

# The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield

2018

December

No. 11

## Ahhhhh Advent

I alluded to the topic in last month's newsletter article, but I'd like to now talk a bit more about the unnecessary rush to Christmas and what we lose by it. We almost attack Christmas like the dog Buck in Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*. Buck was stolen from his quiet, domesticated life and sold into service as an Alaskan gold rush dog. In an opening scene, Buck is fed along with all of the other dogs. Buck was accustomed to eating leisurely, but in the wilder haunts of the Yukon other dogs quickly ate their food and then attacked his. He had to learn to eat as quickly as possible to protect his portion.

Is this what we have done to the peaceful promise that is Jesus' birth? Are we afraid that if we do not attack Christmas quickly and relentlessly that we will miss out on some of it, that somebody else will get my portion?

Tell me if this is not true? By the time Christmas Day finally arrives, are we grateful not that Christmas is here, but that it is almost finally over? How many take down the Christmas decorations even before New Year's Eve? Is it a relief to get it all boxed up and put away in the attic again? Instead of inspiring us with the message of God becoming one of us, does Christmas simply exhaust us?



It does not have to be this way. And that's the reason for Advent. Advent's four Sundays represent the putative 4,000 years that the world waited from creation to Christ. There was no rushing Christmas. The birth of Jesus came when God knew it to be the right time. The world had its chance to be readied. Advent remains our chance to prepare.

Advent anticipates Christmas. It speaks of prophets and hope. It gives us the Advent Wreath and the message of increasing light, but a light that will always be different than the light of the Christ Candle, the candle whose light we share with all gathered in

church on Christmas Eve. There is the realization that everything changes with Christmas, and we with it. This should not be cashed-in and exchanged for anything less.

Advent holds up the person of John the Baptist. He is a wonderfully enigmatic man. The simple definition of the dividing line between the Old and the New Testaments is Jesus. Everything before Jesus is the Old Testament; everything from Jesus on is the New Testament. But John, what do we do with him?

John seems much more the Old Testament prophet than the New Testament Christian, and yet there he is in our Gospels. The biblical text indicates that John is executed still not knowing who Jesus is. On death row, he asks: "Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?" (Luke 7:19) John may have died never knowing Jesus as the Christ, and yet, John played an essential role in preparing the way for Jesus and His ministry. What a grand mystery this reveals. God is able to work wonders through us that we may not even recognize in the moment.

John is a key figure in Advent's journey. He helps us to trust in the unseen and the unexpected. John lets us believe that even when events seem out of control that God is still acting, that God is still present. In what ways is God working through us, through others, even when we do not realize it? All of that blithe "good will toward men" and "peace on earth" does not seem so far-fetched as we prepare for Christmas, as we allow ourselves to believe in our better selves as useful to God.

We do not need to attack Christmas. Advent is the alternative. It is our chance to slow down and exhale a much needed "Ahhhh" as we await Christmas. It lets us think about the mystery and the implications of God becoming us, and it shows us in all the good cheer and charity of this time of the year that we can be a godly people.

Come to church. Share in our community. Share in the increasing light of Advent. Feel the transformation that Christmas promises. Dust off your Bible: <https://www.macucc.org/files/files/documents/dailylectionary/dec+2018.pdf> Be generous and gracious. Let us give ourselves over to the blessings of Advent.

## DECEMBER EVENTS

- Sat. 1<sup>st</sup> Christmas Craft Fair 8:30am – 2:00pm.  
 Sun. 2<sup>nd</sup> First Sunday of Advent.  
 Church Council meets at 11:20am.  
 Tue. 4<sup>th</sup> Bible study in the church parlor from 7 – 8:00pm.  
 Sun. 9<sup>th</sup> Old Fashioned Christmas 11AM – 1PM. Pot luck lunch, Christmas decorating  
 Mon. 10<sup>th</sup> Volunteer opportunity at the Food Bank from 1- 4:00pm.  
 Wed. 12<sup>th</sup> Trustees' meeting at 7:00pm.  
 Thur. 13<sup>th</sup> Hampshire Association Clergy Committee of Practice meeting in Hadley at 12:00pm.  
 HEADS Up meeting at Hatfield Elementary School from 6 -8PM.  
 Sat. 15<sup>th</sup> Church outing to see *A Christmas Carol* at the Hanover Theater in Worcester  
 Sun. 16<sup>th</sup> Benevolence meeting at 11:20 to discuss Kindness to Kids program.  
 Mon. 17<sup>th</sup> Deacons' meeting in the church parlor at 4:30pm.  
 Bible study group in the church parlor from 7 – 8:00pm.  
 Sun. 23<sup>rd</sup> Children's Christmas Pageant during the morning Service.  
 Hatfield Luminarium at 6:00pm and church concert at 7:00pm.  
 Mon. 24<sup>th</sup> Christmas Eve Service at 7:00pm.

## REGULAR GATHERINGS

- Sundays: Worship Service begins at 10:00am. Sunday School at 10:15 am. Chat and Coffee at 11:00am.  
Tuesdays: Yoga classes are offered every Tuesday in the church parlor at 5:30pm.  
Wednesdays: Hatha Yoga classes take place every Wednesday at 6:00pm.  
Thursdays: Choir rehearsal every Thursday at 6:30pm.  
Saturdays: AA meets at the church every Saturday at noon.

## CHRISTMAS CRAFT FAIR



The Christmas Craft Fair is an important fundraiser for our congregation. It takes place on December 1<sup>st</sup>. Please mark your calendars and tell your friends. We are looking for contributions for our jewelry table (lightly used, clean jewelry), our Collectibles table, and our Christmas décor table. And of course, any handcrafted items folks can make. To make our centerpieces/arrangements, we need donations of smaller vases, in Christmas colors or motif. Please see Linda Milewski 247-5604 or Marcia Sheehan 247-9285 with questions or how to contribute or volunteer.

## BIBLE STUDY GROUP – December's Theme → Advent/Christmas replayed

I know that December is the month of Advent's preparation for Christmas and then Christmas itself, but those themes of the season appear in Mark's Passion too. Mark has no Christmas story, and remember that Mark is the oldest Gospel. For the first writer of the Jesus story, either the birth-traditions were not available to him or he considered the beginning of Jesus' public ministry to be where the story began. The absence of the Bethlehem accounts lets Mark delve into the quandary of the Messiah being the "son of David," as we will be reading. There is also the ennoblement of poverty, not as deprivation, but as the absence of wealth's distractions. Grandeur can replace authenticity. Just like Advent prepares us for God's coming reign, the Marcan Jesus speaks

late in His ministry of the coming of "the Son of Man." Maybe you would like to consider Bible study as part of your Advent regimen of preparing for the coming of Christ at Christmas. If you do, I invite you to Bible study.

### **FOOD BANK VOLUNTEERS**

Volunteers from our church gather with Linda Milewski at the Western Mass Food Bank on the second Monday of the month to help this worthwhile organization. If you can share three hours of your time or even an hour or two, it will benefit those of our neighbours who do not have the ability to put enough food on their tables. Please speak with Linda if you can help.

### **GIVING TREE & STUFF OUR STOCKINGS**

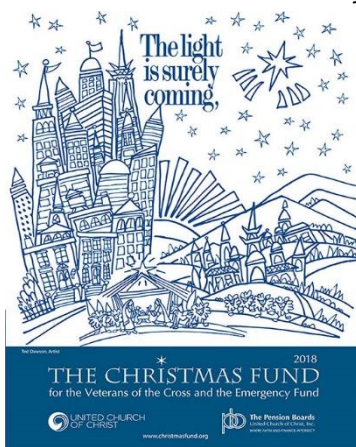
The Giving Tree Collection: "For many years our generous church family has filled a 'wish list' of children through the services of the Greenfield Department of Children and Families. Our list this year has 31 gifts. The gifts need to be returned unwrapped, gift card attached, to the church by December 9th, or to my home by December 13th. I will deliver the gifts to the Greenfield Office on December 14th. Thank you all so very much for your warm hearts. Carol and Pari."

The Stuff Our Stockings collection will take place from December 9th through the 30th. The new men's and women's socks are then donated to the Hampshire County Interfaith Cot Shelter. The homeless are in constant need over the winter months for socks. To be outdoors in the cold and wet has to be brutal. Let's help the Cot Shelter as best we can.

### **CHRISTMAS FUND OFFERING**

"Our joy at Christmas is a response to God's promise of new life through the birth of Jesus. It is a joy we are called to share widely, through our witness and gifts, both to loved ones and to distant neighbors. *"It wasn't easy picking up the telephone to share with you my present situation. In fact, it was one of the most humiliating experiences of my life although it reminded me that grace still happens. Sometimes we as clergy persons lose sight of God's grace when the negative stuff comes into our lives."* "...thanks so much for sharing your time and ministry with me. Your most gracious gift is appreciated more than words can say as I continue to live in the 'meantime.'"

These eloquent words are from a pastor who is the recipient of the caring and concern of those who contribute to the Christmas Fund Offering. You have the opportunity to be a part of this ministry that cares for the active and retired clergy and lay employees through your participation in this year's Christmas Fund Offering. Your gift to the Christmas Fund will not only assist in the supplementation of Health Premiums, Emergency Grants, Checks next December to lower-



more than ever to help the growing number of retirees whose low-income increasing living costs. This is your promise of renewal by enabling this ministry that cares for the active and retired clergy and lay employees through your participation in this year's Christmas Fund Offering. Your gift to the Christmas Fund will not only assist in the supplementation of Health Premiums, Emergency Grants, Checks next December to lower-

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### **CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS**

After our morning Service on December 9th, we will join together for our Old-Fashioned Christmas. We will enjoy a potluck dinner in the church hall with some extra activities to add to the festivities. And then we will begin decorating the church for the Christmas celebration of the birth of the Child Saviour.

Our Christmas Flower Collection continues through December 11th. The flowers are \$10.00 each and can be given in memory or in honor of a loved one. The poinsettias make our church so beautiful for Christmas and your generosity is appreciated. The poinsettias may then be taken home after Christmas by those who have

purchased them. Please see June Lampron if you are interested in helping us fill our chancel with Christmas colour.

On Sunday the 23<sup>rd</sup> the young people of our Sunday School will present a Christmas Pageant as their Christmas gift to the congregation. I hope you will be in church to support their efforts, and I am sure it will be a pleasure to see.

Hatfield's Luminarium is the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup>. The town will be lit up with luminariums all along our roads, driveways and sidewalks. Events will take place on the steps of the Town Hall at 6:00pm. This will be followed at 7:00pm by the annual concert in our church. The concert will feature our Chancel Choir, the Joyful Bell Ringers handbell choir, soloists, and other guests. It is about one hour and is wheelchair accessible. A freewill offering will be accepted at the doorway if you wish, which will support the music programs at our church. This is a festive and fun evening. I hope you will be able to take part.

On Christmas Eve at 7:00pm, we will gather at Jesus' house just like the shepherds gathered at His manger in ancient Bethlehem. We will announce and celebrate His birth as we light the Christ Candle, sing carols, share in the joyous Scriptures of promise and hope and then sing gently in a candle-lit church in honour of the baby born this night for all people. A lot of people complain about the denigration of Christmas, but rather than complain, we can come. We can come to church and remember the real reason for Christmas and we can be inspired by the humble love of our God who has come to us as one of us.

### **HABITAT FOR HUMANITY PROJECT**

"The workday we are signed-up for is Sunday, Jan 13<sup>th</sup>, from 12-4. The Location is 1 Garfield Ave. in Florence at the "tiny house" construction site. No experience is necessary, but Volunteer Orientations are Mandatory for those who have not volunteered previously. These are held on the first Wednesday of the month at 6:30pm, and third Saturday of the month at 9am at the Habitat Admin. Office, 140 Pine St., Florence. The three upcoming orientation dates are Wed. Dec 5th 6:30pm, Sat. Dec 15th 9am, and Wed. Jan 2<sup>nd</sup> 6:30pm. Please sign-up online for an orientation at: <https://www.pvhabitat.org/ways-to-volunteer/> and click the VolunteerUp tab. Come join in for this worthwhile cause! It's fun and you can learn a lot too. Please let Carolyn know if you'd like to participate in the Jan 13<sup>th</sup> workday (space is limited), and/or feel free to contact her for more information, or call the Habitat office at 413-586-5430. Thank you, The Benevolence Committee."

### **RE-DESIGNED WEBSITE IS UP AND RUNNING**

Our website has been redesigned to allow the church to update information and presentation as needed. You can check in a few times a week and there will be new content. There is also the ability to respond and offer your own comments. Consider taking advantage of this site and share it with others: [www.hatfieldchurch.org](http://www.hatfieldchurch.org).

### **CONSIDER MEMBERSHIP AT HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL**

If you may like to be a formal member of this church, it begins with a group meeting with Rev. Calvo and members of the Board of Deacons. We talk about the church, its organization, how things work, and our core values and covenants. Talk with Reverend Calvo or Amy Novak, Head Deacon, if you are interested. We will hold a new member meeting on Monday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> at 6PM.

### **NOTE FROM OUR TREASURER**

If anyone needs to know where they stand as far as 2018 pledging is concerned, please email Ed Keefe at [eckeefe@gmail.com](mailto:eckeefe@gmail.com) for a copy of your statement.

### **SHARE AN INVITATION**

If someone you know is not attending church anywhere, please share an invitation with them to come and join us at Hatfield Congregational Church because "Whoever you are, and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

### **VIEW CHURCH SERVICES ON-LINE AND ON TV**

We air our Services a couple of times a month on public access television. They take place on alternate Sundays. This allows people to see what happens inside our church building and it also reaches into the homes of people who are unable to be with us in church. The recorded Services air on Hatfield Community Television on Saturdays and Sundays at 8 am and 4 pm. All of our taped Services may also be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjVqoCIEfNo&list=PL97Cp8D5oEflNg2Vj4DQkqp-ISAtaEkIf>.

We could use the help of a few more volunteers to operate the camera on a rotating basis during the Services. If you could help in this way, please speak to Rev. Randy.

**CONTACT INFO: HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

Website: [www.hatfieldchurch.org](http://www.hatfieldchurch.org)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC](https://www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC)

Pastor: Rev. Randy Calvo 413-824-1630 [randyc1897@gmail.com](mailto:randyc1897@gmail.com)

**Committee Chairpersons:**

*Christian Education, Anita Wilson 413 247-5229*

*Music, Anthony Tracia 781 738-6284*

*Real Folks Society, Martha Zigmont 413 247-5453*

*Benevolence, Carolyn Forsyth*

*Deacons, Amy Novak 413 210-3965*

*Trustees, Jonathan Bardwell 413-530-6262*

*Church Moderator, Glenda Flynn 413 247-5891*

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**May we all enjoy an enlightening Advent Season ...**



**... and a joyous, hope-filled Christmas.**