

# **Cornerstone United Methodist Church**

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December 2004 Newsletter

## **Pastor Kong's Corner**

### **Christmas for Christ!**

People have a phobia of living out of their paradigm. To bring a new paradigm and to live by that paradigm are challenges faced throughout human history. Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century people believed that the earth was the center of the universe. People thought that all the planets moved around the earth. When Copernicus announced a "new theory," the whole world was in chaos. People who were not willing to accept a new paradigm, hung Copernicus. If someone were to say today, "The earth is the center of the universe," that person would be treated as Noah, who prepared an ark during the sunny days and the whole world will be chaotic.

Rolex became famous by producing the highest quality watch. However, Rolex is heavier watch than most. People were accustomed to putting the heavy watches on their wrists. One of the employees of Rolex invented a very light and strong watch. However, the company rejected the new innovational watch. Before the CEO's of the company threw the new watch into a trashcan, one of the Japanese companies bought the idea. They purchased the model at a very reasonable price. As soon as the Japanese company put the new watch on the market, they were met with enthusiasm. The company made money that ever before. The name of that watch is "Quartz." A new idea and an open mind brought the Japanese company great blessings. Blessings are upon people during Christmas holiday season.

People have celebrated Christmas for centuries. As people live in this consumer society, they lose touch with what it means to celebrate Christmas. They lose touch with the person they are celebrating, Jesus Christ. The parking lots of the shopping centers are full, and Christmas songs are heard in every store. Children have great expectations about the gifts that they will receive. I think all these things are good! But I want to share with you the great thing about Christmas.

The word "Christmas" is the compound word: Christ + mas (Mass),

which means "The act of worshipping Christ." All creatures that God created are worshipping during the Christmas season because of the birth of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christ is the center of Christmas. Christmas is for Christ, the anointed one. Without Christ shopping, giving and receiving gifts, and visiting families and friends is meaningless and superficial. It is like a car without a motor, a pair of glasses without the lens, or plants without roots. No matter what the world says and does, no matter how people spend their time, and no matter where they go, we Christians worship Jesus Christ. We focus our eyes on Christ! We come to the house of God. We need to live by this new paradigm, which we may have neglected.

Copernicus gave a new theory, the sun is center of the universe, and people believe and live with it today. This new idea helped us to understand the whole universe. The Japanese company made tremendous money as they had a new belief. As we believe in the SON, we worship Christ, adore Him, and live Christ centered –life. Then, the kingdom of God has come near than ever. My beloved, brothers and sisters, please, put Christ center. He was, He is, and He will be. Amen

Pastor Kong

## **Titus 2**

The meeting scheduled on December 18<sup>th</sup> for the Titus 2 women has been cancelled until January 15<sup>th</sup>. We will reveal our secret sisters at that time. The meeting was cancelled because many of the women involved cannot attend due to busy holiday schedules.

There is a need for a coordinator for the Titus 2 group. Because of other demands on my time I will not be able to continue as the coordinator. I believe this is a very important ministry to this church that needs to continue. If you feel led to lead this group please contact Sue Todd or Beth Wiggs.

The Titus 2 women have been asked to prepare dinner on Wednesday, January 5th. We would like to have several women from the group make casseroles to serve. If you can help with the cooking, serving, or clean up please contact Sue Todd.

## **December Birthdays**

1-Karen Walker

3-Geovana Bakhshi  
8-John Ban  
9-Andre Bakhshi  
10-Sophia Haskell  
10-Ed Smith  
12-Elinor Marrs  
13-Kathy Schuh  
15-Donna Edwards  
17-Karen Marrs  
17-Robert Smith  
22-Jonathan Blake  
23-Connor Lonergan  
28-John Harro

### **December Anniversaries**

21-Kathy & Willard Davis  
22-John & Deanna Turner  
22-Dwight & Laurie Harro  
23-John & Pearl Lee

### **Deployed Soldiers**

Eddie Harrigan  
David Haskell  
Rob Hoisington  
Doug Marrs

This is a list of soldiers who are away from their families or civilian contractors. If anyone needs to be added to this list please let me know!

### **December Jr. High Youth News**

Plans for the youth summer missions trip continue. Registration has been sent to Group Workcamps for ten youth and two adults. The two adult chaperones are Sue Todd and Sharon Upchurch. Please pray continuously for this mission and specifically that Sharon will be well and healthy enough to go. We also will have need of transportation for this trip. I believe we will need a large passenger van or at least the funds to rent such a van. We still need to raise funds to help pay for this trip. We will keep the congregation aware of future needs regarding this trip.

The youth sponsored what I hope will be the First Annual Chili Cookoff on Saturday, December 4<sup>th</sup>. The cookoff was a success as \$167.00 was raised for the missions trip but it was also a wonderful time of fellowship as it brought many people out for chili and football. I think we all had a great time!

Thanks go to Deanna Turner for decorating our Sock/Hat/Mitten tree. During the Christmas season the congregation is invited to help decorate the tree further with socks, hats, mittens and scarves. They will be donated to Fayetteville Urban Ministries.

The youth will be responsible for serving dinner at church on Wednesday, December 15<sup>th</sup>.

On Friday, December 17 the combined youth groups will hold their Christmas party at the church.

On Wednesday, December 22 the youth invite the congregation to join them in Christmas caroling in the community surrounding the church. We would like families to donate bags of wrapped Christmas candy that we can pass out along with a church business card as we carol.

On Wednesday, December 29<sup>th</sup> the youth will be serving lunch at the Salvation Army.

## **Experiencing the Heart of a Truly Mary Christmas**

by Tracey Russell

I left my church feeling ecstatic. The music minister at my church had just asked me to be Mary at the Christmas Eve service! There were no lines to rehearse, but he wanted my husband, my newborn son and me to stand in a manger on center stage. The spotlight would shine on us so as a live depiction of the first Christmas night. Yes! What woman would not want to play the role of someone who had an angel tell her she was highly favored by God?

When I arrived home, my husband did not share my joy. The thought of dressing up like Joseph in front of everyone went over like a lead balloon. My husband abruptly said, "I can't believe you would get me

into this! You know I have a fear of speaking in public!”

I quickly resorted to Persuasion Tactic #1: “Honey, you won’t have to say a word, just stand there.” My husband stood stone-faced. He quickly responded, “You know I don’t want to get up in front of people and see them looking at me! It makes me nervous.”

Persuasion Tactic #2: “You can stand with your Joseph turban slightly covering your face so you don’t have to look at anyone ...” My husband groaned loudly, still unconvinced that we should do this.

With no more persuasion tactics left, I resorted to honesty and flat out begging . “Okay honey, if you have to know the truth, I reeeeeally want to play Mary. I admit it! It is kind of my secret dream to be Mary!” My husband’s eyes softened as he begrudgingly agreed.

Our conversation was quickly interrupted by the sound of crying. Our newborn son Holt was screaming with an ear-shattering cry I had never heard. I picked him up from his car seat and he felt like a lump of hot coal. Fever!

I quickly took him to the doctor and discovered he had double ear infections at eight weeks old! After lots of Tylenol and a powerful shot of antibiotics, our family would still be able to perform. Only two days and counting till show time! I called our music minister to share the good news that we would be able to perform, ear infections and all.

Late that night, I heard the same ear-piercing scream followed by deep moaning. I ran in to look in my son’s crib. He was hot again. I called the doctor who instructed me to take his temperature while he waited on the phone. The thermometer shot up to 105°. The doctor said in his most calm voice, “Get your husband and get to the hospital as fast as you can.”

Fear struck my heart, but I was too upset to cry. I gathered my little newborn and woke my husband to take us to the hospital. The sights and sounds of Christmas came to a radical end as we entered the emergency room. In the early hours of Christmas Eve day, the doctor took my little baby in for a spinal tap. I could barely breathe during the test. Afterwards, they brought my little teary-eyed newborn and put him back in my arms. The doctor said without emotion, “The test results from the spinal tap indicate your son has spinal meningitis.”

As the doctor began telling us all the possible complications of the

illness, my mind began to race. This was not happening to us. Our pastor rushed to the hospital as friends alerted everyone to our situation. After praying together, I whispered in his ear, "Please tell the music minister he needs to find another Mary, Jesus and Joseph for the service tonight."

The day was not filled with the usual Christmas Eve activities. There was no scent of cinnamon, no tree-filled lights and no beautiful Christmas music playing in the background. Instead there were sterile white walls, the constant rhythm of monitors and the fluorescent lighting of a cold emergency room. My heart was totally consumed with the thought of my baby boy. All that mattered was his little life. I would willingly forego anything to know his life was safe and protected. As more test results followed in the emergency room, the nurses led us through the admissions process and told us our son would need to stay in ICU for at least 24 hours.

Christmas Eve in ICU? As the day wore on, everyone around us was consumed with their own plans for a special Christmas Eve. That left my little family in a cold ICU room, uncertain and insecure. Early evening, the nurses apologized when they said there was no room for parents to sleep in the children's ICU. Hardly cozy Christmas accommodations.

I glanced at the clock and saw it was about 7 p.m. The Christmas performance was going on without us right about now. Or was it? As I walked back into the small ICU room, the Scripture from Luke came to my mind. "*There was no room for them in the inn...*"

My sweet husband sat in a chair all night guarding our son as he slept. I lay down on an empty hospital bed in the vacant room across the hall. In the middle of the night, my husband woke me to nurse our baby. As I reached in to pick him up, I saw his little face smiling. The fever was gone and he was going to be back to normal after a few more days of antibiotics.

He wasn't wearing the Christmas sleeper I had planned, but I wrapped him up in his infant hospital gown and held him in my arms. God was protecting him and I felt total security in God's plans and purposes for my son's life. Again the Scripture came to mind from Luke, "*She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and placed him in a manger.*"

In the darkness of the hospital room, I felt the strangest feeling of overwhelming peace. It was the warm sensation you have when you

feel the most secure and loved. In my heart, I felt God was transforming my little ICU room into a stage. Just like the very first Christmas, there was no spotlight, just an audience of one watching over me from heaven.

Just like Mary, I felt the presence of God's love in the most unappealing environment. The manger must have smelled bad. The walls were probably dingy brown. No one was able to give Joseph and Mary comfortable accommodations either.

I'm sure Mary wanted to wrap her son in something other than pieces of cloth. But when she saw the face of her precious baby, the stable must have miraculously transformed for her too. The peace of God would rest in her arms tonight. She must have felt overwhelming peace knowing God was watching them from heaven. With this heavenly perspective, she could see the unappealing manger as a palace fit for her little King. *"The Lord will give Him the throne of his father David and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end."* (Luke 1:32b-33)

It was as if a still, small voice whispered in my ear, "It was all about the Child ... it **is** all about the Child." I realized that God was truly allowing me to be Mary this year. I didn't need a stage or reconstructed manger. Christmas is all about the Christ child. Jesus brings love and joy to our hearts at Christmas time. With all the worldly distractions of Christmas stripped away, I treasured only the thought of Baby Jesus in my heart. *"But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart."*

Christmas is treasuring Christ above all else. The decorations, the music and the gifts must all direct our hearts back to the Child of Christmas. It doesn't matter if our environment is less than ideal. It doesn't matter if all the decorations are gone and we are left alone. The state of our family or our children doesn't matter. If on Christmas Eve, we have a heart totally focused on the Christ Child, then anyone can experience the heart of a truly Mary Christmas.

Tracey Russell is a writer and speaker committed to supporting women in their unique callings as a wives and mothers. This article is dedicated to her three precious sons-Chase, Holt and Trey and to all mothers who have been blessed to love a son. Have a Mary Christmas!

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Special Thanks to Tracy Russell for allowing us to use her wonderful article!

## **Advent: A Time of Patient Expectation**

*Ben Sharpe*

If your home is run like ours you probably pulled out some Christmas music on Thanksgiving Day to serenade your feast. I love Christmas music, both the religious and secular versions. Yet, I have to be very careful to remind my children and myself that it is misleading for us to jump right into the celebration of Jesus' birth (the Nativity) without going through the season of Advent. In fact, we lose part of the message of discipleship that observing the Christian Year is designed to communicate if we skip over Advent and dive right into Christmas.

The Christian Year is a cycle of seasons and holidays that focuses on the life of Christ each year. For Christians the First Sunday of Advent marks the New Year. Advent leads to the Season of Christmas, which leads to Epiphany, which leads to Lent, which leads to Easter, which leads to Pentecost and the "Season after Pentecost." These seasons and holidays help us to see the world through the lens of the Christian faith. How we measure our time tells us who we are. We are reminded that we belong to a community radically different from secular society when we learn to tell time based on the life of Christ rather than the sequence of natural seasonal changes and civic holidays.

Most people here in the USA see Thanksgiving Day or the beginning of December as the start of the "Christmas Season." This may be true for the secular Christmas observed by local retailers, shoppers, and folks who don't have a clear understanding of the Christian Year. For followers of Jesus, however, this is supposed to be a time of quiet, patient, hopeful, expectation and longing. It reminds us how the world waited for years for the promised coming of the Messiah, and how we long and wait for his glorious Second Coming.

Advent is about **not** having what you hope for, but being sure that it is indeed coming. It is about examining our lives to see if we are truly

ready for Christ's Second Coming. Advent is not about celebrating the fulfillment of prophecy that came about in the birth of Jesus, but about living in the time leading up to the fulfillment of God's promise.

Advent is like smelling the feast being prepared in the kitchen, and knowing that soon we'll sit down to a great meal, but still having to wait until the turkey is done. It is that hopeful hunger that joyfully waits for fulfillment.

Advent is like having to wait to unwrap the presents on Christmas morning. You see them under the tree and know that they are promised to you, but are not able to enjoy them just yet.

Advent is like the nine months leading up to birth. It is a time of preparation, excitement, contemplation and reordering of priorities. There is joy in the waiting, but it is joy that anticipates fulfillment in the gift of a new child.

I serve a newly forming church. Right now we have a tiny handful of households that are fully committed to the mission. For us, Advent is like waiting God to graciously add to the "number of those who are being saved." We long for this new church to "happen" and yet we know that in spite of our faithful efforts we must ultimately "wait upon the Lord." Advent deeply resonates with me as a church planter because I have to stand on the promises of God with his faithfulness as my only assurance. As believers in Jesus, Advent reminds us that we have to quietly, patiently work our own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12-13) as we wait for Jesus to return.

This Advent Season I encourage you to not dive right into Christmas. Listen to the music and put up the tree, but remember that you're still in Advent – at time of hopeful expectation. So don't expect Christmas carols to dominate the music in our churches leading up to December 25<sup>th</sup>. Yes, we will occasionally hear a Christmas tune during Advent at church, but this is a little like peaking at your presents before the big day. In fact, it may even add to the sense of expectancy we are supposed to experience.

Also, just because you might take your Christmas tree down on the 26<sup>th</sup>, don't expect the Christian community to skip over the full Twelve Days of Christmas at church. Christmas begins on December 25<sup>th</sup> and ends on January 6<sup>th</sup>, and we should celebrate the entire season! Christians are supposed to be good at parties (thus following Jesus' own example) and I encourage you to fill the entire Twelve Days of Christmas with holy merriment – I know I will!

Until then, we are still in Advent. We wait. We prepare. We pray. We hope. These are all activities that our consumer-based, instant-gratification society has abandoned. Thus, to observe Advent is a witness to the Truth of God revealed uniquely in Jesus Christ. Don't miss Advent this year – don't miss your opportunity to witness to the Truth.