

Red Door Chronicle



A newsletter of Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church

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CHRISTMAS: MORE NEEDED THAN EVER



EVERY YEAR ON CHRISTMAS EVE WE HAVE A wonderful custom at St. Andrew's, shared by many others in the Body of Christ. (Yes, customs and the customary are not always a bad thing, whatever self-appointed 'progressives' might say.) Having prayed; having sung; having heard from the Word of God; having lit the Advent Candles (all five of them); having listened to God with every fibre of our being, we then extinguish every other light in the sanctu-

ary (save the two candelabras). Then I light a single *handheld* candle from the *Christ* Candle. With this I begin spreading its light to the congregation, each worshipper having been given an unlit candle on entering the church. As the light spreads through the darkness we sing together what some consider one of the profoundest expressions of the heart of Christmas, the 1818 Franz Xaver Grüber/Joseph Mohr carol *Silent Night*.

When every candle of every person is at last lit, I return to the podium and lift my own candle high. "The light of Christ," I say. "The light of Christ," replies the congregation. It is a high and sacred moment, after which the congregation hurries home through the darkness, many of them deeply touched by the Spirit of God by this, as by much else.

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Curiously, one Christmas Eve—I can't remember which—a lady who was in attendance asked me if she could keep her candle, and take it home. I forget quite what she said in asking this, but it was something like, "I really don't want to put this out. I really don't. I want to keep my Christ-light burning as long as I can." And so I said, "Yes. By all means. Take it home."

And so she did. She was right, of course. The lights we lit on Christmas Eve were—and are—*never* meant to be put out. Never.

After he beshrews the accusers gathered to stone the woman caught in adultery (John 8), Jesus turns to the shocked onlookers and says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." He makes the same claim in John 9. Having healed the man born blind, much to the consternation of other onlookers, and other Pharisees, he declares, "When I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

And while Jesus is the Light of the World, we are like his candles; we are like candles in the darkness, lit by his light. And not only on Christmas Eve!

"You are the light of the world," said Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

"A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

And light will do that, even at the darkest and coldest time of the year.

It's no secret that the celebration of Christmas, occurs at the darkest time of the year, even though it's unlikely that Jesus was actually born on December 25. In fact early Christian leaders situated it there, rather purposely, so that early believers would be encouraged by the coming of the light—the real light; the Christ light—at the darkest time of the year. Church leaders also hoped that new Christian folk, i.e. the formerly unbelieving newly called to faith by the Holy Spirit, would be emboldened to step away from earlier pagan celebrations kowtowing to the god Saturn, whom the Romans worshipped (beginning on December 17) with drunkenness, licentiousness, and sheer stupidity of every kind. Or step away from the worship of Mithras, a solar god, whose name day they celebrated on December 25. (Some pundits say we should never celebrate Christmas for this very reason, i.e. on account of the pagan nature of the Roman festivals it was meant to replace, or because Christmas as a celebration is "adiaphora," i.e. not directly mandated in Bible. But I believe them wrong, not to mention far too enamored of the self-serving unimpeachability of their own private views. "I am right, you are wrong. That's the end of the story," declare such people. How many times does one hear that said or inferred? As the day is long, and more.)

The truth is, Christmas—i.e. real Christmas; Christ-lit Christmas—is more needed than ever before! And needless to say you can be part of the bringing of the light of Christmas. You really can.

Are you up for the challenge? It's really not that hard, God being your helper. There are so many different ways one can bring light!

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In C. S. Lewis' the *Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, which we have performed as a play, here at St. Andrew's, not once, but twice (2014, 2016), the story is told of a land locked in winter, for a hundred years or more. (Just imagine a place so forever dark, and forever cold. "Oh but that's the modern world!!" I think you may be right.) Until, that is, a certain Someone returns, a Lion named Aslan. And with him comes another certain someone. The latter's name, of all things? Father Christmas.

"He was a huge man," writes Lewis, "in a bright red robe (bright as hollyberries) with a hood that had fur inside it and a great white beard that fell like a foamy waterfall over his chest. Everyone knew him because, though you see people of his sort only in Narnia, you see pictures of them and hear them talked about even in our world—the world on this side of the wardrobe door. Some of the pictures of Father Christmas in our world make him look only funny and jolly. But now that the children actually stood looking at him

they didn't find it quite like that. He was so big, and so glad, and so real, that they all became quite still. They felt very glad, but also solemn.

"I've come at last," said he. "She has kept me out for a long time, but I have got in at last. Aslan is on the move. The Witch's magic is weakening." And Lucy felt running through her that deep shiver of gladness which you only get if you are being solemn and still."

"Big, and glad, and real." Is that who you are? Yes? No? Well, that's who you *can* be, if infused by the Light of Christ. Do you gift others with deep shivers of gladness, and a sense of the light, and presence, of Christ? Well, you can. Even now, even at Christmas; darkness notwithstanding; Covid-19 notwithstanding. Trust me, it's a God thing.

Christmas. The Light of Christ. It's needed as never before.

- Colin



(See Luke 2:1-16)

12-23-2013

YOU KNOW GUYS, RUMOR HAS IT THE BABY SHIVERS IN THE COLD ... MAYBE INSTEAD OF GOLD AND PERFUME HE WOULD ENJOY A BLANKET?

CHRISTMAS STORY

CROSSWORD

by Marsha R. Chudy

How much do you know about Jesus' birth? If you get stuck, check out the clues in your Bible.

ACROSS:

- Emmanuel means _____ (4 words). (Matthew 1:23)
- The angel called Mary _____ (2 words). (Luke 1:28)
- Joseph had a _____ about marrying Mary. (Matthew 1:20)
- After they finished praising God, the angels went into _____. (Luke 2:15)
- The visitors who brought gifts came from the _____. (Matthew 2:1)
- The angel brought _____ (2 words) to the men in the fields. (Luke 2:10)
- Mary visited her relative named _____. (Luke 1:36, 40)
- _____ was the king when Jesus was born. (Matthew 2:1)
- An angel named _____ appeared to Mary. (Luke 1:26)
- Mary wrapped Jesus in bands of _____. (Luke 2:7)
- The visitors followed a _____ to find out where Jesus was. (Matthew 2:9)
- Mary used a _____ for Jesus' bed. (Luke 2:7)

DOWN:

- _____ was one of the gifts given to Jesus. (Matthew 2:11)
- The _____ (2 words) travelled a long distance to see Jesus. (Matthew 2:1)
- They came to pay _____ to Jesus. (Matthew 2:2)
- _____ was another gift given to Jesus. (Matthew 2:11)
- Jesus was born in the City of _____. (Luke 2:11)
- The visitors brought their gifts in _____ (2 words). (Matthew 2:11)
- The _____ (2 words) appeared to the men in the fields. (Luke 2:13)
- The men living in the fields were _____. (Luke 2:8)
- There was no room for Jesus and Mary and Joseph in the _____. (Luke 2:7)
- Another name for the city in #5 DOWN is _____. (Luke 2:15)
- The men also gave Jesus _____ as a gift. (Matthew 2:11)



Answer on page 47

THE LITTLE CHURCH THAT COULD

BY COLIN CROSS

COVER STORY FOR THE PRESBYTERIAN RECORD DECEMBER 2007

IN 1843, CHARLES DICKENS DESCRIBED Christmas as “a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time, the only time I know of in the long calendar of the year when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of other people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.” Call it madness, call it absence of mind, call it a strange collective hysteria, call it what-you-will; Christmas is a time when sane people go mad and mad people become sane. It happens but once a year, and in it—or by it—an exception is made in the accustomed order of things, as if to say “Okay, folks, now we are going to do things differently, for a time, so please stand by for station identification. Don’t panic! We’ll return to regular programming as soon as possible.” Christmas in the West may occasion shocking greed and debauchery—but both hearts and treasuries fly open, as if by magic. The ordinarily distrustful even enter God’s house, upon Christmas Eve. Yes, it sometimes takes *the curl out of their naturally curly hair*, but people make detours from the ‘broad road’ of customary life. Then, and only then, “The bird of dawning singeth all night long/And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad/The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike/No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm/So hallow’d and so gracious is the time.”

Every child knows this. Every year, growing up, I knew exactly when Christmas began. Christmas began with the first snowflake outside my window; first a snowflake, then a wish, then a prayer, then another snowflake—and another, and another. Not only was heaven falling to earth, but Christmas was on its way, and with it the unbidden sense of another world, so bright, so beautiful, so full of won-

der. I was out-of-doors in a flash, leaping, dancing, running in circles, trying to catch the snow in my hands, trying to see what a snowflake looked like before it melted away. I had been stabbed, ‘flashed,’ even—with an irresistible lightning bolt of joy. Yes, I grew up in Canada, where winters are cold and snow obligatory, but that’s entirely beside the point. That first snowflake started a whole freight train of joy that careened wildly, magically, breathlessly, all the way to Christmas. It would just build and build and build, each succeeding day closer to the Day more magical than the last, till Christmas came. “O great mystery; O wonderful sacrament; that animals should see the new-born Lord, lying in a manger!”

And then there was the Christmas Pageant at First Baptist Church—I was not yet a Presbyterian—directed with military precision by a certain Mrs. D., beloved if brutal Maven of the Flannelgraph whose casting calls were *not* noted for their flexibility, any more than her ideas about wardrobe, script, set design, or blocking. “Every Christmas it’s the same; I always end up playing a shepherd” I recall saying at the time, not long after Charles Schulz gave Shermy the selfsame line. (But having attended Sunday School in the days *before* child-centered education, I knew how to keep my mouth shut.) *Always Christmas but never Joseph*. Sigh! Out came the red-checked bathrobe. But by the time the lights went up on Pageant night and our storytelling began, that strange hush, that something, that *Someone*, even, came back. Suddenly I began to hear what C. S. Lewis called the “real story . . . the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.” Childhood fancy? Perhaps. But it is

(continued . . .)

clear that at this extraordinary time of year something hindering is removed, and by the outreaching Spirit of God a veil falls away—in a flash, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. “The value of story,” writes C. S. Lewis, elsewhere, “is that it takes all the things we know and restores to them the rich significance which has been hidden by ‘the veil of familiarity.’ The child enjoys his cold meat (otherwise dull to him) by pretending it is buffalo, just killed with his or her own bow and arrow. And the child is wise. The real meat comes back to him or her more savory for having been dipped in a story; you might say that only then is it the real meat.” This is how the Gospels function, more so at Christmas than any other time of the year. They are a new kind of literature for a new reality, “deeper, more wonderful, more like places in a story: in a story you have never heard but very much want to know”—a reality at once ordinary, after all, Jesus was just a carpenter from Nazareth, like his father before him, right? Or was he? And if this is the case, how do we, the church, become storytellers for new ages, new peoples, new generations?

Credit for inventing the Christmas Pageant goes to Francis of Assisi (1181–1226). Pilgrimages to Bethlehem had been underway since the fourth century, after the pagan temple Hadrian had built there (to irritate Christians) was duly removed by Constantine, though both Justin Martyr (100–165) and Origen (185–254) had already claimed to have

seen the “actual manger” where Christ was born, not to mention the countless painters and iconographers who were hard at work creating images of the Nativity now considered normative. On his way to Rome in 1223 Francis stopped in the tiny village of Greccio, about 100 kilometers east of Rome. On Christmas Eve, Francis found a tiny grotto in the mountains and placed a donkey, an ox, and a small group of villagers around a small free-standing crib (or crèche). The results were electrifying. “Nor was this an unfitting vision,” wrote early biographer Thomas of Celano, “for in the hearts of many the child Jesus really had been forgotten, but now, by his grace and through his servant Francis, he had been brought back to life.” In the words of John Fisher, Francis ‘made real what he already believed,’ and the town of Greccio was never the same again. In fact Greccio has become, for many, the “new Bethlehem.”

Telling the story—the Great Story. Making real what we already believe. Bringing back to life. Recovering the unbidden sense of another world—so bright, so beautiful, so full of wonder. Christmas is not only a unique time in the life of every child, it’s a unique time in the life of the church—and an unprecedented opportunity for daring and creative ministry. Call it madness, but the doors swing open, and hearts and minds of every description are suddenly willing to hear the Gospel. Let the church preach, to the greater glory of God.



PRAYER REQUESTS

*BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING, BUT IN EVERYTHING BY PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION,
WITH THANKSGIVING, LET YOUR REQUESTS BE MADE KNOWN TO GOD. (PHILIPPIANS 4:6)*



GOD IS GOOD AND WE KEEP PRAYING! Please pray:

- For to give thanks for the young life of Gavin, great grandson to Anna Proudlock, who passed away after a courageous battle with cancer; for his parents, his immediate family, and his large and loving extended family as they walk the long road of grief and experience their first Christmas without this beloved child.
- For Eric Pringle, Carol Hayhurst and Marion Blanchard as they experience Christmas with the recent passing of their spouses.
- For Jean Forbes, who is experiencing the ongoing symptoms of shingles and would appreciate prayers for recovery so that she could spend time at her son's farm in Oliver at Christmas time.
- For recovery from ongoing health problems for Fraser and Iza MacDonald.
- For Anna Proudlock at Haven Hill.
- For Gwen Sulz, to experience better health and mobility so as to remain active.
- For Joan Vant Geloof as she recovers from surgery for a broken femur, a slow process; for Tony Vant Geloof who has ongoing, undiagnosed health concerns.
- For Nickeisha Vant Geloof as she travels back & forth from Kelowna to Summerland for classes at UBCO; for Ashlin Vant Geloof.
- For Debbie Norris & her grandchildren: Alexa, Oswald, Arian, Avianna, Jaxen, Adrianna, Sophie, Emma and Lily; for her daughter, Jolene.
- For Colin as he prepares for Christmas services; for a restful vacation for him the following week.
- For Jan Higgin's son-in-law, Mark, who has had a tracheotomy due to cancer; for his comfort and healing.
- For the little girl Charlotte; and for her grandparents, Ruby and Dave, as they struggle with health issues.
- For renewed health for Sherry and Wendell, dear friends of Terry Stewart; for God's blessing as they seek new accommodation.
- For the safe delivery of Carol Hayhurst's new great grandson, expected near the end of December.
- For Jennifer, dear friend of Linda Middlestead, as she slowly recovers from a lung transplant.
- For Cindy, niece to Fraser and Iza, who has been diagnosed with lung cancer; for their nephew Brad, who suffers from a still-undiagnosed hand ailment that interferes with his work as a pilot; for their nephew Al, who has just undergone open heart surgery.
- For to give thanks that Teresa, daughter to Pat Mesic, has been experiencing improved health and therefore no longer needs heart surgery.
- For Sharon Mayforth, that she would be comforted as she copes with pain and reduced mobility.
- For to give thanks that Brenda MacDowell's eczema is under control.
- For to give thanks for Nadia Pushak's recovery from a back injury.
- For the ongoing provision of our financial needs at St. Andrew's, so that we don't need to burn through funds accrued from the sale of Annex and can instead plan ahead and use these funds responsibly.
- For children and youth; for teachers and counselors; for doctors and nurses and therapists;
- For our livestreamed Sunday services, now often viewed over 120-130 times weekly;
- For hope, encouragement, mutual love and forbearance as we continue to face the challenge of Covid.
- **WARNING: BIG PRAYER NEEDED:** For our divided & adversarial world, even among believers, that factionalism, arrogance, pomposity, and the unwillingness to listen to others or to walk in the shoes and hearts of others (with all that that entails) be swept away by the love of Christ, not only at Christmas time, but always.