

Pastor Peter's message notes from Dec. 13, 2020

Christmas According to Luke: The Good News

More than any of the other gospels, Luke wants the reader to understand that all people are welcome and invited to be a part of the family of God. To illustrate this for us, Luke provides vivid stories about Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The first description of Mary provides a lot of information about her: **"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.²⁸And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.'"** Luke 1:26-28

Gabriel tells Mary the Good News that she will bear a son who will save the world. She will be the mother of the messiah, the long-awaited king of Israel and the whole world. Mary replies, **"How can this be, since I am a virgin?"** Luke 1:34

I've always read her response as an answer to the question, "How can I be pregnant when I've never been with a man?" However, I wonder if her words carry a second meaning. Mary, a young Jewish woman, would be familiar with the promise that God would always keep a king on the throne of David. I wonder how much of her question, **"How can this be?"** came from an understanding of who she was and the times in which she lived. Is she asking, "How could I, a young girl from a family of modest means who lives in a small village be the mother of the man who will set the world free?"

One blessing during the pandemic is the daily reminder of how much each person in our lives matters. As we have had to consider how to maintain safety, we have been forced to think about how much we are served and blessed by people we don't interact with on a daily basis. We have reflected on who the essential workers in our world are.

The Gospel of Luke reminds us that each person God has created is a part of God's mission. Each of us has been given essential work to do for the creation of Jesus' kingdom of heaven here on earth. Luke's telling of the Christmas story reminds us that Jesus came so that *all* people might be invited into His family.

When Mary asks, **"How can this be?"** the angel Gabriel reminds her that she serves God, the Most High. Nothing is impossible with God. Luke is the only gospel that records Mary's response to the news that she will be the mother of the savior of the world: **"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."** Luke 1:38

As I read over the stories of Mary, I wonder if God chose Mary not in spite of her humble background but because of it—because she knew what it was like to work hard, to serve faithfully, to not always be appreciated, to suffer, and to choose to keep serving faithfully all the same.

I wonder if the unique contribution that Luke offers us in the story of Jesus' birth is that each of us, no matter where we were born, no matter our station, is called to serve the Lord according to his word.

Preparing For Worship

Scriptures for the coming week

Monday	Dec. 21:	Luke 2:1-7
Tuesday	Dec. 22	Luke 2:8-20
Wednesday	Dec. 23:	Psalm 78:70-71
Thursday	Dec. 24:	Luke 2:1-20
Friday	Dec. 25:	Luke 1:57-66
Saturday	Dec. 26:	Luke 1:67-80

Upcoming Worship Messages

- 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

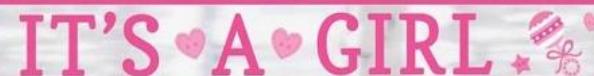
Aura Tavernner, Judy Murray, Donna Rosiere, Jaccie Blaszczyk, Linda Riddle, Camden Garcia, Peggy Province, Irene Miller, Ann Wilson, Nancy Walters, Michael Smith (Hubert Neth's son-in-law), Jim Hudson, Alice Hanrahan, Waneta Lane, Tilly Agymang's sister-in-law Anastasia in Ghana; Harvey Christie's sister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

Birthdays for the coming week

- Dec. 22: Jim Metcalf, Luci Smith
Dec. 23: Doug Christie, Ed Woodrel
Dec. 25: Conner Cummings, Don Peterson
Dec. 26: Dean Hart, Lauren Vesecky

Anniversaries for the coming week

- Dec. 21: Jim and Wilma Baile, Bill and Karen Martin



Congratulations to
Daniel and Gabrielle Benedict
along with big brothers
Johnathan and Andrew
on the birth of
Elizabeth Grace Benedict

Born Dec. 12, 2020
6 lbs. 9 oz. 19 inches long



-by Thomas Gale

As we look to celebrate the birthday of Jesus with great joy, we remember other events that were also so long awaited to take place in our lives and families and our church family as well. As a father and grandpa, watching and waiting has been a test to be sure!

Our savior's parents watched and waited for the joy to come to all the world as foretold in the Old Testament and by the angel who appeared to them. When we look at the small group of people who were watching and waiting with great wonder for Jesus Christ to be born, I can only imagine the range of their emotions being in an occupied land with all the uncertainty that brings. Just think of all the things that had to fall in place. Wow! It was all a rolling succession of miracles just for us.

As we watch and wait this season to celebrate Jesus' birth, let's not lose our joy because of this very unbelievable year. God is still in control and has our best interest is His joy.

As the great hymn of the faithful says, "There is joy in serving Jesus as we travel on this earth." Choose to be joyful this season of Advent.

Jesus, Others and You spells JOY !!!



Thank you to all who donated to the Mitten Tree. Items will be donated to the Warrensburg R-VI School District.

Seeing God's Presence In Our Lives

-by Sandi Bryan

I can never remember a time when my family didn't attend church on a regular basis. I attended parochial schools up until the time I left home to attend CMS. I knew that God made me and I was created to love and serve Him. However, I don't think I ever fully understood how God was truly a part of my life.

My understanding of God's love for me changed in 1989. Our family was involved in a horrific car accident on Christmas night while returning home from my in-laws. I know that God was with me and my family that night.

The chain of events clearly proved His presence! I will briefly share what took place: an elderly couple reluctantly let my son in their home to call 911 (no cellphones then), the first person on the scene was a pastor (prayers immediately), and the EMTs on duty were only three miles away. I was in the ER very quickly, Dr. Hanna was home and at the hospital within minutes, and a highway patrolman went to Lee's Summit and back in 45 minutes to bring the life-saving blood so the surgery could begin.



I vividly remember drifting in and out of consciousness and realizing that I was definitely in trouble. As they were literally running down the hallway toward the OR, I felt the presence of Jesus. I knew He was there!

I left the OR in critical condition and spent many days in and out of the hospital. On one of the visits from my pastor, I asked him to help me process the events that had taken place and why I survived. Of course, it was because God was with our family. My daughter Ami and I were in the backseat, and she spent six weeks in a back brace; Larry and my son Scott had bruising from the seatbelts.

In the years since the accident, I have learned to deal with the life-long injuries and do my best to manage them on a daily basis. I have continued to see God's presence in my life as I was able to see my elderly mother on a weekly basis before she died, serve as preschool director, use my education as a history teacher and the most incredible blessing of all—be a Mimi to two (miracles) AWESOME grandchildren!

In the words of Helen Steiner Rice, "God never comes too early and He never comes too late!"



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From Garden Beds to Food Pantries To A Summer Head Start Program, MVCAA Is There To Help

-by Carol Hassler

When I began communicating with Mandy Baker-Schull, Community Services Manager for Missouri Valley Community Action Agency, to write a series of articles for the newsletter, I was amazed at all this agency does. While the past two weeks the focus has been on the work MVCAA does with those families struggling to make ends meet, this week I want to share a few things going on in other programs in the agency.

Here, directly from Schull, are items she wanted to share with us:

-We have done projects such as raised garden beds at locations where low-income individuals live or visit.

-We have had Little Food Pantries built and installed in various locations, including Warrensburg. Both of these initiatives were projects to address food insecurity in all seven of our counties, which was one of the top needs in our 2017 Community Needs Assessment.

-Our Head Start program serves 51 children in Warrensburg and 36 in Knob Noster. (Knob currently has openings if anyone is interested in applying). We are proud of the ways we have overcome obstacles thrown at us from COVID-19.

-We successfully ran our Summer Head Start without issues and have implemented a virtual classroom for families who are not comfortable with their child being in the classroom. The virtual class utilizes a private Facebook group, and the teachers go live four times a day for 15 minutes each. Our Family Advocates deliver packets weekly with the following week's activities, as well as healthy snacks for the kiddos. The parents and children have engaged well with this option!

-In our Early Head Start program we serve 16 infants and toddlers through a partnership with UCM Foster Knox. We provide diapers and formula for the kiddos, and are able to pay for those 16 childcare slots for low-income families who are working or furthering their education.

-Our Weatherization Assistance Program is always accepting applications for our waitlist. We weatherized four homes in Johnson County last year.

-We are also accepting applications for the Housing Choice Voucher program. We are always needing more participating landlords for the HCV program. It is very disheartening when a family finally makes it to the top of the waiting list to receive their voucher and are not able to find a place to rent. If homeowners/landlords are interested in learning more about the program, they can call Housing Director Lori McKinney at (660) 886-7476 ext. 841.

These are only a few of the many accomplishments of MVCAA. I encourage you take a look at their website and explore all of the ways they help the communities they serve.

I also encourage you to consider making a donation to help MVCAA continue their mission of creating "a future in which all people have the opportunity to thrive."

**Please send your donations to the church. Make checks are payable to UMC-Burg with MVCAA in the memo line or donate online by clicking the Give button at umcburg.org.*



The two Christmas Eve services—traditional and contemporary—will be posted online at noon Dec. 24. Click on the links any time to watch the service. To maintain the feel of worshipping with others, 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. [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 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 services. 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.



For Those Struggling With A Blue Christmas, There Is Hope In Moving From Darkness To Light

-by Associate Pastor Susan Smith

While all around us everyone seems excited to celebrate Christmas with family and friends and holiday traditions, in all actuality, many find the holiday season a struggle.

The reasons for feeling blue in the midst of all the holiday hype range from the loss of a spouse, family member, empty nest syndrome, health diagnosis, distance, loneliness . . . and the list grows.

Churches have begun acknowledging that Advent and Christmas can be difficult; therefore, many churches have developed a Blue Christmas worship service to help those struggling.

According to the UMC Discipleship website, "There is a growing attentiveness to the needs of people who are blue at Christmas. Increasing numbers of churches are creating sacred space for people living through dark times. Such services are reflective, accepting where we really are, and holding out healing and hope."

The Blue Christmas worship is typically offered on the Winter Solstice, which this year is Monday, December 21, the shortest day of the year. According to the world clock, our latitude indicates there will be only about 9 hours and 28 minutes of daylight.

According to the UMC Discipleship website, "There is an interesting convergence for this day as it is also the traditional feast day for Saint Thomas the Apostle. This linkage invites making some connections between Thomas's struggle to believe the tale of Jesus' resurrection, the long nights just before Christmas, and the struggle with darkness and grief faced by those living with loss."

When churches provide a Blue Christmas service, the most common reference in the Bible is to the story of Job. Remember how he maintained his faith despite all the challenges he endured? His friends kept thinking he must have been doing something—sinning—that caused God to punish him.

Yet Job lived faithfully throughout every challenge thrown at him. He was able to fend off the negative pressure from his friends. He trusted God. In the end, he was restored to the wealth and the success he had experienced before the challenges. His life was a living testimony to his friends how faith in God carries us out of the darkness and into the light.

Christmas is filled with the symbolism of light, and maybe that is why we love the candles and all the light displays inside and outside our homes during these short days. Adam Hamilton speaks to the light of Christ in his book *Incarnation*: "*Darkness is most often (but not always) associated with evil, adversity, ignorance, despair, gloom, and even death. Light, on the other hand, is usually associated in scripture with God, goodness, joy, knowledge, hope, and life.*" (p. 124)

Hamilton goes on to explain two forms of darkness, which during these shortest days of the year, seem to lead towards

the second form he refers to as existential or situational darkness "*associated with grief, sadness or despair, or the feelings of being lost or unloved.*" (p.126)

However, as December 21 gives way to the 22nd and then Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, look to the light. Know that God is the light and He pulls us out of our darkness—even during a pandemic. Hamilton defines Christmas as light: "*Christmas is the celebration of light piercing our darkness, God's light coming to us to enlighten our lives.*" (p. 130)

The concept of the incarnation, God as human, is one of the most compelling arguments to celebrate Christmas. God loves us so much that He walked along side of us as the man Jesus Christ. He experienced all the life challenges we do, even the most horrific as He died on the cross so that we may believe in Him and know that He is with us.

Hamilton challenges us to walk in God's light and to share that light: "*Jesus is God's Word to us. In that Word, we see not only the love of God, but the light of God illuminating our moral and existential darkness. Our task is to accept that light, to allow it to illuminate our lives, to walk in this light, and to then share this light with others.*" (p.136)

Almost 30 years ago I lost my mother and went through a divorce in the same year. It was a tough Christmas. Still, I had young kids and we powered through the life changes and celebrated as if nothing had changed.

Admittedly though—even now—I still struggle each year. Life hands us challenges consistently, and we muster through. That does not mean we honestly feel happy; we just ride the current that pushes us forward. How do we do it? With our faith in God.

I choose light even on the shortest, darkest day of the year. I know the challenges of darkness, but I look toward the light. Maybe that is why the words of John speak to me: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*" --John 1:1-5

On Monday, stop and reflect on how your faith sustains you throughout the wide range of life challenges. Take a few moments and consider not only how you manage, but also be aware of those around you who struggle during the season.

Please join me in prayer, not only for yourself but for all those feeling blue during this Advent season:

Dear Lord, our father and our light, thank you for shining bright even in the darkest of days. Guide us and enlighten our heaviness of spirit as we look to your glory and celebrate the birth of your son Jesus Christ.
-Amen.

