



UNIVERSITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

DECEMBER 2018

ADVENT: ABSENCE & ANTICIPATION

by The Reverend Dustin Maddox, Associate Pastor



"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with ...the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." - Luke 21:34-36

The church year begins with Advent – this year, December 2. The season of Advent is not just a church season, but also a personal one meant to be lived, to be experienced not merely in our heads, but in the nitty-gritty of our everyday, ordinary lives. Sometimes, however, the particular circumstances of our life together align themselves according to God's sovereign plan in such a way to underscore the theological meaning of a certain season to help us see with new eyes.

This Advent season, as we take stock of our lives and the state of the world around us, headlines seem to herald God's absence more than God's presence. We step across the holiday threshold not into a wonderland of cherubic Christmas cheer, but into a Narnian winter landscape in which Aslan is absent and the mood is as if it is "always winter and never Christmas" under the White Witch's regime.

C.S. Lewis got Advent exactly right in his masterful *The Chronicles of Narnia* series: Advent is a season characterized by both absence and anticipation. We live in Advent "time," between Jesus' Incarnation and his Second Coming, when Sin, Death, and Evil will finally be exposed, judged, defeated, and all things reconciled and made new. The season of Advent begins not with the anticipation of Jesus' birth, but of his return.

The absence we feel is familiar and, for some of us, ever-present. We look around at the world and at our own lives, wanting to trust, setting out to hope, but, if we're honest, we're quickly struck by profound absence. There's the absence of peace as war and terrorism destroy communities and displace millions; the absence of unity, civility, and understanding in our political system; the absence of meaning, integrity, and rest in our souls; the absence of loved ones, desired relationships, and hoped for presences around our tables during the holidays.

Where is God in the midst of the absence we experience? How long, O God, we cry out, will things be this way? We grieve the current state of affairs, taking it all in, and doing what we can to be faithful in this state of spiritual exile.

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Yet we don't grieve as those without hope. Jesus has promised to return, to repair what has been

destroyed, to fill the void in our world and in our lives. We live with absence, surely, but also with anticipation. But this is Advent-absence, Advent-anticipation. The anticipation God will decisively act, Jesus will return again as surely as Jesus arrived at first, however unexpectedly, to redeem, reconcile, and renew our sin-sick world, our absence-filled lives.

During Advent, we anticipate Christ's return as Judge, about which, at first glance, we're rather averse. This is good news, truly, if we move beyond surface-level notions of religious judgementalism and observe the justice-thirsty and righteousness-hungry heart of Jesus which is what we are told in the Sermon on the Mount characterizes the children of God.

To anticipate Jesus return as Judge means we eagerly await, and stridently work toward, the day in which there are no more refugees; no more Opioid epidemic; no more cancer, disease, or accidental deaths; no more loneliness, estrangement, or alienation; no more wildfires or hurricanes or famines; no more church abuse scandals or theological disintegration; no more need for our monthly food distribution; no more political power posturing, division, and vitriol because it will all be put to an end by Jesus return to bring Heaven crashing into Earth.

Advent is the season in which we get prepared, we daily set our expectations on this magnificent and unperishable gift promised to us in Jesus' return. As we plunge deeper into the increasing darkness and dropping temperatures of winter, we gather together to look for glimmers of light and sources of warmth. Only after feeling the absence do we listen for sounds of the return of the King. We look for signs telling us Aslan is on the move.

Then, on Christmas, we hear afresh the good news of great joy: the king is born! In all our absence and anticipation, God is ever with us.

Grace + Peace, *Pastor Dustin*

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS AT UPC

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

A musical Advent heralds the worship and music of Christmas at UPC. Here is what's coming up in December and early January:

"Christmas Visions" with Soli Deo Gloria | Friday, December 7 at 7:30 p.m.

Soli Deo Gloria will present a brand-new work written for the group, entitled "Christmas Visions," composed by E.J. Hinojosa. Arrangements of many favorite Christmas Carols will also be included on the program. Dr. Julie Carter conducts the Soli Deo Gloria Women's Choir, with Dr. Walter Saul serving as accompanist. Adult Tickets: \$15, Students: \$10, At the Door: \$20



"Advent Meditations" with The Emerald Duo | Monday, December 10 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 sets the tone of Advent in anticipation of Christmas.

A Service of Lessons and Carols | Sunday, December 23 at 9 & 11 a.m.

We celebrate the 4th Sunday of Advent with a Service of Lessons and Carols at both our 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. services. The Fresno Camerata String students accompany in worship at 9 a.m., adding a special sound to the program. (Singers, see below for an invitation to come sing in the choir at the 9 a.m. service.)

Candlelight Christmas Eve | Monday, December 24 at 5 p.m.

We celebrate the light of the Christ Child at our family-friendly Christmas Eve Candlelight service at 5 p.m. We sing carols in worship to welcome the Christ Child. (Singers, see the invitation below to sing in the choir on Christmas Eve.)

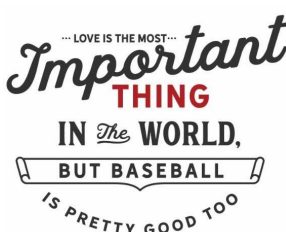
Epiphany Stars | Sunday, January 6 at 9 & 11 a.m.

Epiphany means revelation, and like last year, we want to provide each person a star with a special revelation from God to ponder and pray over in 2019. You are invited to keep this star in a place where you can see it every day and allow God to speak to you through it. You might instantly connect with your word, or it might take a bit more time. Either way, trust God has something important to tell you through this word, and remember God is always speaking.

Attention All Singers: *Once again, you are invited to be part of the choir for the choral-led Lessons and Carols service at 9 a.m. on Sunday December 23 and the Christmas Eve service on December 24.* All are welcome to be a part of the choir! Rehearsals are Sundays between services starting December 2, continuing every Sunday in Advent. Join us!

Celebrating the season, *Cactus*

ADULT EDUCATION: THE MOST IMPORTANT THING



In Adult Education, between services on Sundays through December 16, members of the University Presbyterian Church family continue to share the most important thing they have learned about the life of faith during their time at UPC. The series has featured many inspiring and heartfelt stories and it is not too late to come Sunday mornings at 10:15 a.m. in Majesty Theater to hear more of these stories.

HANDCHIMES: HELP US ADD OCTAVES

by David Knudson, Bell Choir Director

We have the opportunity to enhance our bell choir resources by acquiring the 4th and 5th octaves of Mallmark handchimes. These chimes provide a mellow, sustained sound, which contrasts with the brightness of the handbells, and these octaves expand the bell choir's repertoire. Your donations to the Bell Choir over the years, including donations to celebrate the life of longtime bell choir member Bruce Wendt, son of Lorna and Bill Wendt, who died in December 2015 at age of 52, have allowed us to expand the range and texture of the music the Bell Choir brings to our services and the community.

We invite you to help us keep this expansion going with this acquisition. If you would like to join in this gift, please designate your check or on-line giving to "Bell Choir" or "Bruce Wendt Memorial." We look forward to bringing these new instruments to UPC's worship ministry. If you have questions, please contact David Knudson at 285-3373, or to email Cactus Harris at cactus@upcfresno.org



CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE



by The Reverend Renn Serna, Senior Pastor

Friends, thank you so much for participating in our Feasibility Study last month as our church leadership has been discerning what God has in store for us next. There was overwhelming support for a capital campaign from the congregation, with over 80% of survey participants saying they believed the projects laid out in the proposal aligned well with the life and mission of our congregation.

Because of this, our Session has voted to move forward with a modified capital campaign in the Spring of 2019 to align with the celebration of our 50th Anniversary. This allows us to both give thanks for God's faithfulness to us throughout the years, and to thoughtfully prepare for ministry together in the next season where God is leading us.

Your responses to the Feasibility Study helped us to refine the purpose of the campaign, and to better discern the kinds of projects we feel are life-giving for UPC. Because of your feedback, we realized that the initial fundraising goal was probably outside of our ability to fulfill right now, and so we are working with our campaign consultants to scale back the campaign and set a lower fundraising goal. We also realized there were a couple of proposed projects the congregation felt were less central to our current church vision, and so we are holding off on things like moving the Columbarium and paying off our solar loan, until a time when those particular projects become more urgent.

By aligning the campaign with our 50th Anniversary Celebration, we have a number of months to lay the groundwork and make sure we are approaching this campaign with prayer and thoughtful preparation. While the campaign will go live in the Spring of 2019, we are spending the next few months finalizing projects, training our leadership team, and answering some of the wonderful questions you asked during the Feasibility Study.

The campaign is composed of three major components, with details still being worked out:

1. Caring for our Campus allows us to take care of much needed maintenance work, and to ensure our facilities provide a safe and efficient space for us to live into the call to share God's boundless love. Over the next couple of months, the Board of Property and Finance is putting together a long term maintenance plan, getting bids for various projects, and drafting a schedule for the implementation of various projects.

2. Reaching Towards the Future is geared toward strategically planning for ministry in the next season of our life together. In coming up with these projects, our Session has prayed about where we have seen God moving in recent years, and what resources might help us to live into this call more fully. Projects which excite both Session and the church as a whole include updating our Food Pantry, installing a playground, and remodeling our Narthex to provide a better front door to the community. Each project comes with questions, like what liability issues come with having a playground on campus and what exactly is needed to make the Narthex more visitor-friendly. We are looking into answers to these questions as we plan this phase of the campaign. We look forward to sharing what we discover with you before plans are finalized.

3. Leaving a Legacy that will Last. We want to include a piece of the campaign aimed at maintaining our ministries for generations to come. Our hope is to develop a vehicle to enable planned gifts to generate income in perpetuity to further the life and ministry of our congregation. An Endowment Fund is a likely vehicle, though this section of the campaign is the least defined at the moment. The beautiful thing about an endowment is that it doesn't belong to just one person, or even to just one generation, but to the church as a whole into the future.

So many of you asked wonderful questions about the purpose of an endowment, how the funds would be used, and how we would protect the principal of the fund from being dipped into for everyday sorts of needs. We are beginning to look into these questions and we welcome your input.

Watch for opportunities to join in the conversation so we can hear from as many people as possible to make sure that we are making the very best choices for the future of our church.

Please continue to pray for our congregation and for our leadership team as we start to put plans in place for this campaign. We have been blessed by the countless individuals who have given so sacrificially of their time, talent, and treasure to make UPC what the vital part of the community we are today. Where is God leading us next? What a joy it is to stand in this moment in time and say "yes" to God's invitation to serve!

Blessings, *Pastor Renn*

Do you have questions about the Capital Campaign or want to get involved? Contact our Campaign Chair Mel Enns at 905-7456.

DEACONS: NEW & RETIRING

by Barbara Schlueter, Moderator of the Board of Deacons



The Deacons minister to members of the congregation in times of need, praise, and friendship. As we approach the Christmas celebration of Jesus' birth, we look back on the many gifts and blessings we have received this year from our work as Deacons praying for UPC and the community, having conversations with those in our shepherding groups, assisting those in need, setting up Communion, comforting in times of sorrow, and rejoicing in times of celebration.

Some of you will have a "new" Deacon in the new year as the Deacons of the Class of 2018 retire from service. We are thankful for the work of our retiring Deacons: Lynn Driscoll, Judy Goodmon, Betty Higdon, Becky Souza, and Louis Volpp.

We look forward to welcoming the new Class of Deacons begin their ministry January 1, 2019: Harell Gabel, Leslie Knutsen, Dione Lyons, Trish Orr, and Linda Wilson

Thank you all for supporting our ministry this year. We look forward to the coming year with hope, love, and a caring spirit as we continue to minister at God's direction.

WITH GRATITUDE



Presbyterian Women thank all those who helped make our November Boutique such a success. Members and friends gave time, talent and treasure and we are grateful. Over \$5,000 was raised and will be distributed to local and worldwide missions. In the raffle, Lynn Driscoll won the quilt and Betty Boos won the HP Sprocket.

WHO DO I CALL?

While Pastor Renn is on maternity leave various people are taking over her many roles and we want you to know they are ready to help. For general information or assistance, and for times when you would usually contact Pastor Renn, contact the Church Office at (559) 439-8807 or email Church Administrator Kerry Neal at kerry@upcfresno.org.

If you have an urgent pastoral need during off-hours, call 387-4250 and a pastor will contact you.



ARE MATTHEW & LUKE IN YOUR NATIVITY SCENE?

by Rus Stolling



Christmas is soon upon us. Those of us surviving or ignoring the onslaught of retail advertising and the urge to bust the budget in exorbitant gift giving will remember the day for what it truly is. Regardless of how much or how we celebrate, all of us will be decorating. We'll be setting out candles and wreaths, decorating trees, and very likely posing a set of figurines depicting the Nativity -- a Nativity Set, or Crèche as it is often called.

In the center will be the infant Jesus in a trough, probably hay-lined, wrapped in the swaddling cloth. Beside him, a reverent and perhaps kneeling mother Mary, with Joseph removed a step or two behind as if observing pensively. To one side will be a shepherd or two. To the other side three ornately dressed men bearing gifts. Just as often we see animals: sheep, a donkey, an ox, a camel or two. All of this unfolds in or near an open-faced shelter of some sort.

As we gaze at the depiction of the Nativity story, how many of us remember there are two stories of the Nativity, and the Crèche is an amalgam of the two? Have we noticed that neither of the Nativity stories mentions animals?

The first Gospel, Matthew, has the chronologically later Nativity story where the "wise men" appear "from the East", very likely having traveled on those ships of the desert—camels. They have come to a "house" to view "a child." Their camels may have attended as well.

The third Gospel, Luke, has the chronologically earlier of the two Nativity accounts, wherein shepherds "watching their flocks by night" are heralded to the manger by angels to visit the newborn. It is appropriate then to find the shepherds in the scene accompanied by a lamb, ewe, ram, or one of each. And let's include an angel and a star at the crown of the roof.

Putting the people all together in one scene unites and summarizes the two stories. Although neither book mentions the presence of animals, we can justifiably place the sheep and camels. But what of the donkey? What of the ox?

Here we move to the realm of symbolism. Renaissance art is rich with color symbolism and allegorical figures. Depictions of Mary typically clothe her in a shade of blue. (Contrast Mary Magdalene, not a participant in the Nativity, most often caped in red.) Joseph is always clothed in a drab color, usually brown. The consistent use of the colors assisted illiterate observers in recognizing the principal participants in any scene.

Similarly, animals and other figures also act as symbolic representations. The sheep stands in as a representation of Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God. The donkey perhaps foreshadows Christ's ride into Jerusalem that fateful Passover. Then there is the ox—the big, strong, plodding, clumsy

bovine creature. Why is he here? Aren't those horns a danger to all others? OSHA would not approve!

Painted depictions of the saints were often accompanied by the insertion of a small allegorical figure in the frame, whether relevant to the action in the scene or not, to signify who the person depicted is. A familiar image of Matthew bent over a book with a quill in his hand often has an angel in the background. Mark is shown seated or standing with a lion at his feet. An eagle symbolizes John, and the ox is the symbol of Saint Luke.

Revisiting our Nativity scene, we find the Angel above our manger as representative of Matthew, and the ox stands (or lies) in as a representative for Luke. Matthew and Luke—the authors of the two Nativity stories—are present symbolically to complete the Nativity scene.

UPC Groups

SAVE THE DATE for the 2019 Men's Retreat | January 11– 13: Men of UPC, information on the annual Men's Retreat at Calvin Crest the weekend of January 11-13, 2019 will soon be out. Watch the Sunday bulletin for information on how to register.

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.

Women's Bible Study: The group which meets **Wednesdays from 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.** is studying Isaiah. They welcome you to join them. For more information, contact Laura Lindegren, at 299-1838.

Thursday Evening Bible Study: The group meets for study **Thursdays at 6:30 p.m.** in the Fireside Room. They invite you to join them in studying the Gospel of Luke.

MONTHLY

Intercessory Prayer Service: This is a monthly service where all are invited to come pray for loved ones, members of our congregation, community, and world. Join them on **December 3 at 4 p.m.** For more information, contact Pastor Tedd at 906-1438.

Presbyterian Women (PW): Presbyterian Women (PW): Presbyterian Women will meet **Tuesday, December 11, at a special time, 10:30 a.m.,** to wrap Christmas gifts for FIRM and share a brunch/lunch after a short business meeting. Invite a friend and join us in the Great Room. For further information, contact Ruth Kallenberg at 431-7681.

UPC Food Pantry: The monthly food distribution will take place on **Saturday, December 15 at 8 a.m.** Come and help 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 for December is Christmas dinner fixings (stuffing mix, cranberry sauce, canned pumpkin, etc.).** Bring your donations to the Narthex on Sunday mornings or drop them at the office during the week. Would you like to help stock shelves on Thursday morning before the distribution? Text Dustin at 288-0083.

Pub Theology: Join the discussion on **Tuesday, December 18 from 6:30-8:30 p.m.** in a discussion of a variety of topics concerning faith, religion, and God. Seating is limited so come early to ensure a spot. Listening and discussion are encouraged. Drinking is optional, but with respect to the host venue, we ask you order something. For more information, contact Pastor Dustin at 288-0083.

Taizé Contemplative Worship: A Taizé contemplative, musical prayer service is held the third Sunday of the month in the Sanctuary. Worship in the Taizé style this month on **December 16 at 6 p.m.**

Clippers: Watch for news of events in 2019.

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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
5 p.m. Christmas Eve Service

Pastors

The Reverend Renn Serna, Senior Pastor
The Reverend Dustin Maddox, Associate Pastor

Return Service Requested

Mailing Label Here

**Joyfully Sharing God's Boundless Love with All in Our Community
without limitation, exception, or condition**

December Birthdays

- 1** Elizabeth Prasad
- 3** Elliot Deal
- 4** Tony Bounthapanya
Tim Buchanan
- 5** Ryan Foster
- 8** Thim Phothivongsay
Linda Wilson
- 9** Patricia Gabel
- 10** Jeannine Koshear
- 11** Susan Edyburn
- 12** Mike Guthrie
- 13** Patty Roberts
- 14** James Clark
- 15** Kristen Gearhart
- 16** Andrea Smith
- 17** Cathy Wingert
- 18** Craig Howells
- 19** Marian Amend
Bryce Minturn
- 21** Laura Fuller
- 22** William Goyette
Jeffrey Hakeman
- 23** Tout Tou Bounthapanya
Dustin Maddox
Betty Upton
- 25** Jan Ritchey
- 27** Janet DeWitt
Aaron Grisez
Kim Leslie
Sue Smith
Bill Wilder

December Birthdays cont.

- 28** Trent Braswell
Julia Warnes
- 29** Pat Booth
Sol Freeman
Spencer Howells

December Anniversaries

- 2** Chansy & May Fengthong
- 5** James & Trish Orr
- 6** Chris & Lynette Reid
- 16** Lou & Christi Paradise
- 17** Ben & Cathy Douglas

December Calendar

- 2 First Sunday of Advent**
Membership Class 6:30 p.m.
- 3** Intercessory Prayer 4 p.m.
Contemplative Prayer 6:30 p.m.
- 4** Deacons 6:30 p.m.
- 5** Women's Bible Study 9:30 a.m.
Choir Rehearsal 6:30 p.m.
- 6** Bell Choir Rehearsal 6:30 p.m.
Thursday Night Bible Study
6:30 p.m.
- 7** Soli Deo Gloria 7:30 p.m.
- 9 Second Sunday of Advent**
- 10** Contemplative Prayer 6:30 p.m.
Musica Viva 7 p.m.

December Calendar cont.

- 11** Presbyterian Women 9:30 p.m.
Session 6:30 p.m.
- 12** Women's Bible Study
9:30 a.m.
Choir Rehearsal 6:30 p.m.
- 13** Bell Choir Rehearsal
6:30 p.m.
Thursday Night Bible Study
6:30 p.m.
- 14** Christmas Caroling 6 p.m.
- 15** Food Distribution 8 a.m.
- 16 Third Sunday of Advent**
Taizé Service 6 p.m.
- 17** Contemplative Prayer
6:30 p.m.
- 18** Pub Theology 6:30 p.m.
- 19** Women's Bible Study 9:30 a.m.
Choir Rehearsal 6:30 p.m.
- 20** Bell Choir Rehearsal 6:30 p.m.
Thursday Night Bible Study
6:30 p.m.
- 23 Fourth Sunday of Advent**
- 24 Christmas Eve Service
5 p.m.**
- 25 Christmas Day
office closed**