

December 10, 2020



# Steeple Views

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, MARTINSVILLE, VA

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## Pastor's Corner

Rev. Mark Hinchcliff  
December 9, 2020

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” John 1:1

Growing up as a young child and all the way to adulthood, one of my favorite activities was visiting the local Planetarium. There were regular programs highlighting newly discovered stars and scientific facts about our galaxy and what lies beyond. But my favorite was a special program about the Christmas Star and the origins of certain traditions both Christian and other faiths. The program always began right after Thanksgiving and ran through the second week in December. It was free but limited to a small number of seating so my family always got there an hour early to stand in line. If we made it in my family and I considered it an early Christmas gift. We waited anxiously for the start of the show after we were assured a seat.

The show began as you peered up at a domed ceiling discussing traditions of the Christmas Tree, Christmas lights, Hannukah, and other traditions surrounding the Season. It was there that I first learned that December 25<sup>th</sup> probably wasn't the actual birth of Christ but rather a date surrounding the victory of Light over darkness, the Winter Solstice. It was the Church that decided on that date because the Winter Solstice marks the longest day of darkness of any time of the year and the planetary shift back across the sky towards the Sun bringing new life.

The Christmas tree was chosen as a symbol of sustained life even in the dead of winter. At the Winter Solstice an agricultural festival, which was celebrated by burning the evergreen trees, became the tradition of decorating the trees with lights. Jesus is recognized in Scripture as “the Light of the World” by bringing that “New Life” and so became the Christmas celebration.

Most Biblical scholars believe Jesus to be born in late April or May because of the reference to the birthing of newborn lambs in the fields which normally happens in the Spring or Summer of the year. The program then switches to a focus on the Christmas Star and the

night sky is projected on the ceiling and rolled back in time to exactly what the sky looked like over Bethlehem at that time. The scientist, in conjunction with the Bible, believes the most likely answer is the alignment of two planets and a star which happens only once every couple of hundred years. In addition, the Maji, or Three Kings, were astronomers who were accustomed to spotting unusual changes in the sky giving explanation to their discovery that others missed.

Jesus, known as the Living Word of God. According to John 1, was not only with God at the beginning of all time, but was God! Christmas is not only a beautiful tradition to celebrate but the World's chance to honor God and new life each year. Let's all join in.

Blessed be your days,

Pastor Mark

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### ***Third Sunday of Advent***

Please join us on Sunday as we continue the Christmas season with the **Third Sunday of Advent**. We will be live on Facebook at 10:00 a.m.

We want each and every one of you to remain safe and healthy during the Christmas season into the new year. We pray that the new year will bring hope to us all.

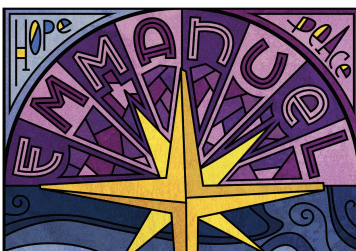
***sermon by Pastor Mark Hinchcliff***

**Set the Stage, Live the Miracle, Tell Everyone You Know**

Based upon Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 and John 1:6-8, 19-28

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### **Christmas Joy Offering**



**The Christmas Joy Offering** has been a cherished Presbyterian tradition since the 1930s. Contributions go towards developing and sustaining our leaders. By giving to the Christmas Joy Offering, you honor God's perfect gift of Jesus Christ. This offering is an appropriate response to nurture members of the Body of Christ in their time of



need; funds of support are used to develop our future leaders and provide financial assistance to current and retired church workers. Half of the Christmas Joy Offering is distributed to the [Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions of the PC\(USA\)](#). The other half of this offering provides leadership development and education at [Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color.](#)

The [Special Offerings of the PC\(USA\)](#) are celebrations of specific ways God has been made known to us. Each is connected to a season of the church year and mandated by the General Assembly to help the whole Church join together in response to God's grace. They represent the largest, collective way Presbyterians come together to work for a better world. The Offerings actively engage congregations in ministries of compassion, justice, hunger, Christian formation, education, peacemaking and global witness. We join other congregations in making an impact on the world.

Each year during the Advent and Christmas season, we turn our eyes to Bethlehem and celebrate the wondrous gift of Jesus Christ, our Savior. How may each of us honor God's perfect gift of his Son? What a loaded question to ask during Stewardship season! With all that God has given to us, how do you respond? How can you respond to the Love of Christ as you give and receive any and every gift this Christmas season?

Let us ask the Lord to teach us how to best respond as we read the Bible and pray for one another. God has blessed the Church with incredible leadership in every time and place. We need each other and your giving, participation and feedback is a gift! Leaders often need to be supported by their communities as well. God designed us to be social creatures, and our culture works most efficiently when we each turn to Jesus Christ and follow Him. We are blessed to have many mature believers at First Presbyterian Church who love, encourage and lead us.

Contributions for the Christmas Joy Special Offering can be made at [www.presbyterianmission.org/christmasjoy](http://www.presbyterianmission.org/christmasjoy) or mailed in to the church office.

***Reminder: Please turn in your pledge cards if you haven't done so yet. Let us be the church together and respond to God's love and grace for each of us.***

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### ***Christmas Joy Children's Message (Sam's message for the First Sunday of Advent)***

The Advent season will of course lead us into Christmas so this is a time of year when a lot of us have just one thing on our mind: the perfect gift.

Maybe we are trying to *give* the perfect gift — it can sometimes be a challenge to find whatever this year’s “hot” item is.

Or maybe, if we aren’t too worried about *giving* the perfect gift, we are hoping to *receive* the perfect gift — perhaps we have even dropped one or two hints in the hope that just the right present will be under the tree this year.

So, it might feel strange to be talking about gift-giving in church — aren’t we supposed to be focused on the more “church-y” parts of the season? Of course, not all gifts in this season come under a tree. The story of Jesus’ birth is, in a way, the most perfect gift there is ... God’s gift of Jesus — the gift of Emmanuel — God WITH US.

And as we celebrate this wonderful story, this great gift of God with us, it is only right that we also share our joy with others, and so today, I want to talk especially about the Christmas Joy Offering that our congregation will be taking part in during this season of Advent. This offering is all about supporting leadership: past, present and future. This offering:

- provides assistance to current and retired church workers in their time of need.
- & it helps develop our future leaders at Presbyterian-related schools and colleges that are equipping & nurturing the racial & ethnic heritage of communities of color.

Caring for church workers who are in need and building leadership certainly seems to be a pretty great gift for a church to be giving at Christmas time! And, whether the perfect gift for *you* is the newest LEGO set or video game, the perfect gift that we all share is the great gift of God being with and living among us — Emmanuel.

Now, your parents may have gotten a little flyer in the mail about the **Christmas Joy Offering** with a nice colored stained-glass image from Illustrated Ministry. I also sent out an email to all your parents that included a couple versions of this image, one is for you to color & the other is a card that you can send & share your JOY of this season with someone. AND, there’s lots of other activities too that you can do with your families during the advent season so I encourage you all to sit down with your parents & look through it all.

*Written by Becky D’Angelo-Veitch*

*Adapted by Sam Smith*

*Provided by PCUSA Special Offerings (Worship Resources)*



Jesus has called us to be active and involved in the work of his church in the world. **Matthew 25** is an initiative developed by the Presbyterian Church (USA) to help churches identify ways in which they can become vital congregations serving Jesus by serving “the least” among us in ways that make a difference for those served and for the church.

Participating in Matthew 25 could serve to:

1. Restart our strategic planning efforts and
2. Challenge our congregation to live into an active biblical ministry, by
  - providing a framework and exciting vehicle for us to continue the work we began before the pandemic to build congregational vitality;
  - becoming more actively engaged in dismantling structural racism and injustice and
  - summarizing and evaluating our current mission and outreach ministries that are a step toward eradicating systemic poverty.
3. Focus our efforts to make the best use of our resources with the best results

The Session is excited to learn more about being part of this initiative and is seeking volunteers from the congregation to participate in exploring how being a Matthew 25 Church can enrich our congregational life and ministry. Therefore:

You are invited to attend an exploratory meeting to learn more about the Matthew 25 initiative and help us map a course into the future of our ministry together. The meeting will be held **at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 16 via Zoom**. If you are interested in attending, please contact Denny Casey at [d.a.casey@gmail.com](mailto:d.a.casey@gmail.com) or Monica Stevens at [mlkstev@hotmail.com](mailto:mlkstev@hotmail.com) and we will make sure you get a Zoom invitation. We hope to see you there!

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## Earth Care



The news on the environmental front is often depressive. This might lighten our thoughts:

***"Last year, the USDA said for the first time in 150 years that there were more farms in America instead of fewer. I think that's the single most hopeful statistic I know."***

— **Bill McKibben**

The Earth Care group is hopeful of a productive day on **December 19th**. Watch for forthcoming news.

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## Upcoming Events



### Christmas Music Program

**Sunday, December 20** during the **10 am** worship service.



## Live Nativity

**Wednesday, December 23** at **6 pm**. More details to come.

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## Virtual Poinsettias



Every year our sanctuary is decorated with poinsettias donated by members of the congregation in memory or in honor of loved ones. Due to the pandemic, we will not be buying flowers for the sanctuary, but you are invited to submit the names of those you would like to remember in this way.

Your name and the names of your loved ones will be printed in the bulletin, Steepleviews, on Facebook, and on our website from December 20<sup>th</sup> to January 3. It is not required, but if you would like to make a donation for your virtual poinsettia, all donations collected will be sent to the MHC Warming Center.

If you wish to designate virtual poinsettias, please provide the information below and mail it to the church office with your check (**if you are making a donation, please mark your check "Poinsettia"**). **Rita will also be sending the order form out via email so be on the lookout for that.**

1. Person(s) requesting virtual poinsettias
2. In honor or memory of (please indicate "**in honor of**" or "**in memory of**")

Send to First Presbyterian Church, 1901 Patrick Henry Ave., Martinsville, VA 24112

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## Gifts to the Church



### In memory of Buck Flythe

A. W. Moore  
Eliza and James Severt  
Mrs. Robert Jane Ferrill  
Patricia Adams  
Bernice Smith  
Elizabeth Holsinger  
Bill and Connie Garrett  
Chris Beeler  
Joan and Monty Montgomery  
Rayfor Smith  
Carl Reynolds  
S. T. Ford  
Reed Stone Moore

### In memory of Ed Pace

Chris Beeler

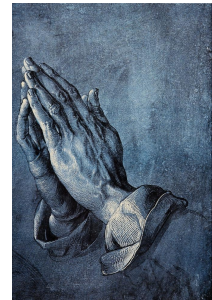
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## Prayer Requests

These members and friends of the congregation need our prayers:

### PRAYER CONCERNS

Family of Anne Holland (sister of Pearl Minter), Doc Altizer, Carl and Georgette Bishop, Ernest and Marilyn Bremner (S. Ford), Jim Brunt (N. Davis' brother), Tommy Cobb (M. Dunn), Mallory Hall-DeSantis (B. Tatum), Daniel Handy, Helen Hawkes, Betty Carol Lamm, Eddie Levi, Mary Manning, Laura Stevens Milton, Regenia Noel (M. Stevens), Anne Peterson, Gene Stanley, persecuted Christians and all troops in defense of freedom throughout the world.



Please submit prayer requests to Rita in the church office, (276) 632-3431, [office@fpcmartinsvilleVA.org](mailto:office@fpcmartinsvilleVA.org).

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***Please remember***

## **Peanut Butter**

Please stay safe, stay healthy

The new food item for First Presbyterian Church for the 4th quarter is **18 oz. peanut butter**. Please consider donating extra when you are able to get out and about as your donations will become more important than ever.

***Hygiene Items - We are always in need of these items!***

**DECEMBER** Dish Detergent, Deodorant, Laundry Detergent

*\*Items may be brought to church but please call the office to make sure Rita is there. Alternatively, you may drop off at Grace Network, Monday - Friday, 9-2 PM*

Blessings, Tracy

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## **Youth Ministry**

The Youth will be meeting on **Sunday afternoons at 12pm**. Grab a snack or lunch & join us on **Zoom!** If your middle or high school child would like to join us, please contact Sam at [sam@peakspresbytery.org](mailto:sam@peakspresbytery.org) for an invite link to the Zoom meeting.

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## **Presbytery of the Peaks**

For updates and announcements, please click on the link below or copy and paste into your web browser:



[https://www.peakspresbytery.org/images/2020 Peaks Postings/PP Aug18 2020.pdf](https://www.peakspresbytery.org/images/2020%20Peaks%20Postings/PP_Aug18_2020.pdf)

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## **Our Mission**

**Share God's Love, Embrace Our Neighbors, Nurture Each Other**

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**Printed copies of Steeple Views** are available at church. Current and back issues are also on our website:

[www.firstpresbyterianmartinsville.org/page.cfm/topic/newsletter](http://www.firstpresbyterianmartinsville.org/page.cfm/topic/newsletter)

## **Useful Links**



FPC website: [www.firstpresbyterianmartinsville.org/](http://www.firstpresbyterianmartinsville.org/) or [www.fpcmartinsvilleVA.org/](http://www.fpcmartinsvilleVA.org/)

FPC online directory: [members.instantchurchdirectory.com/](http://members.instantchurchdirectory.com/)

FPC Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/FPCMartinsvilleVA](http://www.facebook.com/FPCMartinsvilleVA)

Presbytery of the Peaks: [www.peakspresbytery.org/](http://www.peakspresbytery.org/)

Presbyterian Church (USA): [www.pcusa.org/](http://www.pcusa.org/)

Daily Bible Readings: [www.presbyterianmission.org/devotion/daily/](http://www.presbyterianmission.org/devotion/daily/)

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[stepleviews@fpcmartinsvilleVA.org](mailto:stepleviews@fpcmartinsvilleVA.org)

**Church Office Phone:** 276-632-3431

**Our mailing address is:**

First Presbyterian Church

1901 Patrick Henry Ave.

Martinsville, VA 24112

**STAFF**

Rev. Mark Hinchcliff, Pastor, [pastor@fpcmartinsvilleVA.org](mailto:pastor@fpcmartinsvilleVA.org)

Sam Smith, Youth and Family Ministries Director, [sam@peakspresbytery.org](mailto:sam@peakspresbytery.org)

Cynthia Dobrinski, Music Director & Organist, 276-734-0212

Rita Bateman, Secretary/Office Manager, [office@fpcmartinsvilleVA.org](mailto:office@fpcmartinsvilleVA.org)

Drema Austin, Bookkeeper, [bookkeeper@fpcmartinsvilleVA.org](mailto:bookkeeper@fpcmartinsvilleVA.org)

Carol Carter, Weekday School Director, [wds@fpcmartinsvilleVA.org](mailto:wds@fpcmartinsvilleVA.org)

Deborah Burgess, Contemporary Music Director, [contemporarymusic@fpcmartinsvilleVA.org](mailto:contemporarymusic@fpcmartinsvilleVA.org)

**THE SESSION**

Moderator: Rev. Mark Hinchcliff

Clerk: Nancy Baker

Treasurer: Henry Moore

**Class of 2020**

Denny Casey: Christian Education

Ron Rebman: Administration

Kym Tatum: Fellowship

**Class of 2021**

Lynn Pritchett: Stewardship

Rob King: Facilities

Monica Stevens: Worship

**Class of 2022**

Brooke Cundiff: Mission/Outreach

Pamela Rakes: Communications

Betty Hudson: Congregational Care

**TRUSTEES**

2020: Milton Davis, Duke Ferrell

2021: David Garland, Ed Linker

2022: Joan Montgomery, Ashby Pritchett

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