



*Joyfully Sharing God's Love without Limitation, Exception, or Condition*

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## **Spiritual Stargazing**

*by The Reverend Renée Marie Rico, Transitional Pastor*



*Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. . . for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself. . . (Isaiah 43: 18-19)*

*[W]ise men from the East came to Jerusalem asking "Where is the child who has been born King of the Jews?" For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." (Matthew 2: 1b-2)*

It seems odd that through the prophet Isaiah the Lord asks the people "not to remember." Isn't our faith about remembering? Isn't the whole point to remember what God has done, who God is, and respond to that? How could remembering be so problematic?

I pondered this scripture and began to wonder if the problem the Lord was addressing was that a new journey could not begin until the old ways of the would-be travelers were released, with gratitude. Perhaps people were not yet ready to take on new ventures, ones that would have their challenges, if "the ways things were" were always on the minds of those on the journey.

This usually takes time to do. It is not the work of a day, or an hour, but learning to live knowing there is an ebb and flow to all things. It takes us, as individuals, different amounts of time to come to that point, and we all have to do at our own pace, whatever the issue might be.

The Isaiah passage also speaks about noticing the new in their midst. Being watchful for new things is a spiritual discipline unto itself. The wise men who traveled to Bethlehem came because they saw a star rise in the sky. I doubt that Jerusalem was on their "bucket list." Instead they noticed this sign, wondered at this marvelous new thing, and began a journey that led them to the baby Jesus and his mother Mary at home. If they had not noticed the star, the journey would not have been made, and the holy experience would have been missed, the gifts never given. They were willing to risk approaching King Herod, a king who was noted for killing those who disagreed with him, in order to find the child.

This month, we are beginning a new sermon series called *Trip of a Lifetime*, in which

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we examine what it means to be on this journey of faith with Jesus. We begin with the wise men's journey to Jerusalem and back home, then continue on through the baptism of Jesus and the disciples who learned what it meant to remain with Jesus and learn his ways.

As we journey, let's try out the faith practices of letting go with gratitude and seeing with new eyes. Our world depends on those who know how to see when something new is appearing - to name it lovingly, to share it with others, and to begin the journey it requires.

Are you a stargazer? I hope so.

In the Spirit, *Renée*

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## A Year of Hymns: What are Those Little Numbers?

*by Cactus Harris, Director of Music & Arts and Resident Organist*

Our hymn singing tradition is well over 1,500 years old in text and tune, so the question is, what makes them last? Why do some fall by the wayside and others don't? This year I would like to look at some of our hymns in greater detail, learning their history, and in turn creating a greater appreciation for some of those tunes which are our favorites and others a few might grumble over. In order to understand why many texts and tunes have lasted hundreds of years, we first must understand their construction, beginning with the poetry.



Have you ever noticed those little numbers at the bottom of a hymn? (Find a hymn in our *Glory to God* hymnal and look for the little numbers or letters on the bottom right below the music). For example: *8.6.8.6*, *8.8.8.8*, *10.10.10*, or sometimes letters like *LM* or *CM*. These represent the *poetic meter* of the text, each number corresponding to the number of syllables per line. When the poetic meter is described by letters (*CM*, *LM*, *SM*, etc.) they correspond to frequently used meters. For example, *CM* is defined as *Common Meter* which is always *8.6.8.6*.

Let's look at a hymn text in Common Meter:

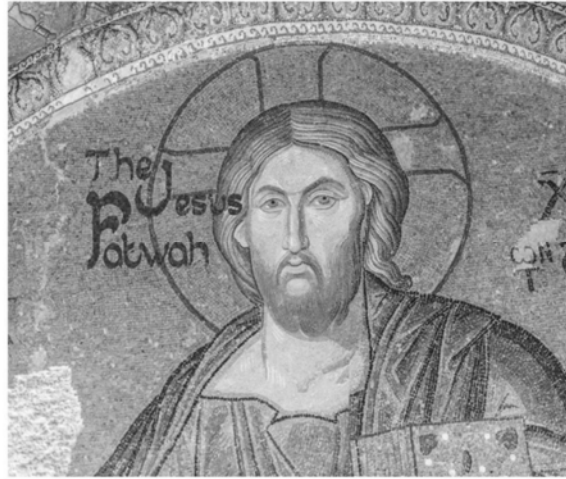
O **God**, our **help** in **a**-ges **past** (8 syllable line)  
our **hope** for **years** to **come**, (6)  
our **shel**-ter **from** the **storm**-y **blast**, (8)  
and **our** e-**ter**-nal **home**. (6)

I hope this is an "aha!" moment for some! Now, with this basic understanding for counting poetic meter, let's see if you can figure out the numbers for one of our oldest hymn texts, "*Of the Father's Love Begotten*." Here is the first verse:

*Of the Father's love begotten, ere the worlds began to be,  
he is Alpha and Omega;  
he the source, the ending he,  
of the things that are that have been, and that future years shall see, evermore and evermore!*

This hymn text was written in the 5th Century by a retired Romano Spanish lawyer around the same time as the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds were being codified. You can see the value of a text that stands beside these creeds which are pillars of our theology. *Did you count the syllables?* Answer: *8.7.8.7.8.7.7*

## January Adult Education



### The Jesus Fatwah:

#### Love Your (Muslim) Neighbor as Yourself

Much of what passes for information about Islam is weed-like disinformation rooted in stereotype and watered by fear. In *The Jesus Fatwah*, seventeen Islamic and Christian scholars offer reliable information about what Muslims believe, how they live out their faith, and how we all can be about building relationships across lines of faith.

Please join us for this enlightening series in the Great Room between services.

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## Looking Back and Moving Forward

*by Alissa Ellett, Director of Children's & Youth Ministries*

Happy 2017, y'all! 2016 was bursting at the seams with great things, and this coming year will be no different surely! *A BIG thank you to all who were involved in serving our children and families.* You will never know the impact your time and investment will have on them for the rest of their years.

Here's a year in review for Children's Ministry @ UPC!

We...



- invested in students at mentoring every Wednesday.
- chowed down together at Community Lunch each month.
- shared our smiles with our neighbors at UPC's Food Pantry.
- kicked off our new Godly Play Sunday School curriculum.
- hunted eggs on Easter morning.
- ate oodles of popcorn at our Majesty Theater movie nights.
- raised funds for summer camp at the Yard Sale.
- partied and ate tacos at Fiesta de La Familia.
- adventured and grew in our faith at Calvin Crest Sherwood Forest.
- made friends and learned about God at our weekly Summer Fun program.
- rode the train and ate too much ice cream at Superior Dairy.
- got our fill at our monthly "Second Mondays" family potlucks.
- hired fabulous Kaderina Guizar in the Nursery.
- got a sugar rush at the Halloween Block Party.
- "Family-feuded" at Count Your Blessings.
- walked wide-eyed at Cindy Lane's Christmas Light Display.
- enjoyed books and hot cocoa at our Mentoring Christmas Outing to Barnes & Noble.
- sang our hearts out Christmas caroling in the neighborhood.

What a year—it was nothing short of fabulous!

For 2017, we have big dreams for growing in faith, relationship, and number, reaching even further out into our community through our unique Montessori-based Godly Play Sunday School and our mentoring presence in local schools. Stay tuned for more in the coming year.

May you find God in unexpected places in 2017 in order that awe and wonder might inspire you beyond the limits of your present imagination!

Blessings, *Alissa*

## **Lao Partners: Clean Water Flow Makes a Difference**

UPC and Lao Partners began visiting and working with our partners, the Lao Evangelical Church fifteen years ago. While several of our key leaders and members have moved on - and passed on - our Lord has continued to bless us with new members who willingly respond to God's call to continue this ministry. We have been able to welcome members of the First Presbyterian Church of Newhall into our partnership on our 2015 and 2016 mission trips, where we worked together to sow the seeds in Laos by doing good and practicing

the Great Commandment of "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39)

It is such a blessing to see God's continuing blessings in Laos as the number of home churches, and the members of those home churches, continue to grow. The Lao capital of  
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Vientiane now has 37 home churches, Luang Prabang has 72, and Paksan has 68.

Thanks to God for pouring out his blessings to Laos. He makes more people safe, free to feel spiritually safe, and physically safe by drinking from his Living Water.

Thank you all for your prayers and support.

Wishing you all a happy New Year! *John and Lorna Bosavanh*

## Session Report

*by Jane Reid, Clerk of Session*

~~The meeting on December 6 began with prayer and a joint potluck dinner with the~~  
Board of Deacons. We recognized church officers who had finished their terms of service. Those faithful servants included:



**Deacons:** Donna Brady (served two 3-year terms in a row), Paul Braswell (served two 3-year terms in a row, 3 years as moderator), Dona Leonard (who faithfully filled a vacant 1-year term), and Judi Tapia (moderator for 2016).

**Elders:** Tony Bounthapanya (Southeast Asian Ministries), Mel Enns (President & Board of Property and Finance Chair), and David Knudson (Music & Worship).

After a hearty meal and ample dessert, we conducted our separate business meetings. Our scripture lesson came from the book of Isaiah 35: 10, The Return of the Redeemed in Zion. Elders savored the rich imagery of the passage including the promise that, "The ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

The lion's share of the meeting was spent with Jim Correia, Chairman of the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC), reviewing the Ministry Information Form (MIF) prepared by the PNC. The MIF is a comprehensive document which includes statistical information about our congregation, our mission statement, as well as anything and everything you would ever want to know about UPC. The narrative portion includes such questions as: What is the congregation's vision for ministry? How do you feel called to reach out to address the emerging needs of your community? How will this position help you to reach your vision and mission goals?

The PNC also provided a description of the characteristics needed by the person who is open to being called to our congregation. Session expressed their gratitude to Jim and PNC for all of the work that went into completing the MIF and unanimously voted to approve the document.

The meeting was adjourned with prayer by Renée at 9:20 p.m.

## UPC Groups

**Sunday Night Youth Group:** This group for our teens meets **Sunday nights at 6:30 p.m.** in the Youth Room for fun, laughs, and Jesus. For more information, email Dustin at [dustin@upcfresno.org](mailto:dustin@upcfresno.org), or text him at 288-0083.

**Contemplative Prayer:** Come **Mondays at 6:30 p.m.** to the Godly Play Room (Rooms 3-4) for Christ-centered meditation. No previous experience is necessary, just a desire to spend quiet, still time with the Divine. For more information, email Cathy Wingert at [wingy104@aol.com](mailto:wingy104@aol.com).

**Women's Bible Study:** The group meets for study and prayer **Wednesdays from 9:30-11 a.m.** They are about to start a new study: *Elijah: Living Securely in an Insecure World*. The new year is a great time to join the group! For more information, email Laura Lindegren at punkin2826@yahoo.com, or call her at 299-1838.

**Intercessory Prayer Service:** This monthly service, where all are invited to come pray for loved ones, members of our congregation, community, and world, meets **Monday, January 2 at 7 p.m.** For more information, email Pastor Tedd at teddlyons@gmail.com, or call or text him at 906-1438.

**Presbyterian Women (PW):** Presbyterian Women meet **Tuesday, January 10 at 9:30 a.m.** in the Great Room for a program and business meeting. Lowell T. Ens, Executive Director of Stone Soup is guest speaker. All UPC women are invited to attend. If you have questions, email Ruth Kallenberg at rbkallenberg@gmail.com, or call her at 431-7681.

**Pub Theology:** Join the discussion **Tuesday, January 17 from 6:30-8:30 p.m.** at Sequoia Brewing Company, on the corner of Champlain and Perrin in the Piazza Del Fiore Center. Add your voice to the discussion of a variety of topics concerning faith, religion, and God. Seating is limited so come early to ensure a spot. We meet monthly on the third Tuesday. Listening and discussion are encouraged; drinking is optional. For more information, email Dustin at dustin@upcfresno.org, or text him at 288-0083.

**Clippers:** Clippers meet **Friday, January 20 at 6:00 p.m.** in the Great Room for refreshments and Bunco! Bring either hors d'oeuvres or a dessert to share, and invite your friends. RSVP to the Dulls, 840-0408 or the Smiths, 325-3695 by January 15.

**Gals Night:** GAL'S Night celebrates the New Year!! Come join them on **Thursday, January 26 at 6:30 p.m.** in the Great Room. Please bring a wrapped "regift" (recycled gift) and a finger food to share with the group. They promise a fun evening of laughter with the girls! Newcomers are very welcome!! For information email Andrea Smith at asmith4160@aol.com.

## **Meeting at UPC**

**Sheeper Than Therapy:** Enjoy a group of knitters and crocheters whose skills range from beginner to expert. They meet at UPC the first Saturday of the month. Join them **Saturday, January 7 from 8:30-11:30 a.m.** For information, email Pastor Renée at rrico@aol.com.



## Volunteer Opportunity of the Month

**Congregational Care** is looking for help on Sundays between services to assist with the coffee and goodies. If you enjoy the socialization between services, contact Rita Dei at 476-9580 to help once a month, every other month, or whatever help you can provide.

**Jesus calls us to serve.** Here at UPC you can serve in many different ways. If you would like to:

**Serve on Session, as a Deacon, or on a Ministry**—call Lisa Matson at 307-3804

**Sing in the choir**—call Cactus Harris at 439-8807

**Ring a bell in the Bell Choir**—call David Knudson at 285-3373

**Assist in the Contemporary Service**—call Rachel Madsen at 392-0434

**Help prepare and serve coffee on Sunday**—call Rita Dei at 476-9580

**Greet**—call Jean Ann Fulton at 432-5092

**Usher**—call Bob Berend at 229-5154

**Serve Communion** (1st Sundays & must be ordained)—call Eleanor Lockhart at 436-1574

**Prepare Communion**—call Anne Klapste at 706-7766

**Provide Flowers for the Chancel**—call Jeanette Hodgson at 974-8880

**Teach Adult Education**—call Doug Lowe at 431-2905

**Teach "Godly Play"**—call Alissa Ellett at 439-8807

**Volunteer for Youth Group Activities**—call Dustin Maddox at 439-8807

**Mentor (Wednesdays during the school year)**—call Lynn Driscoll at 301-7345

**Volunteer with the Food Pantry distribution** (3rd Saturdays)—call Beth Buchanan at 433-1262

**Stock shelves in the Food Pantry** (3rd Thursdays)—call Dustin at 439-8807

**Work in the Community Garden**—call Beth Buchanan at 433-1262

**Visitation**—call Pastor Renée at 439-8807

### January Birthdays

- 2** Donna Brady  
Winston Fuller  
Larry Leeds
- 3** Saly Phouamkha
- 5** Lorna Bosavanh  
Simeon Bugay  
Dorothy Curtis
- 6** Chanphone Rajsavong  
John Bosavanh  
Ray Dull  
Betty Higdon
- 9** Zeke Lyons
- 10** Sophie Fern
- 11** Chris Gromis  
James Orr

### January Birthdays cont.

- 12** Kerry Neal  
Charles Warnes
- 14** Dave Eaton
- 15** Karen Enns
- 19** Jonah Morgan  
Nate Stephenson
- 20** Josiah Bosavanh  
Lenore Schengel
- 21** Tom Jones
- 22** Rob Morgan  
Margil Vanderhoff  
Lorna Wendt
- 24** Marcella Oneida
- 25** Jim Ayars
- 27** Lorraine Yerxa

### January Birthdays cont.

- 28** David Long
- 29** Chris Dei  
John Vencil  
Diane Wetzel

### January Anniversaries

- 8** Greg & Shannon Pozovich
- 10** Scott & Lisa Matson
- 11** Casey & Kelly Austin
- 18** Bob & Wanda Vert
- 21** Ren & Judy Adams
- 29** Louis & Hollie Volpp

**January Calendar**  
**1 Single Service 10 a.m.**  
**Special Congregational Meeting 11 a.m.**  
**2 Campus closed**  
 Intercessory Prayer 7 p.m.  
**3 Called Session Meeting**  
 6 p.m. Deacons 7 p.m.  
**4 Choir Rehearsal**  
 6:30 p.m.  
**5 Bell Choir Rehearsal**  
 7 p.m.  
**7 Knitting Group 8:30 a.m.**  
**8 Epiphany Sunday**  
**9 Contemplative Prayer**  
 6:30 p.m.  
**10 Presbyterian Women**  
 9:30 a.m.  
**11 Women's Bible Study**  
 9:30 a.m.  
 After School Mentoring  
 3:30 p.m.  
 Choir Rehearsal 6:30 p.m.

**January Calendar cont.**  
**12 Bell Choir Rehearsal**  
 6:30 p.m.  
**15 Fresno Choral Artists**  
 4 p.m.  
 Youth Group 6 p.m.  
**January Calendar cont.**  
**16 MLK Day - Campus Closed**  
**17 Pub Theology**  
**18 Women's Bible Study**  
 9:30 a.m.  
 After School Mentoring  
 3:30 p.m.  
 Choir Rehearsal 6:30 p.m.  
**19 Bell Choir Rehearsal**  
 6:30 p.m.  
**20-22 Session Retreat**  
**20 Clippers 6 p.m.**  
**21 Food Distribution**  
 8 a.m.  
**22 Youth Group 6 p.m.**  
**23 Contemplative Prayer**  
 6:30 p.m.

**January Calendar cont.**  
**24 Ministry Meetings (times vary)**  
**25 Women's Bible Study**  
 9:30 a.m.  
 After School Mentoring  
 3:30 p.m.  
 Choir Rehearsal 6:30 p.m.  
**26 Bell Choir Rehearsal**  
 6:30 p.m.  
 Gals Night 6:30 p.m.  
**28 Baroque Festival**  
**29 Single Service**  
**10 a.m.**  
**UPC Annual Meeting**  
**11 a.m.**  
**30 Contemplative Prayer**  
 6:30 p.m.