

Pastor Peter's message notes from Dec. 6, 2020

## Christmas According to Luke: Zachariah's Story

To help us appreciate the impact of Luke's story on Christian faith and our understanding of the birth of Jesus, imagine Christianity without the stories unique to Luke and Acts.

Can we imagine Christmas without shepherds or a baby in a manger? The church calendar without the Ascension or the story of Pentecost? How would we tell Bible stories to kids without Zacchaeus, Mary and Martha, the Good Samaritan, and the prodigal son? If Luke had not written down these stories that came from numerous people, they would have been lost forever.

Another story, that of Elizabeth and Zechariah praying to have a child, also appears only in the gospel of Luke. When Zechariah enters the temple of Jerusalem to offer prayers for the people of Israel, he is overwhelmed by the message of good news that the angel Gabriel shares with him: *'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. <sup>14</sup>You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, Luke 1:12-14*

Zechariah is honored to enter the sanctuary of the temple and offer prayers to God both for himself and for all the people of Israel. Yet even with expectations set so high, Zechariah seems amazed when God shows up.

Theologians have pondered why Zechariah is struck dumb when he questions how he and Elizabeth will have a child when they are past the age of childbearing. I've wondered if Zechariah's time of silence is God's way of helping him hear this message of joy, if by not speaking for a time, Zechariah is finally able to tell a new story of hope and salvation in the birth of Jesus Christ.

Luke, more than the other gospels, emphasizes that Jesus's salvation means deliverance from struggles we face in our lives. Luke emphasizes that the coming of Jesus means delivering the poor from poverty, healing the sick, welcoming people on the margins into the family of Jesus, acknowledging women as disciples and leaders, calling people of different racial backgrounds like the Samaritans morally right, or calling couples without children righteous before God.

The gospel of Luke doesn't offer us easy answers as to why we suffer. But I think that by including so many stories of real challenges and disappointments, the gospel of Luke suggests to us that Jesus chose to be born as a child into our world of pain to be a comfort to us. That even though we suffer he will bring us deliverance in the most painful struggles of our lives.

The gospel of Luke tells us that the birth of Jesus Christ is part of God's master plan to invite all of us to be a part of the family of God. Even when we doubt, we are invited. Even when we want to believe, but we struggle, God patiently waits with us.

## Preparing For Worship

### Scriptures for the coming week

Monday	Dec. 14:	1 Samuel 1:1-11
Tuesday	Dec. 15:	1 Samuel 1:12-26
Wednesday	Dec. 16:	1 Samuel 1:27-28
Thursday	Dec. 17:	Luke 1:39-45
Friday	Dec. 18:	Luke 1:46-49
Saturday	Dec. 19:	Luke 1:50-56

### Upcoming Worship Messages

- Dec. 13: Christmas According to Luke: The Good News
- Dec. 20: Christmas According to Luke: Mary's Message
- Dec. 24: Christmas According to Luke: The Birth of the Savior
- Dec. 27: Christmas According to Luke: The Blessing

## Our Church Family

### Prayer concerns from our church family

Aura Tavernner, Judy Murray, Donna Rosiere, Jaccie Blaszczyk, Linda Riddle, Camden Garcia, Peggy Province, Irene Miller, Ann Wilson, Nancy Walters, Michael Smith (Hubert Neth's son-in-law), Jim Hudson, Alice Hanrahan, Waneta Lane; Anastasia, Tilly Agymang's sister-in-law in Ghana; Larry and Cheryl Yung; Harvey Christie's sister Lillian Christie; Genevieve Case's son, Mark Case

### Birthdays for the coming week

- Dec. 14: Cathy McGraw-Culp
- Dec. 15: Camryn Cummings
- Dec. 16: Waneta Lane
- Dec. 18: Kara Smith

### Anniversaries for the coming week

- Dec. 16: Ken and Betty O'Neal
- Dec. 17: Quincy and Amy Honan

## We Can Help

Are you having difficulty connecting to our worship services online? Do you need a way other than the internet to watch or listen to the services?

Let the staff at UMC-Burg help you.

We can

- provide technical support
- mail DVDs of services for you to view at home
- work to come up with other options to connect you with the church.

For help call the church at 660-747-8158



Well, here we are at the Christmas season, and who could have known that I would still be making masks to wear into stores? Not me. At the same time I am lamenting this pandemic we are having, I have to stop and be thankful for what I have. Not everyone is navigating this COVID-19 thing positively. Not that I am sailing through this, but I am mindful of how much I have to be thankful for at this time. This has turned out to be a real season of giving and thanks. Through Facebook I have read about so many groups and individuals who are reaching out and sharing what they have with others. They too realize that have much to be thankful for this year.

One of the festivities I enjoy at this time of year is being with my church family and singing Christmas hymns. I will miss that this year. But I as ponder this 2020 Christmas season, I realize that Mary and Joseph and that precious baby did not have their church family either, nor a room in the inn. Things can get tough. However, Jesus and this season of giving and “thanksgiving” this year brings hope to my heart and my community. To think this baby Jesus would have such an impact on the world!

Please reach out to members of our church family. Keep in touch and let others know we hold them in our hearts. Be safe and take care of yourselves.

Joy to the World!

-Jana Miller

**THANK YOU!**  
*thank you!*

Thank you to the congregation for supporting one of the families of our church through these last few months with your thoughts, prayers and generous donations. Through your contributions, we were able to help the family with rental payments, utilities including electric, phone, and WiFi; car repair and tires, and gas, food, and other necessities.

The family is very grateful for your support and care during this rough time. Please keep them in your prayers. Thanks be to God for guiding us in this outreach. JOY and Blessings

-Vicki Ollison

## Help Families ‘One Crisis Away’ From Poverty

The season of Advent is a season of celebration for the birth of Jesus Christ. But Advent is also a season of giving, especially to those who are in need of gifts the most.

As mentioned in last week’s newsletter, the MVCAA (Missouri Valley Community Action Agency) is in desperate need of funds to meet the needs of its clients who do not meet the income guideline restrictions set for the Community Services Block Grant (CSGB) yet are, as Mandy Baker-Schull, Community Services Manager for MVCAA, said, “one crisis away” from falling into the poverty range.

To illustrate the need and how MVCAA is able to help with donated funds, Shull shared these three stories:

- In early October, an older married couple came to us for assistance with their electric bill after being denied for energy assistance through the LIHEAP program. The husband had been experiencing some health issues, and they were having to travel to Kansas City often for doctor appointments, which was beginning to take a toll on their finances. They fell behind on their utilities and received a shut-off notice. Their household income was at 129% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), so we couldn’t use CSGB funds to help. Luckily, we were able to use the donated funds to keep their utilities on.
- Towards the end of October, we had a family come to us needing assistance with their water bill. The husband and wife both worked at a nursing home and had been exposed to COVID-19, forcing them both to quarantine at home. Their household income was at 186% of the FPL, so we used the donated funds to prevent their water from being shut off.
- In November we helped a woman in Marshall who was experiencing hardships due to lack of transportation. She works across town and has to walk when she isn’t able to find a ride to work. She was struggling to stay caught up on her rent, so her landlord referred her to our agency. We were able to use locally donated funds to make a payment towards her rent.

As you prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ during this season of Advent, we invite you to consider giving your gifts to help individuals such as those mentioned above get through this difficult season. Please mail checks to the church; they should be made payable to UMC-Burg with MVCAA in the memo.

With the gifts God has given us, let us give back a portion of those gifts to those who are in need both financially and spiritually.

## Join Us For Our Christmas Eve Services

For many people, the Christmas season is their favorite time to attend church. They enjoy the holiday music, the choir's Christmas cantata, the festive decorations, the story of Christ's coming, the candlelight Christmas Eve service, and the warmth that comes in celebrating with their church family.

As we face the shutdown of face-to-face services because of the pandemic, the staff at UMC-Burg is working hard to make its online worship feel as joyful, warm and inviting as possible, especially the Christmas Eve services.

The two Christmas Eve services—traditional and contemporary—will be posted online at noon Dec. 24, giving families flexibility of when to watch the service. We encourage congregants to worship online with each other at 4 p.m. for a traditional service and at 11 p.m. for a contemporary service with our Praise Band.

To be an active participant in the Christmas Eve services, here is a checklist of items you need at home as you watch:

### An advent wreath

Join us as we light the advent wreath. Basically, you need five candles and greenery. [Click here](#) to find instructions on how to make a traditional advent wreath or DIY Advent Wreath Crafts for some family fun. [Click here](#) or go to [umcburg.org](http://umcburg.org) to find the Advent readings we are using this year.



### Communion elements

Set out grape juice and bread as we continue the tradition of partaking in holy communion during our Christmas Eve service.

You can also stop by the welcome center in the church atrium where you will find take-home communion packets. Be sure to get one for each person worshipping with you.

### Candles

As always, we will end the service by lighting candles as we sing "Silent Night." If you do not have a candle at home, feel free to pick one up at the welcome center in the church atrium. Dim your lights, light your candles, and join us in song.



## The Love of a Church Family is a True Blessing

-By Wanda Dahman

The love of a church family lives on . . . on throughout one's life. I grew up in a single parent family of very, very meager means! Thankfully, my mother was a true Christian and a very loving and dedicated parent. As dedicated as she was, however, she had only a minimal education and no real professional training. Thus, earning a sufficient income was difficult, and as a family we struggled financially. Strange . . . but I never felt poor.

Meeting financial obligations each month was enough of a challenge for my mother without adding the extra burden of Christmas gifts for my brother and me. I can remember Mother putting a couple of toys in lay-away for us at the local Ben Franklin store in July . . . then paying a token amount each month until Christmas. Strange . . . but I never felt deprived.

I always felt richly blessed. Our home was spewing over with love always; plus, our church family extended an abundance of love and support. I remember a very special Christmas season when a man appeared at our door shortly before Christmas. He proudly greeted my mom, brother and me and announced that he was one of Santa's elves. He eagerly asked my brother and me what we each wanted for Christmas. My brother asked for a billfold, and I asked for a doll.

I didn't recognize Santa's elf, but I learned much later that he was a member of the First United Methodist Church just across the street from my family's church, which was the First Presbyterian Church. Out of profound love and concern for our family, my home church had made arrangements with the Methodist church to adopt our family for Christmas in an effort to be less revealing of this charitable act and hopefully prevent any social stigma my brother and I might face within our church peer group. What a team effort . . . another great way to spread God's love!

I shall always remember the LOVE that my home church family and that First United Methodist Church family extended to my family some 70 years ago . . . a LOVE that shall dwell within my heart forever!

### \*\*\*\*\*Quick Bits\*\*\*\*\*

The new **Upper Rooms** are in. You can stop by the church atrium and pick one up at the welcome center, email or call the church. We'll be happy to deliver one to you personally.

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We would like to start including **joy and praise announcements** in the newsletter. If you have a birth, wedding, graduation, retirement, new job or military transfer, please let us know so our congregation can share in your celebration.



### Tell your story, simply and succinctly

A few years ago, one of my English teacher colleagues told me about an assignment she was doing with her students called “The Six- Word Memoir,” which some of you may have heard of.

I was reminded of this when I read an online article in the Thanksgiving issue of The New York Times; the editors had asked readers to submit six-word memoirs telling what they were thankful for in 2020.

Here are a few they received:

*The crinkling eye above the mask.*

*A furtive hug with a friend.*

*Saved a lot of lipstick money.*

*More homemade pasta, no more jeans.*

*Windows have never been so important.*

The six-word memoir project originated in November 2006 when the editors of *Smith Magazine*, a U.S.-based online storytelling magazine, asked readers to tell their life story in just six words. The idea comes from the literary legend that American novelist Ernest Hemingway was challenged to a write a short story in only six words, for which he wrote, “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”

The idea became so popular it resulted in the *Six-Word Memoir* book series. You can now find different takes on the six-word memoirs. Google it and you will find a variety based on different prompts. For instance, *Education Week* asked teachers, “If you were writing a mini-memoir of your teaching life, what would your six words be?” It resulted in answers including

*Untied shoelaces, missing front teeth – elementary!*

*Learning as much as I teach.*

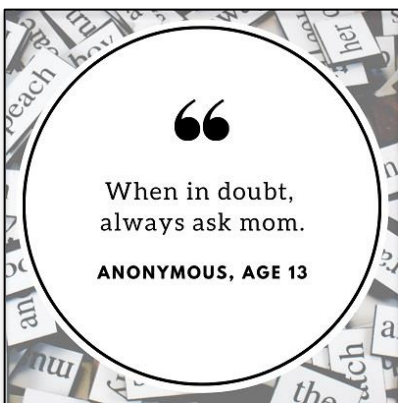
*Active noisy classroom means brains working.*

*Teachers wanted, patience mandatory, sanity optional.*

If you go online and read six-word memoirs, you will find that some are humorous, some are insightful, and some are heart-breaking—yet all are in some way inspiring.

You may be wondering why I’m writing about the six-word memoir in a church newsletter. First, being an English teacher, I love playing with language, and these

short memoirs have always intrigued me. Secondly, as you know by now, I am always asking for church members to share their stories for the newsletter. It makes reading it much more interesting—but more importantly, it gives me something to put in



the newsletter when I have extra space and nothing to fill it with!

So, I am asking once again for your contributions. I think this could be fun for you, plus it’s not as intimidating as writing an entire article (though I would be thrilled to receive some of those, too!). I also think it will be through-provoking and inspiring for others.

I am providing you with prompts below to spark ideas. Hopefully I will receive enough to publish them periodically in the newsletter. If it makes you more comfortable, I don’t plan on including your name—unless you would like it to be included.

There is no deadline for this, so take your time. You never know when an idea will strike you, whether it be tomorrow or two months from now. And you’re welcome to submit more than one memoir.

Email the memoirs to me, mail them to the church office, or call the church office and tell us over the phone.

I look forward to seeing what you come up with. And remember—six words only!

Happy writing! Carol Hassler  
carol@umcburg.org

### Here are a few topics/prompts to get you started, but feel free to come up with your own ideas.

- \*What are you thankful for in 2020?
- \*A spiritual moment
- \*the Christmas season
- \*A love story
- \*What you love about your spouse/mother/father/child (perfect to use for Valentine’s Day, Mother’s Day or Father’s Day)
- \*New year’s resolution
- \*A lesson learned
- \*An observation about life

