

The LINK



UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF PATCHOGUE

Since 1791

January 2017

A Clean Slate

One of the benefits of paying taxes in our village (Bellport) is that we don't have to bag our leaves—we can just pile them up on the street and public works will come and take them away. Well, it was getting down to the wire when they would make their final pass through my neighborhood. So, with rake in hand, and, thank you God, a new leaf blower—I began what appeared to be the insurmountable task of removing all the fallen leaves from my front and back yard. I don't know which I dislike more, cleaning leaves or clearing snow. Perhaps I dislike both?

Well, three hours later our property looked immaculate. I don't believe I left a single leaf hiding anywhere. As I sat

in my yard and surveyed the terrain I began thinking how a new year is something like that—a clean slate—a new start—a new beginning. The old is removed and the new is yet to be realized. Sounds exciting to me.

Now that I have six months under my belt as the pastor of the Patchogue United Methodist Church—I truly have a good handle on our ministry. And by the way, it is a great ministry making a positive impact in our community. The mayor even said so—so it must be true.

I would like to believe that we are moving in the right direction, and even more importantly, we are moving forward. I feel the morale is up, people are excited, new faces visit our church each week and the sky is the limit in 2017. If you don't believe me, just look up in the Cloud Room.

As we close out 2016, I want to thank so many people for all the hard work you do all throughout the year to make our church effective and successful. As pastor, I am blessed to be in ministry with such a noble group of people.

By the time you read this edition of the **LINK**, we would have celebrated Advent and Christmas Eve together—being reminded of how much God loves us that He gave us His only Son, Jesus.

Continued on Page 2

WORSHIP IN JANUARY

Jan. 1—Rev. Dr. Charles Ferrara, *Moving Forward in Hope*, Jeremiah 29:11-14

Jan. 8—Rev. Dr. Charles Ferrara, *Hearing the Voice of God*, 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Jan. 15—Rev. Dr. Charles Ferrara, *Following the Voice of God*, Matthew 4:12-25

Jan. 22—Rev. Dr. Charles Ferrara, *Words that Bring Death or Words that Bring Life*, James 3:2-12

Jan. 29—Rev. Dr. Charles Ferrara, *Back to the Future*, Psalm 7:1-8

The *Spirit*
searches everything,
even the *depths of God*.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:10



Circle of Concern

For Guidance and Healing:

Steve Rea, Ron Jones, Bruce Kirschner, Kathy Maier, Adrian Murphy's mother, Theresa Lindsay, Sean Abrams, Joy Kala, Eugene Cirulli, Eileen Austin, George Werner, Mamie White, Frankie Scott Jr., Lee Hollowell, Henry Prince, Patricia Puk, Luke Gonzalez, Eleanor, Deb, Kayla Donovan, Bruce Koffman, Josh Jansson, Edward Collins, Marjorie Bates, Diane Peterson, Luke Sotis, Tim Jordan, Debbie Guerin, Sue Festa.

These Who are Hospitalized:

Frances Breen, Anthony Marmos, Martin, Michele Conrad, Juliana

These who are in Rehab or Nursing Care Facilities:

Geri Sheridan in Brookhaven Health Care Facility, 801 Gazzolla Drive, E. Patchogue, NY.

John Vander Zalm in Brookhaven Health Care Facility, 801 Gazzolla Drive, E. Patchogue, NY.

Alice Zahnd in Gurwin Jewish Nursing Facility, Commack, NY.

Ed Dew in Sunrise Assisted Living, Waverly Avenue, Holbrook, NY.

Pray for our church and her future directions!

Prayer cards are located at the usher's station in the rear of the sanctuary. Your joys and concerns are important to us; let us pray for you! Please put completed prayer cards in the offering plate. Or use the Prayer Request Form on our web page at www.PatchogueUMC.org.

Clean Slate (From Page 1)

And what a gift Jesus is. Unlike some Christmas presents that we box up and put in the closet—the gift of Jesus is a gift we continue to share throughout the entire year. It is that gift that will help us grow and prosper in 2017. People will come and see the light that shines through us will want to unite with our church family. Discipleship is all about multiplication, isn't it? And I firmly believe that we are in for a tremendous year of multiplication. So take out your spiritual calculators and get ready to see that increase. I'm excited and hope you are too.

Happy New Year Church Family!
In His Grip,

—Pastor Chuck

What's In A Name?

Here we are in a month named after the Roman god Janus, an appropriate personification of the start of the new year. This particular Roman god had two faces so that he could look ahead toward the future and back at the past at the same time. As we get rid of an old year and look forward to a new one, we all try to be a little like Janus. We know through experience what we did wrong and what we did right, and hope to do better this year. Some people make ambitious new year's resolutions; others just take a deep breath and hope for the best...."

—Complete Speakers Almanac

January Birthdays

Jan. 11 Abdiel Sanchez

Jan. 27 Michael Jansson

Seven Week Bible Study

Starting Sunday, Jan. 15, this study, 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM will be led, in the Library, by Myong Cha.

7 STEPS

TO ANSWERED PRAYER

Have you ever struggled with maintaining a regular and effective prayer life? Most people do. This short seven-week course will help an individual develop a prayer life with a powerful spiritual impact. Plan to come and be touched by God.

Jan. 15 Session I: "Decide What You Want From God"

Jan. 22 Session II: "Find the Scriptures that Promise It"

Jan. 29: Session III: "Meditate on those Promises Until You Believe Them"

Feb. 5: Session IV: "Ask God for it and Believe that you Receive It"

Feb. 12: Session V: "Make every Subsequent Prayer a Prayer of Faith"

Feb. 19: Session VI: "Keep your Thoughts and Attitude in Alignment"

Feb. 26: Session VII: "Continually Thank God for the Answer"



United Methodist Church of Patchogue January 2017

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 10:00 a.m.— Communion Wor- ship 12:30 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 5:00 p.m.—AME Service	2 7:00 p.m.—AA	3 9:30 a.m.—Al Anon 10 a.m.—Noon— Food Pantry 7-9 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 7:30 p.m.—AA	4 7:30 p.m.—AME Service	5	6 9:30 a.m.—ESL 7-9 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 7:30 p.m.—NA	7 7:30 p.m.—AME Service
8 10 a.m.—Worship/ Sunday School 11:30 a.m.— Church Council 12:30 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 5:00 p.m.—AME Service	9 7:00 p.m.—AA	10 9:30 a.m.—Al Anon 10 a.m.—Noon— Food Pantry 7-9 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 7:30 p.m.—AA	11 7:30 p.m.—AME Service	12	13 9:30 a.m.—ESL 7-9 p.m.—Pentecostal MF 7:30 p.m.—NA	14 7:30 p.m.—AME Service
15 10 a.m.— Wor- ship/Sunday School 12:30 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 5:00 p.m.—AME Service	16 7:00 p.m.—AA	17 9:30 a.m.—Al Anon 10 a.m.—Noon— Food Pantry 7-9 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 7:30 p.m.—AA	18 7:30 p.m.—AME Service	19	20 9:30 a.m.—ESL 7-9 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 7:30 p.m.—NA	21 7:30 p.m.—AME Service
22 10 a.m.— Worship 11:30 a.m.— Trustees 12:30 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 5:00 p.m.—AME Service	23 7:00 p.m.—AA	24 9:30 a.m.—Al Anon 10 a.m.—Noon— Food Pantry 7-9 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 7:30 p.m.—AA	25 7:30 p.m.—AME Service	26 5:00 p.m.—Wesley Dinner	27 9:30 a.m.—ESL 7-9 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 7:30 p.m.—NA	28 7:30 p.m.—AME Service
29 10 a.m.— Wor- ship/Sunday School 12:30 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 1:30 p.m.—AA Anniversary Party 5:00 p.m.—AME Service	30 7:00 p.m.—AA	31 9:30 a.m.—Al Anon 10 a.m.—Noon— Food Pantry 7-9 p.m.— Pentecostal MF 7:30 p.m.—AA				

Lessons From Baby Jesus

“Dear 8-pound, 6-ounce newborn infant Jesus, don’t even know a word yet, just still a little infant so cuddly but still omnipotent, we just thank you for all the races I’ve won and the \$22.1 million — love that money.”

Well, that’s one way to say grace. In the comedy “Talladega Nights,” Ricky Bobby takes some well-deserved chiding for praying to “Christmas Jesus” rather than “Grown-up Jesus.”

Behind the joke is a theological lesson.

“It does seem like praying to cuddly infant Jesus is a convenient way for the character Ricky Bobby to ignore some of Jesus’ teachings that push against some of the other things he says (and even prays for),” said Susan E. Hylan, a New Testament professor at United Methodist Candler School of Theology in Atlanta. “Jesus’ teachings against the love of wealth come to mind.”

Especially at Christmastime, it’s easy to be a bit like Ricky Bobby — imagining Jesus simply as a sweet babe bestowing worldly blessings. “Perhaps we should also wonder if we love the Christmas Jesus because we are not challenged by the message we hear at Christmas,” Hylan said. If anything, scholars say, Christmas should remind us just how radical God’s arrival in the world is. Even in the nativity, Jesus turns worldly notions of power and justice upside down.

Born in need

For Hylan, one of the most striking things in Matthew and Luke is just how dependent on humans Jesus was—even before his birth.

Luke tells how Mary welcomes the angel’s birth announcement, and Matthew details how Joseph accepts Jesus because of an angel in a dream.

However, Matthew, in particular, makes clear that Mary’s pregnancy was a scandal that could have ended her betrothal to Joseph—a break tantamount to divorce in their culture. Worse yet, if Joseph had complained to the religious authorities, he could have put Mary at risk of stoning for adultery.

Julie Dotterweich Gunby, a nurse midwife in Athens, Georgia, works mainly with uninsured mothers. Her clients generally have a lot more in common with lowly Mary than the wealthy Rick Bobby.

Yet, it was among the marginalized rather than the McMansion set where God sought and found home.

“I think of Jesus needing the hospitality of a woman’s body and nursing,” said Dotterweich Gunby, who is also mother of three and wife of a United Methodist pastor. “That is one of the things that God allowed himself to experience.”

She pointed out that one of the first physical needs all newborns have is for warmth. Mary takes care of that need too, wrapping the babe in swaddling clothes.

“In some ways it sounds kind of heretical to talk about God having lack, but that’s part of the scandal of

the Incarnation, that God knows want and has needs met.”

Born amid death

Bringing Jesus into the world required human effort and kindness. Sadly, as Matthew tells it, his arrival also was accompanied by great human loss.

In all the excitement about angelic dreams and visiting magi, Althea Spencer Miller—a New Testament professor at United Methodist Drew Theological School—urges Christians not to overlook Herod’s savage reaction to news of a coming Messiah. In a move reminiscent of the pharaoh of Exodus, the wicked king orders the murder of all children in Bethlehem and surrounding areas who are 2 and younger. Matthew, quoting Jeremiah, describes the parents’ cries for their lost children. Meanwhile, Joseph—on angelic advice—has fled with his wife and young child to Egypt.

Spencer Miller, like many Christians, thinks of Matthew’s account when she sees images of today’s refugees fleeing violence and oppression. “This is the story of a family running for their lives from authorities,” she said.

The Roman Catholic Church annually remembers Herod’s “slaughter of innocents” on Dec. 28. Spencer Miller urges all Christians to remember the children whose parents didn’t have the power to protect them from Herod’s political might.

“It troubles our complacency that the birth of Jesus is all about joy and a wonderful gift to the world,” she said. “It draws our attention to those

who sacrifice ultimately for the good that is to come. Jesus is not the only one who gives his life.”

Wheeler, the Christian ethicist, sees Herod’s massacre as “a reminder of the brutal lengths to which power will go in its own defense, then as now.”

Yet, even in a world of tyranny and slaughter, God chooses weakness.

Born to die

Get beyond the Christmas carol imagery of singing angels and silent nights, and God’s saving work looks like a “crazy strategy,” Wheeler said. “If you were God and your aim was to overcome evil in the world and redeem creation, would this be how you approach it?” she asked.

She admits to having a lot of sympathy for Jews like the Zealots who, confronted with the occupation of Rome, expected their Messiah to come with a plan for conquest, not crucifixion by that same occupying power.

Faced with the real hatred in today’s world, Wheeler is also sympathetic to fellow Christians who want Jesus to return now and take names. Confronted with grave injustice, she said: “We honestly want to call out the Marines.”

However, suppressing evil with the threat of superior force only offers a temporary respite, she said. Sooner or later, the cycle of violence will continue.

“If you ask me as an ethicist, ‘What does the nativity teach us?’ That God is operating with a whole different understanding and idea of what the conquest of the evil looks like.”

When reflecting on baby Jesus, Wheeler suggests heeding the words not of a fictional racecar driver but of Christian novelist Graham Greene: “You cannot conceive, nor can I, of the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God.”

—Heather Hahn, UMNS

Three Kings

I’ve always found the story of the three wise men to be fascinating.

They were so exotic—those dignified men, dressed in elegant clothing, traveling who knows how many miles from who knows what countries, all to bring expensive gifts to a little child sheltered in a manger in Bethlehem, a backwater town of the Roman Empire.

And that star! I remember reading that around that time, there was a rare alignment of two or three major stars or planets, resulting in the “star so bright” that led the three kings over “field and fountain, moor and mountain” til they came to that little child. An amazing story—that wealth and power and knowledge should humble itself to someone, who in the worldly scheme of things, was nobody.

Who were those guys?

They were called magi, from the Greek word “magoi”. They were literate, learned men, who were often officials of royal courts of countries east of Judea. They quite possibly studied the stars, early astronomers. Where they came from is questionable—perhaps Persia, which had a traditional belief concerning magi and a star predicting the birth of a

ruler. Or Armenia, Arabia or even India, which had a trade relationship with Palestine long before the birth of Jesus. We really don’t know.

This interesting story appears only in the gospel of Matthew and is helpful in understanding Matthew’s perspective. While all the Gospels were written to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, they each had their own context, and point of view.

Matthew was written around or soon after 70 AD (CE), when the Romans destroyed the Temple at Jerusalem. It was a time of great uncertainty, of great fear and anxiety.

Matthew was intent on showing that Jesus was the clear fulfillment of the ancient Jewish prophecies - that he was the Messiah, the King to save Israel. There are at least 10 references to prophecies in Matthew that relate events or actions around or by Jesus to the ancient prophecies. (Matthew 1:22-23, Matthew 2, Matthew 21, and more).

Matthew’s gospel is also the only one to present a genealogy of Jesus, which interestingly for such a patriarchal society, names four women as Jesus’ ancestors, at least three of whom were not Jewish and all of whom behaved in decidedly non-traditional ways! But this family tree clearly connects Jesus to the ancient heroes of Israel, David and Solomon, and all the way back to Abraham.

So, the story of the three Magi further underscores Matthew’s perspective. Royalty often sent costly gifts to new rulers by way of emissaries of status. This underscored

Continued on Page 8

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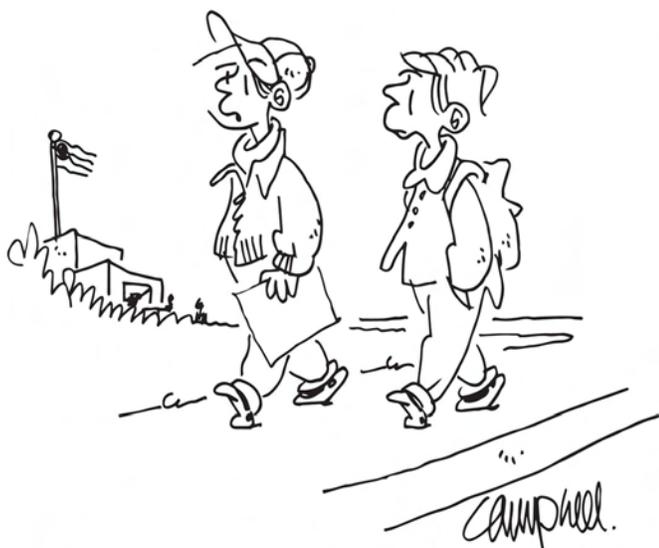
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If I can't stand it, I'll give it up for Lent."

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The deadline for the February issue
of **The Link** is **January 20**.
Please email your copy to gbhoag@optonline.net.



A Note About Restoring Hope

Our Restoring Hope capital campaign was completed several years ago but funds may continue to be contributed. All Restoring Hope contributions go to the Trustees who have continuing building expenses but no other revenue source. \$500 a month in Trustee funds go to pay off our boiler loan. Contributions can be made to either "Restoring Hope" or "Trustees".

The Kingdom of Heaven Is (Still) At Hand

Yes, Donald Trump won the presidential election. No, not everyone is happy about that. Clinton won the popular vote while Trump won the electoral vote. Plenty of people are having to adjust their ideas of the next four years.

Like many people I was surprised, even discouraged, at the election results. My candidate didn't win. The values I hold most dear are not well-represented in the president-elect. Yet, I still find reason to hope for a world that works for everyone. For me, it all started with this realization: The Kingdom of Heaven is (still) at hand.

Whether you are delighted or outraged with the results of the election, this is an important fact to hold true: the Kingdom of Heaven is (still) at hand. If you're thinking that your ideal world cannot happen unless the right woman or man is in the White House then consider again the story of Jesus. He proclaimed the Kingdom of God right under the nose of Pontius Pilate and under the rule of Caesar. He proclaimed it not as something that was going to come, or going to be restored, but something that was at hand even then.

Jesus reminds us all—Republicans, Democrats, and Independents alike—that it's not our leaders who ultimately create the kind of world we live in. They don't have that kind of power. It's up to us to say what kind of world we live, and to act accordingly.

Yes, Trump will soon have executive powers. But that no way imping-

es on our own inherent kingdom powers of dignity, self-regard, and co-creation with God. The power of the kingdom is already within us: it's found at the depth of our being. It's expressed through our thoughts, our feelings, beliefs and our actions. No one can take that away.

At the same time that we are each responsible for our ensuring own personal dignity and empowerment, that doesn't mean we stop paying attention to the world at large. It's imperative that we church leaders continue envisioning a just and inclusive society. It's imperative that we church leaders continue to work for a world in which the needs of all are met. It's imperative that we church leaders continue speaking up about what works and what doesn't. Finally, it's imperative that we back up our talk with action.

There's been a dramatic uptick in hate crimes by some pro-Trump supporters since last Tuesday's election. On the other hand, some anti-Trump protests have turned violent. Christian values of loving friends and enemies, forgiving those who have wronged us, offering radical hospitality and welcoming the stranger are more important than ever. Living the Gospel has never been more counter-cultural!

While violence against persons of color, religious minorities, and property should cause us to be vigilant, let's not go overboard by assuming the worst in others. We have to keep our assumptions in check. We lead congregations full of both Republicans and Democrats and Independ-

ents. Regardless of our own political leanings, we cannot assume that everyone who voted for Donald Trump wants to deport immigrants, block Muslims from coming into the country, roll back civil rights, normalize preying on women, or insult and bully people at will. It's simply not true. Sure, some share those views. More likely, however, most Trump supporters were drawn to one or more of his ideas about the economy, the government, or international relations. Or, they simply couldn't see voting for the other party. Or the other party's candidate.

On the other hand, we cannot assume that everyone who voted for Hillary Clinton is insensitive to concerns about the economy or security, supports rioters in the streets, is non-patriotic, or is somehow against everyone else.

Both sets of assumptions are false. As church leaders we are called to bring people together to live into the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the time to lean into the calling. Not by pretending discord and disagreement aren't happening. Or by simply reacting in fear. But by actively promoting all that we do stand for.

This is our time. This is our time to love all our neighbors, and all our enemies. This is our time to extend radical hospitality. This is our time to cast out demons, to turn fear into faith, and to cast a vision of a world that works for everyone. After all, the Kingdom of Heaven is (still) at hand. Let's demonstrate it.

—Rev. Rebekah Simon-Peter, United Methodist Reporter

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Three Kings (From Page 5)

the all important connection that Jesus was the foreordained King, come to save and preserve the ancient kingdom.

So, is this account historically correct? Or could it be apocryphal—a tale told to make a point, but not necessarily factual?

To me, it doesn't matter, because the story of the three wise men speaks to me of something beyond bare facts. It speaks to me of the profound, universal human longing to know God, to feel connected to God, even in the midst of this crazy world, this material plane of existence that is both terrible and wonderful.

I like to imagine those learned men in the years before Jesus' birth, searching the skies for signs, looking, always looking for the key, the moment when the signs and prophecies and knowledge converge and point the way to the Divine.

Imagine the hope blossoming in their hearts, as they came to the realization that the moment had arrived and they began their journey.

They traveled for perhaps as much as two years, sustained by the hope in their hearts. And when they arrived, they were filled with joy and the delicious irony of understanding that the gifts they brought—gold, frankincense and myrrh—the symbols of earthly wealth, were not needed

by the beautiful child, who transcended earthly values.

I like to imagine that their journey did not end with their arrival in Bethlehem, but, transformed by the presence of Emmanuel, God with us, continued throughout their lives.

Just as our journeys should not end when the holiday celebrations end, or when we leave church services each Sunday. Just like the magi in their deep longing for God, we should keep seeking the connection with God, for the “living water”.

Let us not pack away our search, our journey toward God, along with the decorations.

—Barbara Becker