

TheLink



The United Methodist Church of Patchogue

January 2014

Sponsored this month by Dianne & Glenn Adone

Edited By George Hoag

A New Beginning

Dear Family in Christ,

Grace to you and peace this New Year 2014, from God our Father and our Lord Jesus, the newborn King of kings. Amen. Happy New Year! Welcome to a new and exciting year! As we enter into the New Year, there is great excitement and anticipation within our congregation. This New Year offers new beginnings, new challenges, new expectations, new experiences and new opportunities to share our faith throughout our journeys, whether they are in our homes, our places where we work, our community and yes within our church's life.

2013 was a remarkable year for our church. Through both trial and heartache, I believe we have grown. There is something about the lessons of time and experience in life that cannot be produced or manufactured. Only through God's refining process of sanctifying us as a church both as individuals and as a congregation have we come to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The reality of a new year presents many wonderful opportunities to avoid the sins and mistakes of the last year. It also presents many obstacles, hin-

Continued on Page 5

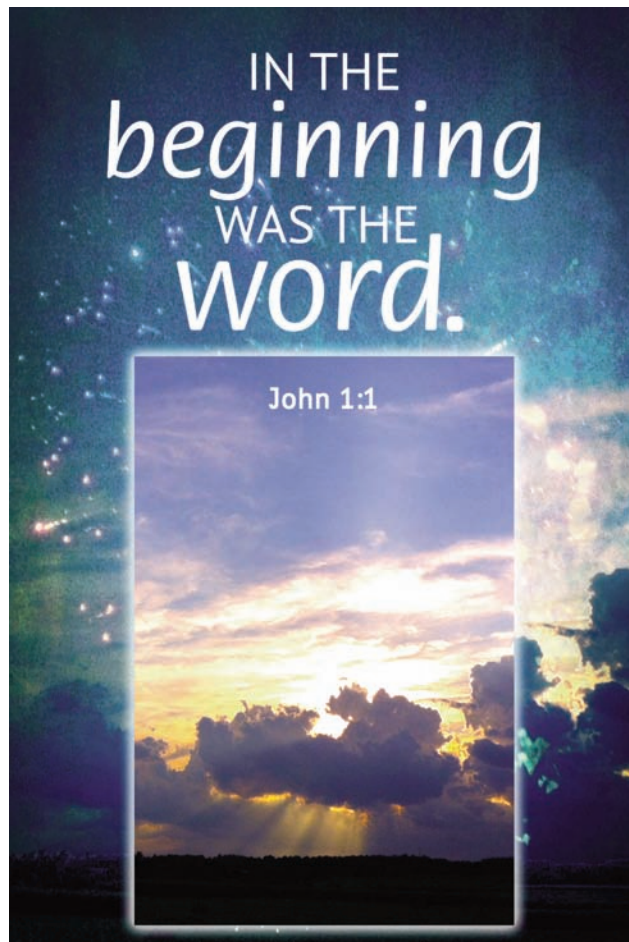
Worship In January

Jan. 5—Rev. Ernesto Sanchez. *Setting Our Hope On Christ*, Isaiah 60:1-6, Ephesians 1:3-14.

Jan. 12—Rev. Ernesto Sanchez, *Knowing When It's Timee*, Isaiah 42:1-9, Matthew 3:13-17.

Jan. 19—Rev. Ernesto Sanchez, *Why Me When I'm Far From The Best*, Isaiah 49:1-7, John 1:29-42.

Jan. 26—Rev. Ernesto Sanchez, *It's All About The People In Need*, Isaiah 9:1-4, Matthew 4:12-23.



Circle of Concern

For Guidance:

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

These Who are Hospitalized:

Keyana White, Richard Vining, Andrew Miller, Wayne Williams, Frank Whalen.

These at Home:

Kathie Wells' aunt Gail, Wilfredo Franco, Michael Curtis Sr., Sandy Burrell, Chester Gibson, Grace Cruger, Dave Hollowell, John Puk, Geri Sheridan, Patricia Dudek, Harold.

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

UMW

Webster's Dictionary defines a mission as a sending, a charge to go and perform a service or a duty.

When United Methodist Women began in 1869, as the Women's Foreign Missionary Society, their first mission was to send two women, one a doctor, to minister to the women and children of an area in India.

The UMW concept of mission has broadened and expanded to include mission projects in every corner of the world. Health care, education, skills training, child care, and financial and spiritual support are just some of the missions in which UMW is involved.

Our own unit, in existence since 1872, not only participates in world wide UMW projects, through our financial pledge to mission and in support of a variety of other missions, but also has other local projects.

In 2013, using the money realized from our fund raising efforts, such as the Holiday Fair, our mission projects include:

\$1,000 for Wesley Dinners.

\$350 as a financial gift to a local family in need.

\$150 donation to the Heifer Project for an irrigation pump in an under developed area.

\$1000 donation to our own church to help support expenses.

\$200 in small scholarships to graduating high school seniors.

\$200 purchase of a new table and chairs for Wesley Hall.

—Barbara Becker

Holiday Thanks

A huge Thank you to all who so generously supported the Poinsettas project. These beautiful plants were specially blessed to the glory of our Lord.

On Sunday, Jan. 5, we will unhang the Christmas greens and tree immediately following the service.

—Geri Sheridan

Counters Needed

A very important thing that we must do each week after service is count and record the offering. The United Methodist Church Book of Discipline requires that this function be done by two people who are not husband and wife.

We are in need of people who would be willing to do this once a month. Please see Tom Bracken if you are willing to volunteer.

The deadline for contributions to the February edition of **TheLink** is January 10. Please e-mail your copy to gbhoag@optonline.net.

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

What Was The Star of Bethlehem?

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the reign of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They asked, ‘Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We’ve seen his star in the east, and we’ve come to honor him.’” (Matthew 2:1-2, Common English Bible)

Just about every year at Christmastime, Nick Strobel can count on getting questions about the star that guided the magi.

Strobel is the planetarium director and a physical science professor at Bakersfield College in central California. As an astronomer and lifelong United Methodist, he has a certain affinity with the Bible’s most famous stargazers.

“We both have a love of the night sky,” said Strobel, a member of Wesley United Methodist Church in Bakersfield. “And, we search for a place or person where heaven and earth meet, and we both found that in the person of Jesus.”

The biblical account of the magi does not quite match the typical church Christmas pageant image of three little boys in scratchy beards and lopsided crowns dropping gifts by the baby Jesus’ manger.

The second chapter of Matthew — the only Gospel where the wise men appear — does not specify their number or say they were kings. Matthew also does not mention the no-vacancies inn, the manger or the quaking shepherds — those are all found in the Gospel of Luke.

Instead, in Matthew, the wise men visit the holy family in a house in Bethlehem some point after Jesus’ birth. The number

three probably derives from the three gifts they brought to the Christ child — gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The magi — called magoi in the original Greek — were likely sages and astrologers. The tradition that they were three kings named Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar developed centuries later.

On this the Bible and Christmas tradition do agree: The magi found the newborn king by following a star.

The ancients believed God would make destiny manifest in the stars, said Gregory J. Riley, New Testament professor at United Methodist-related Claremont (Calif.) School of Theology. So, it was no surprise that Jesus’ birth was accompanied “by the appearance of his star in the very fabric of the heavens.”

The exact nature of that heavenly body has been a source of speculation — for Bible scholars, children’s book authors, astronomers and, in recent decades, planetarium audiences. Discussion of the star is part of Bakersfield College’s annual December planetarium show, “Season of Light,” which Strobel hosts.

Strobel, 46, has his own thoughts about the star, which he has detailed in his blog.

Since the night sky can vary greatly depending on the year and season, Strobel first needed a good estimate for Jesus’ birth year to evaluate these possibilities.

The Bible does not give Jesus’ exact birth date. However, many biblical scholars and historians now think Jesus most likely was born around 6 to 4 B.C., and Strobel uses those years in his dating. That puts Jesus’ birth sometime near the death of Herod the Great (the wicked

Herod mentioned at the beginning of Matthew) and Jesus’ ministry during the early years of Pontius Pilate (the wicked Roman governor in all four Gospels).

Strobel points to four natural phenomena that some astronomers think might explain the celestial sighting: a nova, a comet, a planetary conjunction and Jupiter’s retrograde motion.

Nova

Chinese astronomers, Strobel said, recorded that a new star (or nova) appeared in the constellation Capricorn during March and April of 5 B.C. A nova is actually a white dwarf — that is, a dying star — that has gathered enough material, usually from another nearby star, to build up pressure and explode. A nova quickly peaks in brightness within a few days and then fades to invisible over a few months.

The nova the Chinese spotted would have first appeared in the east (that much fits with the Gospel of Matthew). However, that nova would not have visibly moved much as the magi headed toward Bethlehem, which is why Strobel sees it as an unlikely candidate for Star of Bethlehem status.

Comet

Many ancient cultures, including the Chinese, regarded comets as heralds of important events. Trouble is, there are no comet sightings recorded around 6 to 4 B.C. Strobel said Halley’s Comet made a swing by earth in 12 B.C., too early to portend the Bethlehem birth. That’s probably a good a thing. The ancients typically viewed a comet as a bad sign — not a proclamation of joy to the world.

Planetary conjunction

Planetary conjunctions, where two or

Continued on Page 7

Celebrate your life! Witness for your faith!

New Beginning (from Page 1)

dances, and weights that can keep us from running the race with endurance.

Every member of our church can do more for the glory of Christ than they did last year. Take time, review the year, ask yourself the hard questions of how you can be more effective for Christ, serve his people more selflessly, and glorify God in this dark world. Our prayer for our congregation is for faithfulness in God's work, peace in God's church, and love for God's people. Happy New Year.

Therefore: Let us begin the New Year together with the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi: "Lord, make us instruments of your peace, where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life." As we begin this New Year, may we communicate the heart of the "good news" of our Lord and the meaning of this beautiful prayer with those around us. God's blessings to you in your work and in your play and in your rest. Happy New Year!

In Christ,

—**Pastor Ernesto Sanchez**

birthdays

Jan. 3 Colby Schwartz

Jan. 30 Abby Leddin

United Methodist Statement On The Death of Nelson Mandella

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, said:

"The bishops of The United Methodist Church were honored with a visit by Nelson Mandela and Graça Machel when the Council met in Mozambique in 2006. What a moment! We committed ourselves to follow the example of this fellow Christian, even though none of us dared compare our struggles with the lifelong fight for justice and the reconciling ministry of this great Methodist.

Nelson Mandela brought faith into action. Even 27 years in prison could not hinder him in staying firm in believing that all God's people are called to live with one another in peace and dignity, no matter the color of their skin. We grieve with Nelson Mandela's family, especially with his wife Graça Machel, who is a Mozambican United Methodist and with the whole nation of South Africa. And we give thanks to God for the life of a faithful Christian, a hero of hope and a great leader who built up the rainbow nation. Let us pray that the work of Nelson Mandela will be multiplied by the service of all who admire him in his home country and throughout the world."

New Year's Prayer

Lord, this year I want to change,
and I've said that in the past.
But now my prayer is different
'cause I understand at last.
I wanted my own way before,
I ignored your loving plans.
But now I'm putting everything
into your nail-scarred hands.
I promise to obey you
out of gratitude and love.
I won't be giving orders
to my Father up above.
I finally realize the truth
and so I've changed my prayer.
The safest place for me to be
is in your gentle care.
Please be my shepherd, Jesus,
that's all I ask of you.
In good times and in bad this year,
Take my hand and lead me through.
Amen.

—**Jack Zavada**

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Please help us continue this monthly communication by becoming a Link sponsor. With your \$70 contribution, you get your acknowledgment at the top of the front page. Please volunteer to sponsor the April issue.

Remember
the Church
in Your Will

United Methodist Church of Patchogue

January 2014

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			<i>1</i> Happy New Year	<i>2</i> 7:30 p.m.—Choir Rehearsal	<i>3</i> 7:30 p.m.—N/A	<i>4</i>
<i>5</i> 9:00 a.m.—Bible Study 10 a.m.— Communion Worship/Sunday School 12:30 p.m.— Salvation Army Class & Service	<i>6</i> 7 p.m.—Prayer Ministry	<i>7</i> 9 a.m.—Al Anon 10 a.m.—Noon— Food Pantry 7:00 p.m.—AA	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i> 7:30 p.m.—Choir Rehearsal	<i>10</i> 7:30 p.m.—N/A	<i>11</i>
<i>12</i> 9:00 a.m.—Bible Study New Member Class 10 a.m.—Worship/ Sunday School 11:30 a.m.—Finance Committee 12:30 p.m.—Salvation Army Class & Service	<i>13</i> 7 p.m.—Prayer Ministry	<i>14</i> 9 a.m.—Al Anon 10 a.m.—Noon— Food Pantry 7:00 p.m.—AA	<i>15</i>	<i>16</i> 7:30 p.m.—Choir Rehearsal	<i>17</i> 7:30 p.m.—N/A	<i>18</i> 9:30 a.m.—UMW
<i>19</i> 9:00 a.m.—Bible Study New Member Class 10 a.m.—Worship/ Sunday School 12:30 p.m.— Salvation Army Class & Service	<i>20</i> 7 p.m.—Prayer Ministry	<i>21</i> 9 a.m.—Al Anon 10 a.m.—Noon— Food Pantry 7:00 p.m.—AA	<i>22</i>	<i>23</i> 5:00 p.m.—Wesley Dinner 7:30 p.m.—Choir Rehearsal	<i>24</i> 7:30 p.m.—N/A	<i>25</i>
<i>26</i> 9:00 a.m.—Bible Study New Member Class 10 a.m.—Worship/ Sunday School 11:30 a.m.—Trustees 12:30 p.m.—Salvation Army Class & Service	<i>27</i> 7 p.m.—Prayer Ministry	<i>28</i> 9 a.m.—Al Anon 10 a.m.—Noon— Food Pantry 7:00 p.m.—AA	<i>29</i>	<i>30</i> 7:30 p.m.—Choir Rehearsal	<i>31</i> 7:30 p.m.—N/A	

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Christmas Star (From Page 4)

more planets appear very close together in the night sky, may not make the headlines today the way comets do. Still, Strobel thinks such a conjunction is a much likelier prospect for the nativity's starring role. And, astronomically speaking, 7 to 6 B.C. were good years for conjunctions.

In late May, late September and early December 7 B.C., Jupiter and Saturn moved past each other three times in the constellation Pisces. Such an occurrence happens only once every 900 years. The following February, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn formed a near conjunction in Pisces, which happens once every 800 years.

The combination of Jupiter and Saturn would have seemed especially auspicious to these astrologers in the Near East, Strobel said. Jupiter symbolized royalty, and Saturn represented the Mesopotamian deity who protected Israel. In addition, ancient astrologers associated Pisces with the Jewish people.

“(The wise men) would have been aware of the sky and probably kept records of the sky going back centuries,” Strobel said. “They would have known this was a rare occurrence. They’d think, ‘Well maybe this is telling us that something really interesting is going to be happening there in Israel.’”

Jupiter's retrograde motion

If the wise men were in need of a further sign in the heavens, they got one in 5 B.C., Strobel said. That year, Jupiter, instead of “wandering” eastward as planets typically appear to do, seemed to stop and then go backward among the stars in what astronomers call a retrograde motion.

Strobel compared the motion to what happens when a car accelerates past another car. It makes the slower vehicle look like it is standing still and then receding. In 5 B.C., earth passed Jupiter and it appeared to be stationary for about a week — perfect for hovering in place over a momentous birth.

Among the various astronomical possibilities, Strobel thinks that the planetary conjunction and stationary Jupiter theories probably get closest to what the magi might have seen.

The Rev. Ben Witherington III, a United Methodist elder and New Testament professor at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Ky., agrees that astronomical phenomena could help explain the magi's guide. But, he points out, the magi like most ancients would have seen stars and other celestial objects as living beings — much like “the heavenly host” that visited the shepherds.

While it's fun to speculate, Strobel said, the nature of the star does not matter to his faith. In fact, he would not care if Matthew made up the whole story of the magi.

“He was not writing a science textbook or newspaper account,” Strobel said, “but rather a book to persuade people that this person called Jesus was the Son of God, one who should be worshipped, and one who showed us how to live as God wants us to live.” The story of the nativity contains a deeper truth than can be found in any star chart, he said.

“God, the infinite power of the universe, is just so willing and wanting to have a relationship with us that he became a powerless infant who had to be cared for,” he said. “That's pretty amazing that God would be willing to do that.”

—Heather Hahn, UMNS

What are Frankincense and Myrrh?

While you will not find gold, frankincense and myrrh on a typical baby registry, the gifts certainly were fit for a king. Gold's value is self-explanatory. But, in many ways, frankincense and myrrh were just as desirable among royalty. Frankincense and myrrh — both rare, fragrant resins — were used in incense and perfumes.

Because myrrh also was used to preserve corpses, many Christians have long seen the magi's gift as foreshadowing Christ's death. The carol “We Three Kings of Orient Are” connects myrrh to the “gathering gloom.”

Many ancients would have associated myrrh with burial, said the Rev. Ben Witherington III of Asbury Theological Seminary. Myrrh also could serve as a narcotic, he said, and in that capacity, it featured in the Crucifixion. In Mark 15:23, Jesus on the cross was offered — and refused — wine mixed with myrrh. In John 19:39, Jesus later was buried with myrrh and aloe.

Alicia D. Myers, New Testament professor at United Theological Seminary, doubts the Gospel of Matthew's earliest readers would have linked the magi's present with the coming tomb.

“In Matthew we have no explicit connection between death and myrrh,” she said. “Instead, the context of Matthew 2 highlights the expensive nature of the spice as a costly gift alongside the gold and frankincense. I am more inclined, then, to understand the myrrh as yet another move by Matthew to reinforce Jesus' kingly status rather than reading it as an allusion to his coming death.”

However interpreted, the gifts of the magi continue to inspire Christmas generosity each year.

—Heather Hahn

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Rev. Ernesto Sanchez, Pastoral Minister
Christine Saas, Office Assistant
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Record Breaking Giving

Thanks to the generosity of United Methodists around the world, more than 880 projects and missionaries will receive a financial boost to help them meet their mission goals. The denomination's General Board of Global Ministries announced that the first-ever UMC #GivingTuesday generated a record \$6.5 million online on December 3. Nearly 11,000 donors in 34 countries gave more than 16,300 gifts through The Advance to mission and ministries they believe in. Global Ministries matched the first \$500,000 received.

Building on the recent US shopping traditions of Black Friday, Local Business Saturday, and Cyber Monday, UMC #GivingTuesday offered an opportunity to start the holiday season by giving instead of getting, while sup-

porting organizations that are transforming the world.

"We were overwhelmed by this giving that went far beyond our dreams," said Thomas Kemper, the head of Global Ministries. "The people called Methodists once again have exceeded themselves in love and solidarity."

Noting the extensive number of Advance projects and that "100% goes to mission," donor Ann Bosson Greenberg wrote in a Facebook post, "I am so happy to be a Methodist Christian!" Greenberg shared that she had made a gift to Alternative Rite of Passage, an organization that is working to eliminate female circumcision in Kenya.

The Advance is The United Methodist Church's giving channel which ensures that 100 percent of each gift supports the project designated by

the donor; it is a link that connects the church in mission. The Advance encompasses more than 850 Methodist-related projects and more than 300 missionaries, all of them reviewed and monitored by Global Ministries staff.

Kemper said, "By promoting UMC Giving Tuesday, conferences and local churches significantly helped educate their members about The Advance—a giving channel that would not be possible without apportionments to cover administrative costs." He added, "Having matching funds available not only directly benefited the projects, but helped build momentum for the campaign."

Gifts to support Advance projects and the missionary community can be made online at any time at www.umcmmission.org/give.