

WESTOVER REFLECTIONS

A Letter From The Pastor

BY SUNG MOY

Dear Westover Family and Friends,

There is a lot about the secular holiday of Christmas that I like. I like the Christmas music, shows, and decorations all around us. It's festive and fun. There is also a lot about the secular holiday I don't like. The focus on consumerism, the disappointment that many poor children will face when Santa doesn't bring them what they wish for, and the fabricated war on Christmas. No matter what the secular holiday means for you, for me, it pales in comparison to the gift God gave us in Jesus Christ. I know that many of you have been reluctant to come to worship or have simply gotten out of the habit. Frankly, we have so much room in both services for more people, we can safely distance everyone who has been coming. You will have choices, this Christmas. You can worship in-person or virtually. You can donate to our special Advent/Christmas offering or spend that money on gifts for others. You have many choices. I am sure that many of you will be swept up in the Christmas holiday, and I hope that your choices will also reflect an appreciation for the gift God has given you as you celebrate the holy day of Christmas. My prayer is that you will find ways to love your friends and family but also love the stranger and the poor. May we see Christ in all we do this season. My love to you and yours for a wonderful and joyous celebration of Christ's birth.

Pastor Sung

BIRTHDAYS

1 DEBORAH COX	13 CLARA WILSON
2 MARK BROOKS	RIDGE LEDBETTER
BETH TUDOR HAYES	16 ANN RENEGAR
4 RICHARD RAMBEAUT	JOSH JOHNSON
5 JEFFERY DANIEL	ROBERT MCGHEE
TAYO ADEBIYI	20 TREY WATKINS
6 ADRIANNE WATKINS	22 SHARRON GIBSON
7 JIMMY COGGINS	27 AYEN KSOR
8 ASHLEY FISHER	ALEX ARELLANES
9 TOMMY HIGHSMITH	29 DONNA DANIELS
10 TOYIN ADEBIYI	31 CATHERINE CLYBURN
JANICE CARTER	TYLER WATKINS
12 FAYE BATTS	



CHRISTMAS CAROL STORY: "SILENT NIGHT"

BY BRUCE SMITH
DIRECTOR OF MUSIC MINISTRIES

"Radiant beams from Thy holy face - With dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus Lord, at Thy birth."

One of the most beautiful and compelling Christmas carols has a storied history beginning in the Austrian Alps in 1818. In that year, a roving band of actors was performing in towns throughout the Austrian Alps. On December 23rd they arrived at Oberndorf, a village near Salzburg where they were to re-enact the story of Christ's birth in the small Church of St. Nicholas.

Unfortunately, the St. Nicholas' church organ wasn't working and would not be repaired before Christmas. Because the church organ was out of commission, the actors presented their Christmas drama in a private home. That Christmas presentation of the events in the first chapters of Matthew and Luke put assistant pastor Josef Mohr in a meditative mood. Instead of walking straight to his house that night, Mohr took a longer way home. The longer path took him up over a hill overlooking the village.

From that hilltop, Mohr looked down on the peaceful snow-covered village. Reveling in majestic silence of the wintry night, Mohr gazed down at the glowing Christmas-card like scene. His thoughts about the Christmas play he had just seen made him remember a poem he had written a couple of years before. That poem was about the night when angels announced the birth of the long-awaited Messiah to shepherds on a hillside.

Mohr decided those words might make a good carol for his congregation the following evening at their Christmas eve service. The one problem was that he didn't have any music to which that poem could be sung. So, the next day Mohr went to see the church organist, Franz Gruber. Gruber only had a few hours to come up with a melody that could be sung with a guitar. However, by that evening, Gruber had managed to compose a musical setting for the poem.

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The Perfect Gift

BY CLARA WORSLEY

During this wonderful, glorious, and joyful season of Christmas, someone could ask: Why are we honoring this baby born in a manger, of all places! On a bed of hay! And, why are angels singing praises to him? And, why are shepherds leaving their flocks to go and worship him? And, why are wise men coming to bring gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh?

I'm told that this baby is a king - but he's asleep in the hay! That can't be right because a king should be wrapped in fine silks (not bands of cloth) and this baby should be in a royal bed - NOT a manger! This baby should be surrounded by servants (certainly not lowly shepherds) and, goodness, not animals - there's a donkey there that I'm told carried the baby's mother to Bethlehem. And there are cows and sheep. None of this makes sense, especially if this baby is a king!

Then I'm told that this baby is a gift to ME (and to each of you)! This baby is a blessing to ME (and to each of you). This baby brings salvation to ME (and to each of you)! How is that possible? How is any of this possible with this little baby born in a nowhere place like a manger in a far-off town called Bethlehem?

I'm told that the gift of this baby is a gift from God...He is God's Son! So - this baby really IS a gift and I'm beginning to understand how, on the holy night of his birth - when wonderful memories are made - there is magic and there is wonder - and the "hopes and fears of all the years are met" in this baby. God gave ALL of us a gift - the gift of grace through His own Son - because God's love for us is so overwhelming.

And, if we could stop at that manger - if we could just take a moment to stand with the shepherds and the animals -

to listen to the angels sing - we would look upon this child in wonder - and we would truly understand the gift of grace we have been given. And we might wonder if we could find the words to express our thoughts and our thanks.

God is giving us this gift, but the question could be: do we accept it? We go through that at Christmas when we want to find the perfect gift for someone - we hope it's just perfect and that the one we are giving it to will accept the gift and love it.

We shouldn't need to wonder about this gift of a baby in a manger. This baby is exactly what we wanted (but maybe didn't realize); this baby is exactly what we needed (but maybe didn't realize). This gift is Christmas and we celebrate the unbelievable love, the unlimited generosity of God's gift - unmatched!

When God sent his son as a sacrifice for us, this gift said God knew us. He knew more about our hearts than we ourselves did. He knew the good parts and the bad parts. God gave us Jesus because he loves us so much - yes, right in the midst of our sin and imperfections.

So, if you're hoping that someone will give you the perfect gift for Christmas - it's already been given to you, and, at Christmas, we celebrate just that! We also celebrate the gift of each other - of being family at this church we love as our home. In these uncertain times, more than ever, we need the gift of Jesus and the gift of each other. On behalf of those on the Administrative Council, the wish we have for each of you is to accept the gift of Jesus, to know in your heart what it truly means - and to know what each of you means to us. We feel wonder, hope, and joy as we celebrate the birth of Jesus together during this season!

ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL

We're starting a new series for the Winter Quarter and hope you will join us on Sunday mornings at 10.

December will be "Wait for It" – Advent is a time of anticipation and waiting. The lessons for December invite us to explore waiting as an important part in three episodes in Luke's telling of the Christmas story. And one lesson reminds us that, as much as we are called to wait for the Lord, Jesus Christ waits patiently for us.

January is "Wonder." We rush here and there, doing this and that and get caught up in our day-to-day activities so that we easily miss the extraordinary and wonderful experience of entering into God's presence. January's lessons will explore different ways we have experienced God's great glory.

February is "Show and Tell." These lessons lead us to understand various ways that we can participate with God through our actions. When we read through the Old and New Testaments, we see that by engaging in life-giving activities, we join in the work to which God set our hands in the Garden of Eden.

Join us for Sunday School Bible Study each Sunday morning at 10:00 in the Education Building. All ages are welcome!

SILENT NIGHT FROM PG 2

It no longer mattered to Mohr and Gruber that their church organ was inoperable. They now had a Christmas carol that could be sung without that organ.

On Christmas Eve, the little Oberndorf congregation heard Gruber and Mohr sing their new composition to the accompaniment of Gruber's guitar. The impact of this quiet guitar accompanied carol of the quietness and simplicity of the birth of Jesus was overwhelming to the gathered believers. In this carol, Mohr sets the scene of this quiet and awe-inspiring night –

***"Round yon virgin – mother and child –
holy infant so tender and mild"***

Mohr's story telling goes on to include the powerful impact upon the unsuspecting shepherds...

***"Shepherds quake at the sight. Glories
stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia, Christ the
Savior is born!"***

As we close our Christmas Eve services with this song, and as you hear it and sing it throughout the holidays, remember the quiet, hushed tones of Franz Gruber's guitar playing to the gathered worshippers that snowy, wintry night in 1818, and remember the timelessness of Christ's birth and the simplicity of that beautiful baby in the manger. For Christ the Savior is born!

FIRST FRUITS OF WORSHIP

Spirit & Truth

BY BRUCE SMITH
DIRECTOR OF MUSIC MINISTRIES

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”John 4:23

We are looking at the two important qualities of worship shared with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well in the Gospel of John – spirit and truth – and how we benefit from worshiping the living God in this way. To date we have discovered that these qualities of our worship produce Power and Healing in our lives. This month, we’ll consider the third benefit of Spirit and Truth worship...

3. Revelation

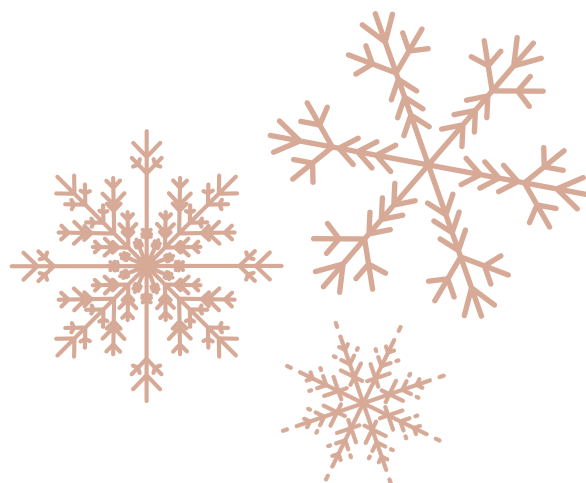
It is in the midst of worshiping God with our focus on our heart (Spirit) and our knowledge of who He is (Truth) that we find God revealing things to us. It might be a purpose, a plan, a desire, a correction to our path, or a need for our life that should be addressed, but **God works in the revelation business!** Just look at what Paul tells the church in Galatia about his own “spirit and truth” moments with Jesus...

“I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”
Galatians 1:11-12

When we worship God in Spirit and in truth, He will speak to us about our lives. He will convict us of bad habits we have, reveal new paths for us, encourage us in our impatience and sorrow, and restore confidence in our daily walk. I have no doubt that it was a result of my spirit and truth worship two and a half years ago, that God led me to Westover – so I can attest to God revealing things I would never have conceived of on my own.

The story of Helen Keller is an inspirational one to all of us. The story is told that after Helen Keller's teacher, Anne Sullivan, had given her the names of physical objects in sign language, Miss Sullivan attempted to explain God and tapped out the symbols for the name "God." Much to Miss Sullivan's surprise, Helen spelled back, "Thank you for telling me God's name, Teacher, for he has touched me many times before." Helen Keller knew something of God's signature from nature, she had experienced His revelations, she just didn't know His name!

God has something to say to us every time we worship Him. And I don't know about you, but if God is saying something, I want to hear it!



Bag Lunch Mission

BY JANET GIANNATTASIO

As of this date, November 18, we have just enough money in this account to send Oak City Cares one more check. This mission started in March of 2009, that's "pretty good" considering that UMW, with the help of the congregation, only planned to do this for 3 months.

Oak City Cares sends a monthly email with a section entitled "By The Numbers", here is their report for October 2021:

Shower Services - 811, with toiletries

Laundry - 479, with detergents and dryer sheets

Care Coordination Services - 150

Total Meals Served - 2,699 Weekend Meals Program

Imagine if you had to find a place to take a shower, do your laundry, and, hopefully, get a meal! Each month when I see the numbers for these services it makes me so grateful to realize that this could be me or any one of us - how fortunate we are.

God bless you all for supporting this mission for over 12-1/2 years.



Congratulations!

After dating 8 years, Daniel Lucas proposed to Camryn Watkins on Christmas night 2020. On September 25, they were married in Cary. Daniel is employed with Amazon and Camryn is a manager for Bath & Body Works. The newly weds live in Clayton with their 4 legged children Oliver (dog) and Pepper (cat).

ANNOUNCEMENTS



KID'S CHRISTMAS PARTY

We are hosting a kid's Christmas party on December 4th from 11 am to 1 pm in the front parking lot facing Carolina Avenue. Join us for hotdogs, a craft, cookie decorating, storytime, decorating the community Christmas tree and a visit from Santa.

ANGEL TREE

We will be collecting monetary donations to provide to AB Combs Elementary School in lieu of buying gifts during this season of pandemic. Checks can be made out to the church with "Angel Tree" in the memo line. Online donations should note "Angel Tree" so that we can designate it to this collection. Thank you for your generosity.

ADVENT/CHRISTMAS OFFERING

We will be collecting an Advent/Christmas offering which will be split between the Interfaith Food Shuttle and Meals of Wheels. If you are donating by check, please write "Christmas Offering" on the memo line. If donating online, please note that it is for the Christmas Offering.

CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP (12/24)

We will have an in-person Christmas Eve service at 5 pm. Both Communion and Candlelighting will be included. Phyllis Danskin will read a Christmas book to the children. We hope that you will come and worship Christ with us.

DECEMBER 26 WORSHIP

We will have a single worship service on December 26 at 10:30 am. Clara Worsley will be preaching.

PASTOR AWAY

Pastor Sung will be away from December 25 - December 28. For emergencies, please call her mobile number.

END OF YEAR DONATIONS

In order for contributions to be credited as 2021 donations, IRS regulations require that they be received by the church by December 31, 2021 OR be postmarked by December 31, 2021. Online donations made by December 31st are also acceptable. Thank you for your faithfulness!

REFUGEE UPDATE

According to USCRI, refugees from Syria have been placed in temporary housing in the Triangle. They are looking for affordable apartments for these families. More information will be provided as it comes.