Parents who take a lackadaisical approach to children's activities will stop everything else to make sure their child is present for program/choir/pageant practice. Yes! Christmas brings out the best in most folks.

It seems to me that Christmas is God's way to tenderizing us. When I see people who are constantly on the go, talking endlessly, stand in the cold, hushed in awe, before a live nativity scene; when I read that a doctor and hospital will donate their services so that a young man can have an operation enabling him to hear; when I see people who like bright lights and have forgotten how to cry hold a small, lighted candle and wipe their eyes while singing "Silent Night, Holy Night",

when I see whole families, who haven't done much together all year, kneel at an old, wooden altar rail, hands out stretched to receive God's grace upon life in the form of bread and juice, then I know that God is at work to soften up our tired, hard lives.

Oh, I know that at Christmas the days are still hard for many. Life can be difficult and people can be cruel. I know that colored lights and red bows and wreaths on doors do not mean that life inside that dwelling is a pretty as it appears. I know that when Christmas has passed, the music of bells and songs has ended, and the trash is hauled away, that people will say they are glad to "get back to normal". But I love Christmas. I'm grateful that at least one month out of twelve God uses babies and sheep, red bows and pretty music, candles and cards, colored lights and laughter to soften us up. I'm grateful

that God has carved out of every year a few special days to remind us of his intention for life – hope and love and joy and peace. I'm grateful that for a few days every year we are glad to be silent, to bend our knees before an altar, to bow our hearts and heads in adoration of the Christ rather than ourselves and our creations.

Christmas really is the best time of the year. It is God's way of reaching His world and His creatures with the good news that life could be different from what we have made it. It is God's way of giving us, his creatures, the gift that keeps on giving – Jesus the Christ. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it". (John 1:4-5) O yes! I love Christmas!

—Rev. Judi J. Smith, Elizabeth, North Carolina UMC