



DECEMBER '20 & JANUARY '21

ISSUE 20-12 & 21-1

The Diligent

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ARP LAKE WALES, FL

“...a Christ-centered fellowship of believers devoted to glorifying God through true worship, personal evangelism, discipleship, and servanthood.”

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Leadership

CHRISTMAS READING

From Pastor Chad

One of my favorite holiday traditions at the Reynolds house is pulling out all of the Advent and Christmas themed books. In our home, many of these are children's books with wonderful illustrations. Some of them tell the Christmas story from Matthew's and Luke's gospels. Others tell tales that exhibit one or more prominent Christmas themes, such as hope, joy, peace, and love. We have often read some of these together as a family, and our kids have read one, from time to time, on their own throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons.

Perhaps you also enjoy reading material that is seasonally appropriate this time of year. There are more than a few children's options out there, but what about Advent/Christmas reading for adults? Let me suggest a few books for your consideration this year.

***The Christ of Christmas* by James Montgomery Boice**

This book is a collection of Dr. Boice's insights into the Biblical narratives that tell of the first coming of Christ. Boice looks at the theological themes of the deity of Christ, the Incarnation, and the Virgin Birth. He looks at the birth narratives themselves and gleans insights from such details

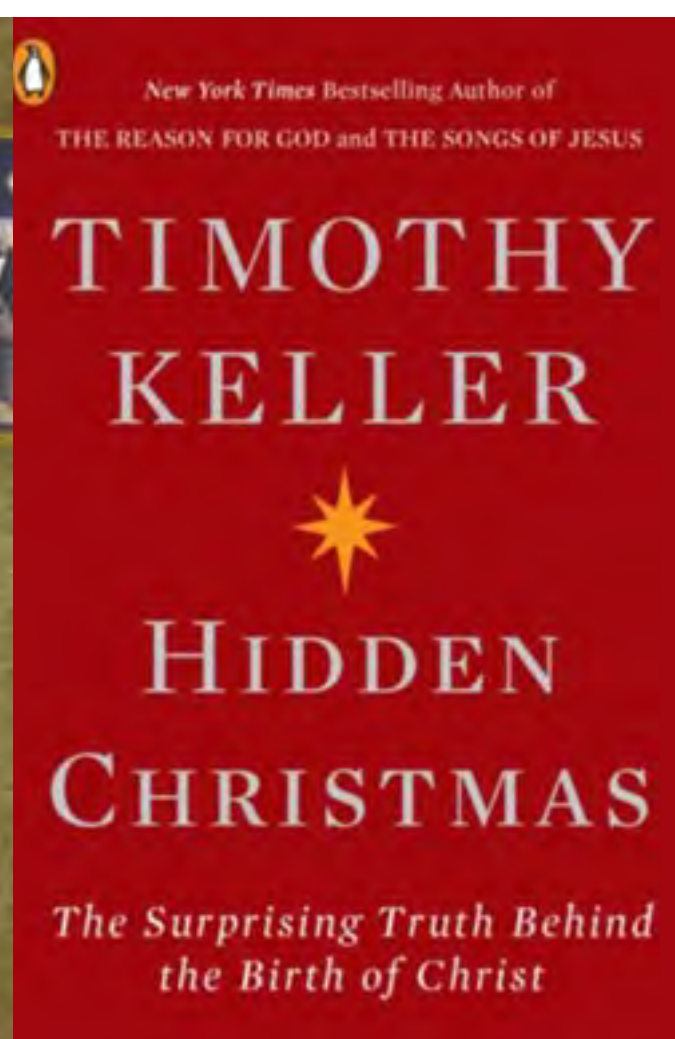
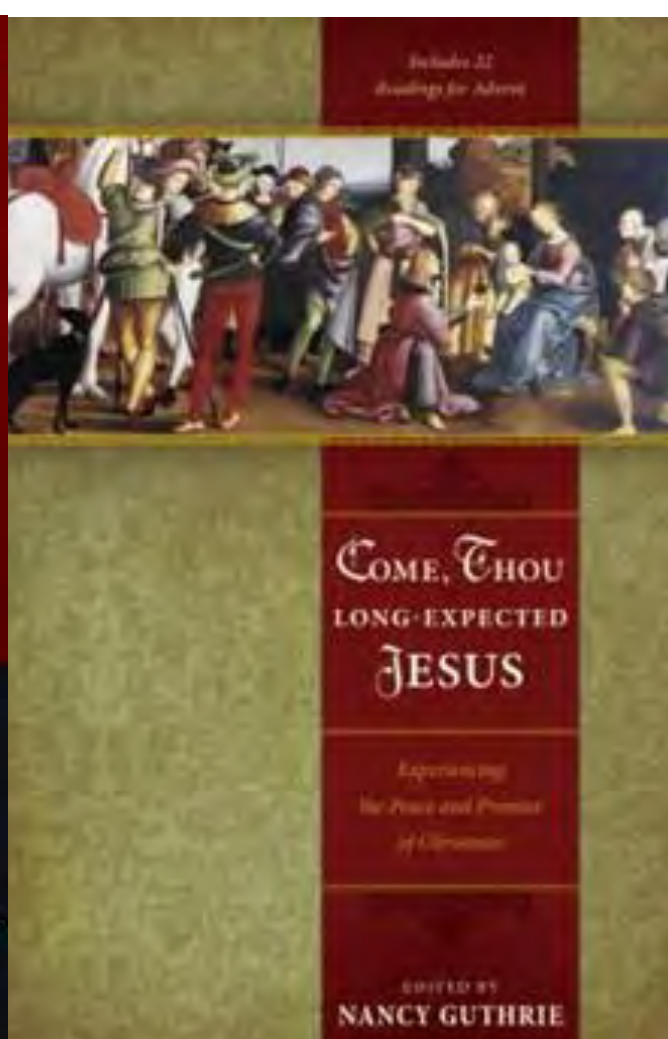
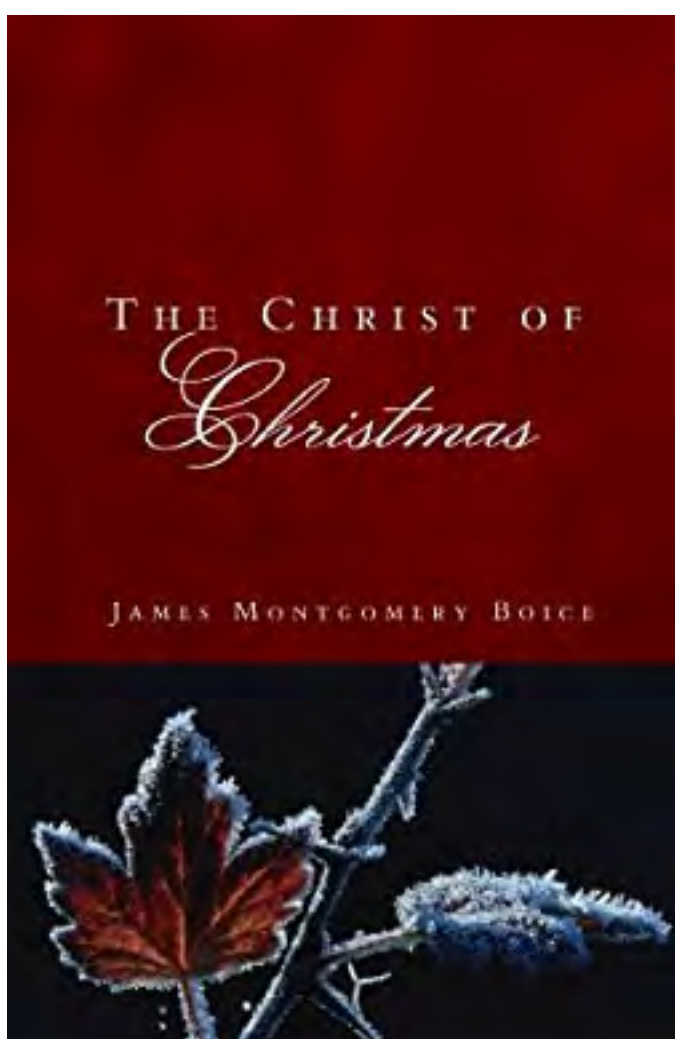
as the full inn, the king in a manger, the shepherds, the wise men, and the king who missed the first Christmas (Herod). In all, there are sixteen chapters in this little volume. It would make an excellent daily reading in the couple of weeks (plus two days) leading up to Christmas.

***Come Thou Long Expected Jesus* edited by Nancy Guthrie**

This little volume is a compilation of works by various preachers, including Tim Keller, J.I. Packer, Martin Luther, and Francis Schaeffer. It makes a nice book for daily reading during this time of year as each chapter is a work unto itself. In all, there are twenty-two chapters by twenty-two different authors, sharing their wisdom and insight on the themes of Christmas.

***Hidden Christmas* by Timothy Keller**

In this brief volume, Keller aims to reach those who celebrate Christmas in the secular sense (lights, presents, etc. but no mention of Jesus). He wants them to see the truth of Christmas that has been hidden from many by these more worldly aspects of the season. This could be a good book for believers to read, but it may be a particularly helpful volume to gift to a friend or family member who needs to hear the truth of the hidden Christmas. ■



UNEXPECTED GIFTS

From Pastor Chad

Christmas is a time for giving. I recently received an unexpected gift from Dale Bourdette. It was a Christmas memory that his wife, Carol, had written for the Diligent back in 2004 (incidentally, that was my first Christmas in Lake Wales). I was blessed to read what Carol shared in the story. It was an encouraging reminder to me of God's goodness to us. What I share with you now is an excerpt from Carol's words in December 2004. I hope they will be an encouragement to you in this Christmas season to look to God, the giver of all that is good even if his gifts often come in unexpected forms. Carol's story goes...

When I was a little girl we visited Grandpa and Grandma on Christmas Eve. On the ride back home one time I remember peering out the car window trying my best to see Santa and all his reindeer flying across the sky. Because we were in the country there were no streetlights and I had a clear view of the starlit sky. But never did I see Santa and his sleigh full of expected gifts...

One year Mother came home on Christmas Eve with a baby sister for me. I had been an only child for five and a half years and had not asked for this. I was not that impressed with Mother's choice of gifts at the time, but now my Christmas Eve sister and I have grown close and are good friends who enjoy each other's company. This goes to show us that if we give ourselves time to get to know God's unexpected gifts to us we may find them to be quite a treasure.

I hope Carol's story gives you encouragement to share testimonies of God's goodness to you in your own life. God's most wonderful gift of all is his Son Jesus Christ, whose unexpected birth to the virgin Mary we celebrate at this time of year. He is a gift we cherish through worship and the good news which we share with others. We do this not just on Christmas Day but in all of our days. We share him not just with other Christians but as importantly with those outside the fellowship of believers who may be "searching the starlit skies" (or any other number of places) for meaning and purpose and value. Let us take every opportunity to proclaim to these seekers the good news of God's gift to them in the person of Jesus. ■

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

November 2020 Session Highlights

The elders of First Presbyterian Church meet monthly on the fourth Tuesday. The following notes are some highlights from their meeting on November 17.

- Stewardship and Finance reported that as of the end of October tithes and offerings toward the church's general budget are at 74% of the annual budget. This is slightly ahead the average of 71% (2015-2019) our church has historically received by the end of October, as we head toward the end of the year. Praise was given to God for his financial blessing and prayer was offered that the ongoing giving of our congregation would match our ministry needs.
- Lesleigh Miller (11/17) and John Spencer (11/29) were received as new members of the First Presbyterian Church. Prayers of praise and thanksgiving were offered to the Lord for his grace to Lesleigh and John. They were presented before the congregation and both received the sacrament of baptism during the worship service on Sunday, November 29.
- Pat Frankenburger, Daniel Hunt, and David Nelson were approved as nominees to serve as elders in the class of 2024. Susan Coyne, Bob Hulen, and Michael Matteson were approved as nominees to serve as deacons in the class of 2023. These nominees will be voted on at the December 13 Congregational Meeting. There remain two vacant spots on the Session and one on the Diaconate heading into 2021. The nominations committee will continue to seek nominees to be presented at a future date.
- The chairmen of the committees of the Session gave reports of the work and ministry they are overseeing (see the ministry sections of the Diligent for more on these ministries). Prayer was offered after each report, asking for the Lord's guidance and blessing.
- A season of prayer was had for various needs within our congregation, community, and world.

PRAYER FOCUS

DECEMBER 6 - Christmas: Relationships during the Season; Congregational Meeting on December 13

DECEMBER 13 - Christmas: Missionaries in the Field during the Season

DECEMBER 20 - Christmas: The Glory of Christ during the Season

DECEMBER 27 - The New New Year

Discipleship

2020: THE YEAR OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

From Pastor Mackay

At the beginning of this year, I remember seeing a number of churches taking "2020" and using it to reference 20/20 vision. Signs read something like, "2020: The Year of Clear Vision!" or "Clarity for Our Future!" Oh, boy. Predicting the future is a dangerous game! What a year it has been.

I have found myself coming back to the same question over and over: "How should Christians respond when we *don't know*?" You could add some additional words to the end of that question, such as, don't know who's in charge, or don't know what the truth is, or don't know how to care for each other in these circumstances. Pandemic. Protests. Politics. What are Christians to do?

From the unknowns of the world, we must turn to the security of the Word of God. Psalm 119:160 reminds us, "The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever." What does Scripture tell us about times when we don't know? Here are three ways we should respond.

Remember the extent of our own weakness. If we're honest, I think the majority of us expect a level of control over our daily lives. This year has exposed that desire and the tenacity with which we hold it. From our favorite restaurant to our favorite golf tournament: there have been so many times when the things we want just aren't there. What is even more frustrating is that we so often aren't sure why or if they should be taken away. With the combination of social media and our news media, who knows what is really going on?

In James 4, we are reminded about the real level of control we have. "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit' — yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is

evil" (v. 14-16). God's Word reminds us that fundamentally we do not control even where we go in a day, much less the success we will find when we get there. Is this a calling to stop making plans or become stoic, "let go and let God" people? No, the admonition here isn't against making plans, it's about boasting in our self-sufficiency. We must recognize that we are needy and weak people. All control is held by God. Our actions and choices are enabled by his providential ruling (Matt. 10:29-31). The good news is that we have a strong Father who loves us and always wills what is best for us (Ps. 138:8). This truth frees us from the impossible task of making the world yield to us, and gives us a better trajectory. We should live according to his dictates, not ours (Psalm 1). In our weakness and dependency we find true strength.

Empathize with those who are truly powerless. As our personal freedoms have been hindered and are threatened to be hindered even more, we may fear that good principles of individual liberties are being undermined. Yet, even in this, we have an opportunity for obedience. At the very least, we have the opportunity to somewhat grasp what life is like for those who have no freedom. God's love to us is empathizing love (Heb 4:15). He knows our plight and has worked salvation for us. This means it is a gift for us to understand the struggles of others, for it allows us to be more Christ-like. We are angered by powerful people overriding our desires, yet our desires are so often beyond the basics. They center on luxury, unfettered personal freedom, and political dominance while so many people in our world desire not luxury but basic food and shelter. They desire not total personal autonomy but escape from slavery. They want not to tell those in charge what they should do but escape from the oppression of dictatorship. These are situations we have a hard time understanding in our affluence and freedom. But, as this year has taught us our lack of control, and we are comforted by God's control, a great blessing is to be able to share that message with those who are more profoundly impacted by brokenness (2 Cor. 1:4). Let us learn to empathize as God has empathized with us.

Rest more and more on the faithful God. This year, if you are a Christian, God has been

Continued from page 4...

perfectly faithful to you. Go ahead and read that sentence again. How can we know that? Because God's word tells us of the eternal, unchanging, perfect love he has for his people. In John 10, Jesus makes it clear that all the sheep God has claimed will never be lost. God will never let us go. Everything that comes from his mighty providential hand is what is best (Rom. 8:28). We should rest in his mighty power.

As 2021 dawns, the world will tell us that the "bad vibes" of 2020 are at an end. We, as God's people, know the truth. As long as sin remains, the creation will groan with the disappointment and frustration of life under its curse. Yet, we live with an invincible hope: not under an ill-advised church sign about perfect vision, but under the banner of God's love and faithfulness to us. His mercy will extend this year, next year, and throughout all eternity (Psalm 105:8).

Rachel, Cecilia, Evelyn, Annelise, and I wish you a wonderfully merry Christmas and a joyous New Year! ■

EKKLESIA

We will not meet for Ekklesia on December 16, 23, and 30. We will resume January 6.

New Adult Bible Study of Isaiah begins in January

This mighty Old Testament prophet was granted the vision of a big God with a big plan. Isaiah's words have been called the "mountaintop of Scripture" from which the entire scope of God's salvation can be seen. We will study selections from Isaiah over 12 weeks to better understand his message and the God who called him.

DISCIPLESHIP WEEKEND

Save the Date!

Feb 12-14, 2021

Friday - Supper and Keynote Session #1

Saturday - Keynote Sessions #2 and #3 (concluding before lunch)

Sunday - Morning Worship with Rev. Miller (guest preacher)

Rev. Matt Miller, ARP Minister, will join us to discuss our prayer life in times like these. Rev. Miller has served as Senior Pastor of Greenville ARP Church, in development at Erskine Theological Seminary, and the C.S. Lewis Institute.



GIVE THANKS

From Vince Treadway

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!
-Psalm 100:4-5

This is a time of year that we specifically think about thanking God for all of his blessings, yet giving thanks is something we need to do continually. There are so many hymns and songs that include thankfulness: for salvation, for provision, for God's love and faithfulness, for creation, for family, and for so much more. We know that "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). Every day we can spend time thanking God for all of his goodness and faithfulness.

Most hymnals include a very small section for "Thanksgiving hymns" and they usually have to do with giving thanks for a harvest, creation, and blessings. The *Trinity Hymnal* has only three: *We Plow the Fields* #714, *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come* #715 and *Sing to the Lord of Harvest* #716. However, there are many hymns in the *Trinity Hymnal* that have verses that give praise to God for various things that he does and the blessings that he gives. *The Doxology* is a great example: "Praise God from whom all blessings flow..." Another is *Give Thanks unto the Lord, Jehovah* #613 that begins with "Give thanks, unto the Lord Jehovah, for he is good, O praise his name!" A familiar hymn that begins with thanks is *O Worship the King* #2, and the first verse starts with thanks: "O worship the King all glorious above, O gratefully sing his power and his love..." A setting of Psalm 139 is a great hymn of thankfulness; *All That I Am I Owe to Thee* #37, and it begins "All that I am I owe to thee; thy wisdom, Lord, has fashioned me. I give my Maker thankful praise, whose wondrous works my soul amaze."

While many hymns do not use the exact words *thanks* or *thanksgiving*, the texts give specific praise to God for his many attributes and blessings. I would encourage us all to consider the list of hymns and spiritual songs that we know and love and note what is mentioned in them for which

we can be thankful. When we begin to take things for granted, we lose sight of just how much God does for us every day.

Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and merciful. He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever. He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the inheritance of the nations. The works of his hands are faithful and just all his precepts are trustworthy; they are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name! The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever! -Psalm 111 ■



Children's Ministry

ADVENT TRADITIONS HELP FORM FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

From Kelly Harrington



At the end of a year that has imposed the word "wait" on us more times and for more reasons than we care to recall, I want to intentionally set it in front of us one more time to help us grow in our Christ-likeness as we wait

for Christmas. Only a handful of people waited for the first Advent, and now millions wait for Christmas morning each year in anticipation of finding lasting joy wrapped up in paper and tied with bows. There was no paper, and there were no bows at the first Advent, the first coming, and yet the world's greatest gift was delivered to humanity on that morning! Because of that, as Christians, we celebrate Jesus' first "coming" each year in celebration and with thanksgiving while we wait and look forward to his second Advent!

I want to encourage you to take advantage of the excitement of Christmas in your home and use it to catapult your family into meaningful times of family discipleship this season. There are many ways in which to do this with great books, devotionals, calendars, and candles available to help you along the way. Many of these things work just fine to bring us into God's Word and center us on Jesus as long as we attend to them. However, the best devotional books for Advent and cleverest calendars cannot affect us if we lack the discipline to routinely set aside time to read, pray, and worship the Lord with our families.

In our home, we have an Advent calendar that creates a nativity scene we have used for many years to count the days. Whether it is the star, a camel, an angel, or the manger, each piece is paired with part of the Christmas story that is woven together as we create the nativity scene throughout the month. After supper, we elect someone to remove the daily nativity piece from its numbered box and hang it on its designated hook in the scene as Monty reads the corresponding scripture. Throughout the years, we have added other devotionals, prayers, and readings to this routine as our kids have grown

older and could tolerate spending more time at the table. Still, the daily practice has remained meaningful and centering for our family throughout Advent.

Another Christmas tradition that has deepened the discipline of waiting for our family is reading the story of Christ's birth from Luke 2:1-21 just before we begin our family gift exchange on Christmas morning. This is a tradition that my husband brought to our family from his, as his father had done while Monty was growing up. I have sweet memories of watching our little girls intently and unwaveringly stare at their beautifully wrapped gifts under the Christmas tree (as if they could see through them) while they listened to (or so it appeared) and waited for Monty to finish reading the Christmas story. They were growing and deepening while waiting.

These are just two practices that we have used over the years to focus our family on Jesus during Advent. Advent traditions that you choose to do with your family can become foundational building blocks for family discipleship upon which you can continue to add family Bible study and worship routines throughout the year and lead your children into committed personal discipleship of their own. Do not let this season, bursting with opportunity to focus each day on the Savior of the World, the One we celebrate for Christmas, pass you by without giving attention to your family's spiritual growth. Remember, we disciple our children every day by what we do, say, and show them what is most important to us.

Advent is here, so begin today with great intentionality to set aside time to read God's Word and worship him with your family. Be deliberate in making your home a place of great anticipation this Advent season in remembrance of the greatest gift given to us! In the end, you will have given your family a gift of family discipleship that has far greater value than the beautiful packages under the tree.

"Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul." -Joshua 22:5 ■

MILESTONE CELEBRATIONS

Church Family

BIRTHDAYS

December 2, Dorine Bullock
December 5, Lydia Blackburn
December 5, Kelly Harrington
December 6, Steven Wilson
December 6, Tommy Ricketts
December 6, Ann Mann
December 7, Julie Smith
December 8, Frank Hunt, III
December 8, Birdie Cockrell
December 9, Stewart Hurst
December 10, Joyce McCollum
December 10, Scottie Smith, III
December 14, Kathe Galloway
December 15, Kay Weaver
December 18, Michelle Hurst
December 19, Carson Pike
December 21, Bill Schaffer
December 21, Rachel Smith
December 21, Andy Hunt
December 23, Evelyn Smith
December 24, Gail Tew

December 24, Gary Estes
December 26, Cindy Turner
December 27, Shane Miller
December 28, Wyatt Caldwell
December 28, Ben Geils
December 29, Patty Falk
December 30, Wayne Tew
December 30, Nancy Hunt
January 4, Julie Seay
January 9, Jimmy Kahler
January 10, Darlene Krpata
January 12, Jim Armstrong
January 13, Nancy Turnquist
January 13, Pete Bellamy
January 15, Amanda Quam
January 15, Kelly Wheeler
January 16, John DuBois
January 18, Chris Waters
January 18, Sara Wynn
January 19, Mary Roberts
January 19, Barbara Sebring
January 20, Maria Herman
January 21, Emily Bass

January 21, Mary Benner
January 22, Susan Marks
January 22, Cole Hixenbaugh
January 24, Irene Nelson
January 25, Wendy Moore
January 27, Audrey Hunt
January 30, Billy Kahler
January 31, Laura Hunt

ANNIVERSARIES

December 2, Tony & Lori Woods
December 3, Gerald & Katie Lippert
December 3, Ansel & Beth Buhrman
December 12, Jim & Nancy Ayers
December 18, Jeff & Whitney Brewer
December 19, Pete & Susie Bellamy
December 22, Chip & Donna Carter
December 24, Mickey & Jo Garrett
December 25, Bill & Norma Schaffer
December 30, Kevin & Dionne Kohl
January 1, Morgan & Patti Roe
January 4, Scott & Carrie Blackburn

Congregational Meeting December 13

The meeting will immediately follow morning worship in the sanctuary and be accessible on Zoom for those who attend worship via Livestream from home; a link to attend the meeting via Zoom will be sent by email on Saturday, Dec 12. The meeting will include a vote on the proposed 2021 church budget and a vote on the incoming slate of elders and deacons.

Lessons & Carols December 13

Come and enjoy our traditional Lessons and Carols service as the choirs of First Presbyterian Church unite to present a meaningful time of worship with music, Scripture readings, and singing of favorite Christmas carols at 9:30 am.

Candlelight Communion Service Christmas Eve

Join us on Christmas Eve for a traditional candlelight communion service at 6 pm. With seating in both the sanctuary and the fellowship hall, safety procedures of socially distancing and wearing face coverings will be followed by church leadership and strongly encouraged for all participants. Communion will be served by the elders in both settings and the service will be available by Livestream on YouTube for those who want to worship with us from home.

Are We Missing Your Birthday or Anniversary?

If we have missed listing your birthday or anniversary or listed it wrong, please let us know! If you do not see your name or the date is wrong, please give us a call and we will be happy to correct it.



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CHURCH OFFICERS

ELDERS

2020	2022
John Dubois	Frank Hunt III
Stewart Hurst	John Matteson
Ed Lamb	Vince Treadway
Fox Rawlings	2023
2021	Scott Crews
Mike Berkau	Doug Pace
Paul Benner	

DEACONS

2020	2022
David Bass	Bea Meeker
Lynne Hulen	Aaron Nelson
Rob McCollum	Mary Youmans
David Kennedy Nelson	
2021	
David Caldwell	
Michael Kahler	
Carl McCollum	
Tony Thomas	

Moderator: Rev. Chad Reynolds
Vice Moderator: Rev. Mackay Smith
Clerk of Session: Ed Lamb
Chairman of Deacons: Rob McCollum
Deacon Secretary: David Kennedy Nelson
Chm. of the Congregation: Jake Cockrell
Treasurer: Michelle Hurst (2020-2021)
Asst. Treasurer: Daniel Hunt (2020-2021)