



Network News

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH • Jacksonville, NC

DECEMBER 2015

The angel Gabriel said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her. In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

– Luke 1:35-45

Beloved in the Lord,

I’ve noticed that this time of year the most common conversation starter is, “Are you ready for Christmas?” As a kid my immediate answer was, “Yes!” I was ready as soon as the Christmas decorations went up in the stores! I was ready to sing carols, go out with my dad on a snowy evening to pick out our tree, help my mom make spritz and sugar cookies, carefully unpack the holiday ceramics my aunt made for us over the years, and head out in the cold and dark for the candlelight Christmas Eve service. And, of course, I was ready to wake up early the next morning and open presents!

Years later, as a young mother, I knew I was being asked whether the tree was up, the house decorated, the gifts purchased and wrapped, the cookies baked, the cards sent. So my answer was always, “No, not quite.” Without fail Larry and I were up past midnight on Christmas Eve wrapping the last few gifts and stuffing the stockings, having tucked the girls into bed right after coming home from church.

Nowadays I really don’t know how to answer. Is the tree up? No, and we still aren’t sure where we will put it. I hope to have the house decorated inside and out by the 12th. I plan to make many batches of cookies to share with friends and family. Christmas cards? Maybe this year, but more likely in the New Year. Many of our presents will need to be purchased, wrapped, and then mailed, unless we decide to buy on-line and have them shipped directly. Those are the kinds of things people are thinking of when they ask that question, I’m sure. But being ready for Christmas for me also means having bulletins ready, sermons prepared, shut-ins visited, and all of the countless details that go into leading a congregation through the joy and wonder of Advent and Christmas. So my answer is still, “No, not quite,” because until we sing the final verse of *Joy to the World* and I give the benediction on Christmas Eve, I will always be preparing in some way for Christmas.



Pastor’s Message...continued on page 5

SUNDAY ASSISTANTS IN WORSHIP

Dates	Liturgists	Usher Leaders	Treasurer Assistants	Acolytes
6	Walter Bateman	Barbara Krause	Jackie Southerland	Paticia & Edward
13	—	Tim Hunter	Kaye Bledsoe	Dominique & Makayla
20	Gary Danford	Connie Kellum	Ariel Rymoff	Genevieve & Abigail
27	Walter Bateman	Connie Kellum	Tim Hunter	Jaliya & Jayla

December Birthdays

1	Barbara Lord	13	Don Edmondson	25	Bobby Sheegog
5	Jim Hamilton	16	Tracy Valez	26	Wes Johnson
6	Downs Milner		Jim Wayne	27	Christopher Ayer
	Billy Sewell	18	Chrystal Carrier	28	Esz Cabamalan
7	Margaret Curry		Christopher Lord		Jim Dempsey
8	Larry Cone	19	Stephanie Talbert	29	Chase Padgett
9	Bob Krause		Liam Dean	30	Glendora Quinn
10	Nigel Story	23	Catherine Summerlin	31	Joann Brown
			Louise Egbert		



Sanctuary Flowers

If you would like to provide a poinsettia for December, please call Gloria asap!



Nov. 29: First Sunday of Advent

Dec. 6: Second Sunday of Advent, Hanging of the Greens & Luncheon

Dec. 13: Third Sunday of Advent, Christmas Cantata

Dec. 20: Fourth Sunday of Advent, Christmas Joy Offering

Dec. 24: Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

See pages 4 & 7 for A Night in Narnia dates and details!



Network News of the First Presbyterian Church

400 Bayshore Boulevard, Jacksonville, NC 28540 • (910) 455-2434 • www.jacksonvillepresbyterian.com
Coastal Carolina Presbytery www.presbycc.org • Presbyterian Church (USA) www.pcusa.org

A monthly publication of First Presbyterian Church—its purpose is to inform members and friends of the meetings and programs of the church, to provide newsworthy articles, and to strengthen communications in our church family.

Please send articles and news to the editor.

Jan. 2016 Newsletter Submission DeadlineFRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2015

Ministers	The People of the Church
Interim Pastor	The Reverend Marie Cone
Choir Director	Jeff Story
Organist.....	Sheila Miller
Pre-School Director.....	Melody Abshear
Church Secretary.....	Gloria Parker
Newsletter Editor.....	Lisa Colwell, (910) 937-0190, colwellster@gmail.com

Evangelism Opportunities

Blessing Clyde Erwin Elementary Magnet School

Ah chew! Bless you! It's cold and flu season once again. During the month of December, we can help Clyde Erwin classroom teachers prevent infection by collecting facial tissues and large bottles of hand sanitizer (*no small individual bottles, please*). Principal Lori Howard is grateful for our generous contributions toward a healthy school.

Throughout the month of December, please place your donations in one of the designated bins: as you enter the sanctuary or outside the church office.

Christmas Joy Offering: Supporting Past, Present, and Future Church Leaders

The Christmas Joy Offering will be received during the Sunday, December 20 worship service. A gift to the Christmas Joy Offering helps provide financial assistance to current and former church workers and their families and also enables deserving students to attend Presbyterian-related racial ethnic colleges and schools.



The Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions –

The Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions provides critical financial assistance to eligible workers in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and their families, and to qualifying retired church workers and their families. The Assistance Program also sponsors grants for vocational training of clergy.

Racial Ethnic Leadership Development – The importance of the racial ethnic schools and colleges of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is demonstrated in the continuing partnership between the two entities. The institutions have provided quality education to people who have contributed immeasurably to the church at large and to the world. Students are educated for the professions of their choice in an environment which supports and nurtures racial and ethnic heritage.

You can also help sustain the important PC(USA) ministries and programs that are supported by the Christmas Joy Offering by making an online gift at any time throughout the year.

It Stinks to Work on Christmas Eve!

Everyone who has had to do it, knows that working on Christmas Eve can be a major downer. Part of First Presbyterian Church's vision is to serve others in the name of Christ.

One way we believe God has led us to do this is by launching our first attempt at what we are calling, "**It Stinks to Work on Christmas Eve.**" This will be an intentional outreach to first responders at the nearby police and fire station who have no choice but to work on Christmas Eve.



We are asking that you bring baked goods to the Christmas Eve service on Dec. 24.

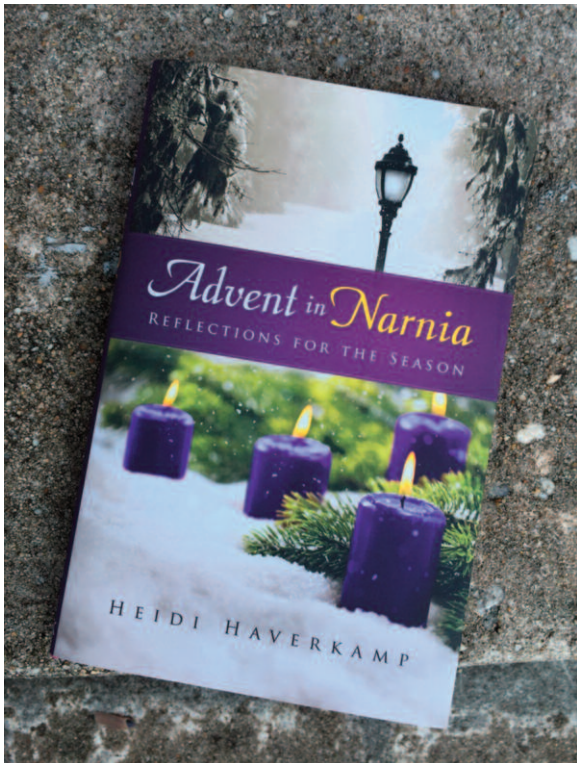
Following the service, you are invited to help deliver the baked goods to the local police and fire station.

While most of us are home with family, there are many people who stay on the job Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Help us bless these first responders by delivering baked items to say "Thank you," God bless you," and "Merry Christmas".

If you cannot be at the Christmas Eve service, but would like to provide baked items, please leave them in the church kitchen (labeled "Christmas Eve Project") beginning on Dec. 21.

Advent in Narnia

This Advent we invite you to enter Narnia, the enchanting world created by C.S. Lewis and inhabited by talking animals and the great lion Aslan. Perhaps you read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* as a child, or perhaps you read it aloud to your children. As a child it's easy to miss the Christian message that underlies all seven of *The Chronicles of Narnia* books. As an adult, however, that message is a bit more obvious. Episcopalian Vicar Heidi Haverkamp has written a wonderful book, *Advent in Narnia—Reflections for the Season*, to “inspire us to consider the holiday season from a new perspective.”



Our Christian Education Team has planned three ways for our congregation to celebrate *Advent in Narnia* this year.

At Home Individuals and families can use the 28 devotions included in *Advent in Narnia*. The author invites you to read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* over the course of the season. The daily devotions reflect on what is happening in the story and conclude with a few thoughtful questions. Families may want to read both books aloud and discuss the questions together. Individuals can note their thoughts in a journal.

Wednesday Nights Everyone is invited to gather in the Fellowship Hall at 5:00 for dinner and one of the small group discussions included in *Advent in Narnia*. If you can't make it exactly at 5:00 or for every Wednesday, no worries! Join in when you get there, and come to as many of the four dinners as you can. There's no need to prepare in advance, although we would like to know who's coming by Tuesday so we know how many to cook for. Call Gloria or up by the office, and let us know if you need a ride. Older kids may want to join in the discussion, and we'll have something for the younger ones to

do so you can come as a family. We'll wrap up by 6:30 so that choir members can get to rehearsal. Child care provided!

Friday December 18 Join us for **A Night in Narnia**, a magical night of food, fellowship, and fun! After dinner the kids will enjoy crafts and games with a Narnia theme and the adults are invited to join in or spend time together. 6:00–8:00, followed by caroling in the neighborhood for those who are interested.

Sharing Our Faith through Christmas Carols

A caroling we will go! Join us for some of the easiest and most fun evangelism you may ever do. The Evangelism/Mission Ministry Team invites you to warm up that voice and prepare to share God's message of love through Jesus Christ!

The carols we sing at Christmas time are full of the Good News and peoples' hearts are open to Christ's message in a special way this time of year. Christmas caroling can be a great way to share the Gospel message during the Advent/Christmas season!

On Friday, December 18, following the Night in Narnia, the church family is invited to go caroling in the neighborhood (weather permitting).



'Tis the Season

Prayers of the Church

Please keep Connie Kitchen and her family in your prayers.
 Connie's mother passed away on Nov. 19 in South Carolina.

~ At Home ~
 Martha Jacob
 Macie Ruddell
 Slim Ruddell
 Roberta Siegriest
 Judy Woodard

Please
 Pray
 for ...



Our dearly loved Midge Reed
 died peacefully on Nov. 21 in
 Baton Rouge. Please hold the
 family in your prayers.

~ In Hospitals, Nursing Homes or
 Rehab Centers ~
 Lei Ashley – Onslow House
 Donna McIntyre – Liberty Commons
 Dot Keel – Liberty Commons

*Operation Christmas Child thanks all those that
 generously participated in this year's mission
 project. Our congregation provided 34 boxes of
 love for the world's children.*

Financials

October 2015

General Fund	\$14,079
Building Fund	\$600
Total	\$14,679

Philippians 4:6

*In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer
 and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be
 made known to God.*

Through November 16, 2015

General Fund:

Income	\$155,620
Expenses	\$173,116
Net	\$<17,496>

Roof Repair Fund:

Amount Needed	\$66,000
Amount Collected to Date	12,200
Loan Balance	\$53,800

Thank you for your support. The Stewardship Team

Pastor's Message... continued from page 1

But for now Christmas Eve is still weeks away and we still have time to get ready. One of the gospel lessons for Advent is the Annunciation: the Angel Gabriel amazing Mary with the news that she will bear the Son of the Most High God and revealing to her that her relative Elizabeth has, in her old age, also conceived a son. Imagine the preparations those women went through! Picture the joyful meeting of these two ordinary women who were chosen to raise extraordinary sons. How do you suppose they would answer the question, "Are you ready for Christmas?" I wonder what kinds of Christmas cookies they were busy baking?

Yours and His,
 Pastor Marie

Under Wraps: Adult Advent Study on Sunday mornings

The Sunday school class that meets in the fellowship hall at 9:45 A.M. welcomes everyone to join them for an Advent study. You are invited to join them as they prepare their hearts and minds for Christmas with a DVD-based Advent study titled *Under Wraps: The Gift We Never Expected*. **This 4-week study begins on Nov. 29 and concludes on December 20.**

In *Under Wraps*, the authors eloquently remind us how, at the first Christmas, our amazing, surprising God came lovingly gift-wrapped into the world as the perfect Christmas gift to visit and redeem God's people. The adult study for small groups is a DVD-based resource. Each week centers on a key word that describes a characteristic of God that is evidenced in the Old Testament and then seen more clearly through Jesus: *faithful, dangerous, expectant and jealous*.

Find Peace during Advent by Creating a Breath Prayer

"Peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart." – Unknown

The practice of breath prayers is one way we can try to create calm or peace in our hearts, even when the world around us is full of noise and expectations. Try creating and practicing breath prayers, either individually or as a family.

To create your own breath prayer, pick two or three words that name God (e.g. Loving Creator, Holy Savior, Sustaining Spirit) and two to three words that express what you need most in this moment (e.g. be with me, show me life, give me strength). The practice of creating breath prayers is, in and of itself, a spiritual discipline. By identifying what it is that we most need at this moment, we are discerning (or identifying) the spaces into which we are inviting God. In doing so, we begin the process of shedding the defensive barriers we use to protect ourselves—opening the door to let God's light and presence shine into the dark and empty places in our lives.

To practice breath prayers, take your two phrases and silently say the first (e.g. Gracious God) as you take a deep breath in, and the second (e.g. show me how) as you breathe out. It is often helpful to remain still and close your eyes while practicing breath prayers, but they can also be done while walking, running, or driving, and thus with your eyes open! Repeat the process for five to ten slow breaths if you only have a moment, or for a set period of time if you have longer (setting an alarm on your phone is a good way to keep track of time without having to worry about it). This is a particularly good prayer for young children, who will appreciate being able to do it by themselves after only a little help, and they may even be able to create their own.

Variations:

- Try creating a breath prayer as a family to use as a grace before dinner.
- Create a prayer in the morning and set an alarm on your phone to go off at various times throughout the day, reminding you to practice your prayer.
- Take a moment each evening to create a prayer that sums up, or brings closure to, your day; practice this prayer as you fall asleep.
- If you can find a set of religious magnetic poetry, use it to create new or unusual prayers on your fridge. <http://www.funkyfridge.com/MP-3131-2.html>

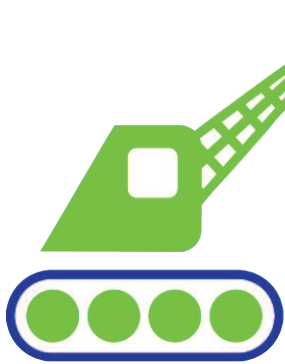
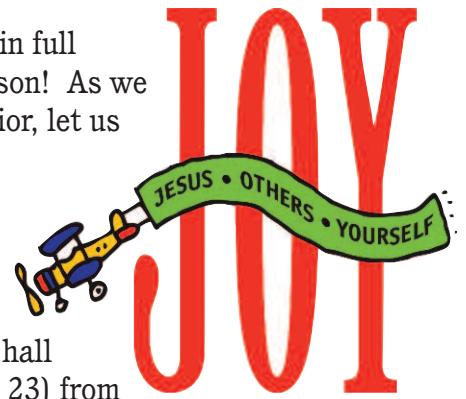
As a family, take turns creating a prayer that everyone practices for the day and then check-in each evening to see how the prayer might have shaped, or intersected with, your day.

***Sarah Walker Cleaveland** is a pastor and spiritual director living and working outside of Chicago where she is Acting Associate Pastor at Winnetka Congregational Church. She loves spending time with her almost four-year-old son and indulging her introverted nature by listening to audiobooks and building things in her garage.*

Christian Education

Greetings from the Christian Education Team! By now the holiday rush is in full swing, with lots of activity, shopping, lights, presents.....ah, 'tis the season! As we enter Advent, anticipating the celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior, let us keep our hearts and minds focused on the TRUE reason for the season... experiencing and sharing the joy, love, hope and peace of God.

As part of our Advent season, the Christian Education Ministry Team has planned 4 study sessions based on C.S. Lewis' book *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. These study sessions will be in the church fellowship hall each Wednesday evening leading up to Christmas (December 2, 9, 16, and 23) from 5:00 until 6:30 p.m. Dinner will be served, so come join us for special reflections on the underlying Christian message within the pages of Lewis' imagination. Please let us know you are coming, (you can sign up at the church office or give Gloria a call) and bring a side dish or dessert to share. Transportation can be provided if needed, and child care will be available. If you have questions, please contact the church office (455-2434).



As part of the Narnia reflection, there will be a special night of festivities and fun on Friday, December 18 at 6:00 in the church fellowship hall. Prepare to be transported to the magical world of Narnia! There will be crafts, movie viewing, special readings, and other fun and exciting activities! In our planning for this event, we are asking for donations of artificial trees of various sizes (undecorated or prelit), as well as 2 deer lawn decorations. All donations will be returned. On that evening, there will be a mission project for the children (adults as well!) to participate in, and caroling afterwards. Make

plans now to join in the festivities! Dinner will be served for this event as well (bring your sides and desserts), so come, bring your appetite and plan to enjoy this season of celebration!



Just a reminder to our kids and parents.....keep practicing your songs for the season! There will be choir practice at the church on December 6 during the Sunday School hour, and again on December 13. The children will sing their songs as part of the choir cantata on Sunday, December 13.

Believe it or not, plans are already underway for VBS 2016! Tentative dates are Monday, June 20 – Friday, June 24. Stay tuned for updates.

The Christian Education Team thanks each and every one of you for your prayers, donations, support and involvement. We couldn't do it without you!





400 Bayshore Boulevard N., Jacksonville, NC 28540

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



First Presbyterian Preschool has been enjoying the fall season with stories, art, and activities that focus on the fall colors and holidays. Earlier this fall the students have learned about pumpkins, the farm, their five senses, nocturnal and diurnal animals, and more! I am always amazed at how much our teacher's accomplish in such a short amount of time.

If you want to view pictures and videos of some of our projects, and see what the students are learning, you can visit our Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/JacksonvilleFirstPresbyterianPreschool.

Or you can do a search for First Presbyterian Preschool, Jacksonville, NC, and our page will come up.

On November 24 we had our Thanksgiving Feast. Parents were entertained by their children dressed up as pilgrims and Native Americans. They worked hard on the songs, and on the crafts they displayed. We provided a turkey, and the parents brought side dishes and desserts.

Our preschool has many things to be thankful about this season. We are very encouraged and appreciative that pastor Marie is hosting a new bimonthly morning group with our preschool parents. Although we still have spots available, we are thankful for each and every student that we have, and for their families. We are also very thankful for Connie Kitchen and the rest of the board for all of their help.

Our staff and students continue to pray for Judy Woodward, and are very thankful for all of the years she has dedicated to our preschool, as a teacher, director and board member.

May God bless you and your family this Christmas Season.

– *Melody Abshear*