

Joyfully Sharing God's Boundless Love with All in Our Community
without Limitation, Exception, or Condition

UNIVERSITY PRESS

December 2017

Follow the Star

by The Reverend Renn Serna, Senior Pastor



"...the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy." Matthew 2:9-10.

Can you believe Advent is already upon us and Christmas is just around the corner? Where has this year gone? Are you ready to greet the newborn King?

I find it funny that Advent, the time of slowing down and preparing for the birth of our Savior, always seems to fall during the busiest time of the year. Between Christmas shopping, holiday parties, and end of the year preparations, there never seems to be enough time to truly appreciate the reason for the season. And so often our hearts are heavy - heavy with grief, heavy with expectations, heavy with uncertainty of what the coming year will hold. And yet Christmas is supposed to be a time of great joy and wonder when we remember God's promise to love and care for us.

That is why this Advent we join the ancients before us "Following the Star" that will lead us to the manger. Slowing down, refocusing our hearts and celebrating the Christmas miracle once again.

Have you ever wondered what Christ's star - the Star of Bethlehem - must have looked like? What a magnificent star it must have been for the Wise Men to leave everything to follow after it. The star that points us towards Christ, that reminds us anew of "God with us," that whispers promises of a better tomorrow.

What would it look like for us to put aside the busyness and the worry, the shopping and the stress and follow after that beautiful star? What hope does that star hold for us? What promise of light does it offer?

I'd like to invite you to join us during worship the next few weeks as we *Follow the Star* and journey towards the Christ Child. Each week we will be taking a step closer to the little manger, and drawing ever closer to the promise of new life born on Christmas morning.

With much love, Pastor Renn

Follow the Star with Worship and Music at UPC

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

We invite you to make these worship and music opportunities a part of your Christmas spirit this year.

First Sunday of Advent | Sunday, December 3 at 9 & 11 a.m.

We begin the Season of Peace with a sermon series "Following the Star" where we join the Magi in following the star and discovering mystery in the Advent season, celebrating the awe and wonder of finding ourselves in God's story, having faith and trust in God's promises, and how we can keep following the star to discover the baby Jesus.



Soli Deo Gloria | Friday, December 8 at 7:30 p.m.

Soli Deo Gloria presents their Gala 10th Season Christmas Concert at UPC. This outstanding choral group sings of the joy, mystery, and delight of Christmas in selections from their first decade. Also featured are two world premieres of music by local composers Walter Saul and Kevin Memley. The repertoire includes music by Stroepe, Morales, Holst, and Bach with strings and a grand carol sing-a-long with orchestra.

Neighborhood Caroling | Sunday, December 10 at 6:30 p.m.

Our neighbors always look forward to our caroling. Join Rev. Lou Paradise to sing carols, pass out stockings full of Christmas goodies, and then head back to UPC for hot chocolate and Christmas cookies. All voices and instruments are welcome.

Advent Meditations with the Emerald Duo | Thursday December 14 at 7 p.m.

The Emerald Duo, Susan Doering and Dieter Wulfhorst, present their annual Advent Meditations program. This evening of poetry interspersed with music for violin and cello always helps set the tone of Advent in anticipation for Christmas.

Third Sunday of Advent | Sunday, December 17 at 9 a.m.

Harpist Laura Porter joins us with special music as we move closer to Christmas Eve.

A Service of Lessons and Carols | Sunday, December 24 at 10 a.m.

We celebrate the 4th Sunday of Advent with one worship service at 10 a.m. to hear the lessons and carols of the season.

Christmas Eve Worship | Sunday, December 24 at 5 p.m.

We welcome the Christ Child at our candle-lit Christmas Eve service where we sing carols of joy. This is a family-friendly Communion service.

New Year's Eve Morning Worship | Sunday, December 31 at 9 a.m and 11 a.m

We return to our regular 9 & 11 a.m. service times as we close the Christmas season celebrating the New Year and observing the Epiphany.

Wishing you the joyful harmonies of the Christmas season, Cactus

Attention All Singers: *Would you like to sing in the choir for our choral-led Lessons and Carols Service on Christmas Eve morning? All are welcome to be a part of the choir! Rehearsals are Sundays between services starting December 3 and continuing every Sunday of Advent. I hope you can join us!*

An Illustrated Advent for Families

by Dustin Maddox, Lay Minister & Commissioned Ruling Elder



The holidays often seem like a blur, don't they? In our culture, everything after Halloween seems as if we're in an all-out sprint to get through the holidays to the end of the year when we can finally blow off some well-deserved steam for having to spend so much time loaded with so many expectations with our family. But does it have to be this way?

The season of Advent invites us into a different rhythm. Rather than rushing from one party to another or chasing after one great deal or another, Advent gives us time to slow down so that we can be with one another. That is what Advent is about after all: deliberately creating time and space in our lives to recognize *Immanuel*, God with us here and now.

One helpful family resource for Advent comes from our friends at Illustrated Children's Ministry. They have created a bundle of goodies to help you and your family intentionally slow down to be together amidst the chaos of the Christmas season. For only \$10, you can purchase five weeks of family devotions, five coloring pages, an Advent calendar with activities, and an Advent wreath. This is a wonderful opportunity for the whole family to set aside some time to be creative and intentional about following Jesus together.

Visit <https://store.illustratedchildrensministry.com> to purchase *An Illustrated Advent for Families* from Illustrated Children's Ministry. If this is something you decide to do, make sure to take and share some pictures of what you create together!

May you slow down this Advent and spend time cultivating a childlike faith with those you love.

Grace + Peace, Dustin

Extravagant Generosity

A big THANK YOU to the 60+ families and individuals who filled out a Commitment Card and dedicated themselves to supporting the life and ministry of UPC through their Time, Talent, and Treasure. Your outpouring of love was indeed an act of extravagant generosity, and you are making such a difference in the Kingdom of God. Thank you!



If you would still like to turn in a Commitment Card for the coming year, there is still time! Contact the church office for more information.

UPC Joins Giving Tuesday | There is Still Time to Give

by Sol Eufrazio, Elder for the Missions Ministry

#GIVING
TUESDAY

As we move into the holidays and traditions that shape our families, our community and our church, UPC is starting what we hope will be a new tradition. At UPC, we have a deep value for groups and organizations that not only help those in need, but demonstrate the deep love of Jesus to those who need it the most. Consequently, it reminds us of the power of Jesus and how we partner with the mission of loving each other each and every day.

This holiday season, the UPC Missions Ministry has launched an online campaign called Giving Tuesday. Giving Tuesday is held on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving, to encourage people and organizations to give to non-profits who support causes they value. We launched this campaign on November 28 and announced what organizations the proceeds are going to.

Check our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/upcfresno and keep up with the latest on the campaign as it develops. Email Sol at sol.eufracio@gmail.com if you have questions or are super excited about Giving Tuesday!

A Partnership Adapting to Change

by Charlie Warnes for the Southeast Asian Ministry

UPC's Lao Partners began sending teams to work with the Lao Evangelical Church (LEC) 16 years ago. Our first team members vividly recall the undercurrent tension during those first visits. The Lao Communist government had essentially driven all Christian missionaries from the country some 30 years earlier, and LEC remained the sole remnant of Christianity in Laos. LEC harbored some concern that these visitors from the US could upset the delicate relationship that LEC had managed to build with the Lao government.



With God's blessing and guidance, our team members were able to develop a partnership with the LEC - through working together to provide supplies to schools and hospitals, installing computer equipment, giving English as a 2nd Language classes and operating a short term medical screening clinic.

Thirteen years ago Lao Partners helped a village with a new well, and this eventually led to our partnership with the LEC and Living Waters for the World (LWW) to provide seven clean water systems in Laos. Four of those systems are in eastern Laos' Xiengkhouang province - primary victim of the wartime intense cluster bombing.

Lao Partners had planned to install our 8th LWW system this fall, but the regional authorities chose to not grant the necessary permit. Reasons are still unclear, but we understand that a locally-based commercial water company might have played a role.

Concurrently LWW is shifting their focus toward projects in countries in Central America and the Caribbean with multiple water systems - where specifically trained 'in-country networks' actively manage the systems. As a part of this, LWW has changed their fee structures that are now beyond the financial capabilities of Lao Partners with our seven systems. Lao Partners is in the process of exploring other means for training teams and sourcing equipment.

In the concluding days of this year's Lao Partners trip, John and Lorna Bosavanh will be meeting with the leaders of the LEC to discuss the future directions and plans for our Lao Partners visits to Laos. We value and appreciate your prayers and support.

UPC Groups

WEEKLY

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.

Women's Bible Study: The group meets weekly on **Wednesdays at 9:30 a.m. in the Great Room.** After a hiatus for the holidays (December 20 & 27 & January 3) the group resumes their study on January 10. They will start a new study - *Women of the New Testament*. Join them and learn about the women of our Faith. For more information, email Laura Lindegren at punkin2826@yahoo.com, or call her at 299-1838.

Thursday Evening Bible Study: The group, led by Ceci Johnson, meets for study **Thursdays at 6:30 p.m.** They are currently "wrestling" with the Gospel of Matthew. They invite you to join them. For more information, email Ceci Johnson at cjartistquilts@gmail.com.

MONTHLY

Young Families Gathering: This event is open to all who want to fellowship with young families. For December, this monthly event is on **Monday, December 4 at 6:30 p.m. in the Great Room.** To RSVP for the event, email Dustin at dustin@upcfresno.org.

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, December 4 at 7 p.m.** For more information, email Pastor Tedd at teddlyons@gmail.com, or call/text him at 906-1438.

Presbyterian Women (PW): Presbyterian Women thank the UPC family for all the support for our annual holiday boutique, including the locale change for the 11 a.m. service. We are delighted to announce that the boutique brought in \$5,000 for missions. Bill Hoey picked the winning tickets for the two drawings. The quilt went to Judy Taylor's husband John, and the doll ensemble, created by Judy, went to Doris Hansen. Congratulations!

The PW monthly meeting is on December 12. They meet at 10:30 a.m. in the Great Room. (Note the change from their usual time.) They are wrapping Christmas gifts for children at FIRM and enjoying a shared luncheon. Bring a small salad to share along with two unwrapped gifts. For more information, email Ruth Kallenberg at rebkallenberg@gmail.com.

Clippers: Clippers will not meet in December.

Pub Theology: Join the discussion on **Tuesday, December 19 from 6:30-8:30 p.m.** at Sequoia Brewing Company (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. They 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.

UPC Food Pantry: The food distribution is **Saturday, December 16 at 8 a.m.** It is held the third Saturday of each month. Make this a holiday tradition for you and your family by texting Dustin at 288-0083 to volunteer. If you would like to donate to the food of the month item for the distribution, **the food item this month is holiday meal fixings.** Bring your donations to the Narthex on Sunday mornings or drop them at the office during the week. There is also always a need for paper bags.

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, December 2 from 8:30-11:30 a.m.** For information, visit the Sheeper Than Therapy website at www.sheeperthantherapy.org.

Pastor Renn's Office Hours & Contact Info



Monday: Sabbath
Tuesday: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. (Office)
Wednesday: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. (Office)
Thursday: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. (Office)
Friday: Sermon preparation (Home)
Office Phone: (559) 439-8812
Pastoral Emergency Line: (559) 87-4250
Email: renn@upcfresno.org

<p>December Birthdays</p> <p>1 Elizabeth Prasad 3 Charlene Barcenilla 4 Tony Bounthapanya Tim Buchanan 5 Ryan Foster 8 Thim Phothivongsay Linda Wilson 9 Patricia Gabel 10 Jeannine Koshear 11 Susan Edyburn Phoy Noi 12 Mike Guthrie 13 Patty Roberts 14 Jim Clark Ceci Johnson 15 Kristen Gearhart 16 Andrea Smith 17 Cathy Wingert 18 Craig Howells 19 Marian Amend Bryce Minturn 21 Colleen Evans Laura Fuller 22 Bill Goyette Jeff Hakeman 23 Tout Tou Bounthapanya Dustin Maddox Betty Upton 25 Jan Ritchey</p>	<p>Birthdays cont.</p> <p>27 Janet DeWitt Aaron Grisez Kim Leslie Sue Smith Bill Wilder 28 Trent Braswell Rob Walling</p> <p>December Anniversaries</p> <p>2 Chansy & May Fengthong 5 James & Trish Orr 6 Chris & Lynette Reid 16 Lou & Christi Paradise 17 Ben & Cathy Douglas</p> <p>December Calendar</p> <p>2 Sheeper Than Therapy 8:30 a.m. 3 First Sunday in Advent 4 Contemplative Prayer 6:30 p.m. Young Families Gathering 6:30 p.m. Intercessory Prayer 7 p.m. 5 Session & Deacons Joint Meeting 6 p.m. Women's Bible Study 9:30 a.m. 6 Choir Rehearsal 7 p.m. 7 Bell Choir Rehearsal 6:30 p.m.</p>	<p>December Calendar cont.</p> <p>8 Soli Deo Gloria Concert 7:30 p.m. 10 Second Sunday in Advent Neighborhood Caroling 6:30 p.m. 11 Contemplative Prayer 6:30 p.m. 12 Presbyterian Women 10:30 a.m. 13 Women's Bible Study 9:30 a.m. Choir Rehearsal 7 p.m. 14 Bell Choir Rehearsal 6:30 p.m. Musica Viva Advent Program 7 p.m. 16 Food Distribution 8 a.m. 17 Third Sunday in Advent 18 Contemplative Prayer 6:30 p.m. 19 Pub Theology 6:30 p.m. 20 Choir Rehearsal 7 p.m. 24 Fourth Sunday in Advent & Christmas Eve Lessons & Carols 10 a.m. Family Friendly Service 5 p.m. 25 Christmas Day - Office Closed 31 Epiphany Sunday</p>
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Sunday Worship Schedule for December

9 a.m. Classic Worship | 11 a.m. Contemporary Service

11 a.m. Lao Language Service | except the 1st Sunday

Christmas Eve Worship

10 a.m. Lessons & Carols

5 p.m. Family-Friendly Candle-lit Service

Return Service Requested

Mailing Label Here

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Advent & Christmas at UPC
December 3, 2017 - December 31, 2017
Sundays, 12/3, 12/10, 12/17 & 12/31- 9 a.m. & 11 a.m. Worship
Sunday, 12/24 - 10 a.m. Lessons & Carols & 5 p.m. Family Friendly Service