

Pastor Peter's message notes from Dec. 20, 2020

## Christmas According to Luke: Mary's Message

After receiving the message from the angel Gabriel that she would give birth to the Messiah, Mary immediately set out from Nazareth to visit her cousin Elizabeth and her husband Zachariah. If anyone would understand Mary's concerns, it would be Elizabeth, herself miraculously pregnant as a woman past the age of child bearing.

Tradition has it that Elizabeth and Zechariah lived in Ein Karem, a town on a hill close to both Bethlehem and Jerusalem. It would take eight to ten days to travel from Nazareth to Ein Karem.

Imagine the joy Mary felt when she entered the home of Elizabeth who immediately prophesied over her saying, **"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?"** Luke 1:42-43

Without being told, Elizabeth knew that Mary was pregnant and that the child would be the messianic king. Can you imagine what Elizabeth's words meant to this young girl?

For nine days Mary had been traveling, carrying the secret with her that she was pregnant. For nine days she worried what it would be like to live with the shame of conceiving a child out of wedlock. For nine days she worried she might be stoned to death once it became known. For nine days she worried how Joseph would respond. And then, three times, Elizabeth blessed Mary and the child she carried inside.

Sometimes as we face big challenges, we need someone like Elizabeth to be with us to offer us encouragement. Elizabeth helped Mary see her situation through the eyes of faith. She helped Mary recognize blessing where others would have only seen burden. She helped Mary give thanks for the blessing God had given her.

In response to Elizabeth's song, Mary offers her own song of thankfulness, deliverance, and welcome into the family of God for outsiders. She sings in Luke 1:48-53,

**Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.**

**<sup>50</sup> His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.**

**<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.**

**<sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;**

**<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. Luke 1:48-53**

Mary's message offers us the vision that as we follow Jesus to create the kingdom of Heaven, God will empower us to come alongside the poor and encourage us to be a family of faith.

Although we sometimes feel like Mary, on the road with worries and challenges in our hearts, she and Elizabeth offer us a message of hope and transformation. The birth of Jesus is so joyful that it makes us want to burst out into the Christmas songs! God is going to do amazing things through the birth of the Christ child. Although we struggle, although we are poor, God has sent us a deliverer. His name is Jesus.

## Preparing For Worship

### Scriptures for the coming week

Monday	Dec. 28:	1 John 4:19
Tuesday	Dec. 29	Romans 5:8
Wednesday	Dec. 30:	Luke 11:1-13
Thursday	Dec. 31:	Mark 12:28-34
Friday	Jan. 1:	Colossian 3:1-11
Saturday	Jan. 2:	Colossians 3:12-17

### Upcoming Worship Messages

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 Anastasi in Ghana; Harvey Christie's sister Lillian Christie; Genevieve Case's son Mark Case, Michelle Schubert, family members of Thomas Gale-- Douglas Gale and Brian Johnson

### Birthdays for the coming week

Dec. 27: Amanda Simmons

Dec. 28: Jan Glover, Christi Riddle, John Schmidli

Dec. 29: Jeremy Gilpin

Jan 1: Brayden Burton, Ellie Carter, Gwenith Baker

Jan. 2: Issie McClung

### Anniversaries for the coming week

Dec. 28: Bill and Betty Thoms

Dec. 30: Bryan and Beth Hunt



In celebration of the holiday season, the church office will be closed Dec. 24, Dec. 25, and Dec. 28. We will also be closed Jan. 1, 2021. We will continue to check emails and phone messages.

## Keeping The Holiday Spirit Alive During COVID Christmas 2020 Proves Challenging

-by Associate Pastor Susan Smith

Have you ever noticed that some Christmas seasons are more difficult than others? I doubt we have ever experienced a year that has made Christmas traditions more difficult to manage than this year--especially the annual family and friend gatherings.

I admit to struggling with Christmas this year. The first thought that hit me is that we might as well not make gingerbread for the houses that we had just gotten started as a tradition with the grandkids.

Then COVID hit our own household. How do we manage now? We were given different recommendations for how long quarantine had to last. Then I calculated the situation--Christmas will come and go just as I get through quarantine.

But, Christmas is part of my Christian faith and how can I let it slide past without joining in? I started working on that idea. I put one little decoration out--tiny lights on a Norfolk pine. Then I added the antique snow buddies from my childhood tree.

I have been reading Adam Hamilton's *Incarnation*. I have been reading Luke's story and making a daily devotional post. I have worked on Christmas cards. And I have sat in my chair looking at the nativity scene that is displayed year-round.

Maybe Christmas 2020 is not going to be like any other Christmas we have ever experienced. And that is ok. When the prophet Isaiah first spoke the words that a child would be born, he said, *Isaiah 7:13 Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you weary mortals, that you weary my God also? <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.*

The reality of that birth came over 700 years later! We may feel frustrated, even disappointed, with Christmas 2020, but the reality is that it is only one year, not 700 years. One year will not destroy the reality of Christ's birth which now is well over 2,000 years ago--that is a total of 2,700 years

Stop and look at a nativity scene. The story never gets old. The story never changes. We need to celebrate Christmas every year. It certainly is not the way Mary and Joseph celebrated that very first Christmas, so what we have created as our own traditions are not the key to the season--it is the baby Jesus in a manger.

As I have worked through this COVID Christmas, I suddenly remembered a nativity scene I used to put up even in my college dorm room. And I thought for a moment--where had I put it--and then I went to check.

Yes! The tiny little manger scene is sitting in a small curio cabinet with other mementoes of earlier years. There it was--the one-inch manger, the one-inch Mary and



Joseph.

As we get closer and closer to Christmas Day, know that God is with us and that with him all is possible, even COVID Christmas 2020. How you manage your Christmas this year is exactly what you make it. But keep hope alive.

Look at the nativity scenes, study the Christmas cards, watch the Christmas lights flicker in the evening, light a candle, and know that God's gift is larger than any gift we could ever buy or give--and he gave it to us freely. This Christmas open up God's gift and accept it freely; then give it away so it continues to grow.

Join us online Christmas Eve for  
*Christmas According to Luke*  
*The Birth of the Savior*  
Rev. Peter Norton  
At 4 p.m. and 11 p.m.  
on our Facebook page

A link to both services will be emailed at noon Dec. 24

The services will be posted on Facebook at noon Dec. 24

## Happenings At The Rock: Answering The Nudge To Enrich UMC-Burg's Campus Ministry

By Lisa Schmidli

"Life's a dance, we learn as we go. Sometimes we lead; sometimes we follow." These song lyrics, though not a hymn, pretty much sum up my latest adventure as I seek to do God's will.

One of the opportunities offered by UMC-Burg is to enrich the lives of the college-age students in our congregation and extended families residing at The Rock and attending UCM. It's a pretty big undertaking, but something that can be rewarding as we work together.

I came on board with the College-Age Ministry Team in March, I think (2020 is a blur). Preston Parks had taken over as The Rock director in January and was hard at work updating documents and maintaining the facility. From a workday of cleaning and painting to a free baked potato bar for college students to Monday night Bible Studies, the College-Age Ministry Team (Steve Mills, Susan Jackson, Ginger Cochran, Bob Muir, Peter Norton, and me) has been planning around Covid-19 restrictions to provide for our students.

Sadly, Preston will be leaving his position at The Rock at the end of December. Without a replacement at this time, the College-Age Ministry Team chose to revamp the director responsibilities. After multiple Zoom meetings, the decision was made to have a UMC-Burg member serve as The Rock's coordinator, and a Rock resident would serve as the RA (Resident Assistant.)



I have elected to answer this little "nudge" and serve as the current coordinator on a volunteer basis. We are yet to fill the RA position and are hopeful that God will send us an amazing candidate in the near future. As we know, it takes a multitude of talents to do God's work. Susan Jackson has been sharing her gift by leading Bible studies on Monday evenings at The Rock. This is open to ALL young adults, 18-29. After the holiday break, she will continue her discussion on David Platt's series,

"Something Needs to Change." If you are in that age group, consider joining Susan on Monday evenings at 7 p.m. at The Rock.

Steve Mills has shared his talents at The Rock for numerous years. I am still tapping into his wealth of knowledge.

It is obvious that it has taken the hard work and vision of numerous church members, past and present, to provide this enrichment to the UCM campus. Many hands have been involved throughout each transition.

As this branch of our church is new to me, I want to thank each of you who have contributed over the years. From painting to cleaning to renovating to cooking to hosting to praying—whatever your contribution—thank you! It is your sharing of God's love and acceptance that is making a difference.

For anyone else feeling the "nudge," consider sharing your gifts and talents at The Rock. These students need us. Here's an example. . . . A month or so ago, when we were able to gather in the sanctuary, I witnessed one of our friends from The Rock join our service. She searched out a familiar face and was welcomed joyfully by one of our loyal church members.

From my back row pew, I knew that there had been a relationship built outside of the church walls. The comfort and acceptance provided by a familiar face was what that student needed that morning. I thought to myself, "Someday, I want to be like June Mellinger."

I'm still working toward my "someday," and I encourage all who are willing to join me on this journey.



Thanks to your donations, students living at The Rock received a stocking full of treats to help them as they studied for finals.

### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!



We are looking for people to

- help with tasks in the church office
- work with tech guru Andrew Arbeau in producing the online service
- maintain the church website
- help with production of the newsletter

No experience necessary!

If interested, email [doug@umcburg.org](mailto:doug@umcburg.org)

### 6-word memoirs

Self-centered heart. Enter Jesus.

Enlarged heart.

Bank on God. He pays dividends.

Faith and hope move you forward

Love leads us to new heights.

Where would we be without God?

Please continue sharing your memoirs!  
[carol@umcburg.org](mailto:carol@umcburg.org)

# GUESS THAT SONG



**Answers:** 1. Jingle Bells 2. Walking in a Winter Wonderland 3. Santa Claus is Coming to Town 4. Joy to the World 5. Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer 6. O come All Ye Faithful 7. I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas 8. "O" Christmas Tree 9. What Child is This? 10. We (wee) Three Kings 11. Deck the Halls 12. I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing On 13. O Holy Night 14. (The First) Noel (No "L") 15. Away (Weigh) in a Manger 16. The 12 Days of Christmas 17. I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus 18. All (awl) I Wish For Christmas is My 2 Front Teeth 19. Chestnuts Roasting On an Open Fire 20. It Came Upon a Midnight Clear 21. Let It Snow, Let It Snow, Let It Snow 22. Silent Night 23. O Little Town of Bethlehem 24. Silver Bells