

The Pastor's Notebook

I have no idea where the interest came from, but I love reading newspapers. On a given day I might check out an English language paper from the Middle East, a national paper like the Washington Post and, of course, the P-G or the Trib. But my favorite papers have always been the local, community newspapers like the Almanac, Times Express, or the Northside Chronicle which report on real, everyday people and their impact on the community. Only in the small, local papers will you read details of the local pancake supper, small business news, and activity that is easily overlooked by the larger papers.

But even the local Bethlehem Gazette missed the goings-on in the fields outside of town. Its best reporters paid little attention to the small cluster of shepherds hurrying toward a small stable. The keenest observers of the local scene missed the sound of singing over the nighttime hills and the glow of heavenly light. They simply expected nothing THAT new, and THAT astonishing. They reported on every minor detail of the Neighborhood Association meeting and missed the shimmering light in the sky and the breaking news of Jesus' birth.



Always a possibility, the God of unexpected entrances and quiet arrivals is often overlooked as folks find themselves distracted by what SEEMS to be important and by what LOOKS like news but which is just more of the same. Even today, with so much to do – decorating, shopping, baking and planning for Christmas activities – we can miss the gentle arrival of God's presence with its gift of healing, comfort and peace.

Who would have thought that a vulnerable infant, in a backwater town, born to ordinary parents, and lying amidst animals in a crude manger would reveal the true heart and love of the Eternal God?

Watch, listen and stay alert in these special days leading up to Christmas 2016 for God is surely near and offering us the best news of all – we are not alone on cold winter’s nights and that a new day is set to break forth for our families, for you and for me.

The angels are singing again. Don’t look for reports in the neighborhood newspapers – look deep within your heart and you’ll hear them once again.

Linda and I wish you a surprising and beautiful Christmas, my friends!

- Pastor Tom

Christmas Eve Worship

The church will be filled with the sounds of Christmas carols, joy, friendship and love as we gather together on Christmas Eve. Plan to be a part of the wonder on this sacred, candlelit night as we celebrate the wonder of Christ’s birth.



- **4:00 pm** - A family worship service for children of all ages!
- **7:00 pm** - Casual, acoustic worship with Jeff Leonhardt and a wonderful gathering of instrumentalists and singers.
- **10:00 pm** - A beautiful service of carols, candlelight, and the miracle of Christmas in a traditional style sure to touch your heart.

Just a reminder – there will be just ONE SERVICE on Christmas DAY and New Years Day – 10:00 a.m. Join us!

Live Nativity Scene!

This Christmas First Bethel Church will, once again, offer the neighborhood a very special Christmas present – a touching re-creation of the **first Christmas in Bethlehem**. Shepherds, Magi, angels and, of course, Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus will gather on the lawn of the church while carols fill the night air.



In addition, refreshments will be available to warm your body as well as your spirit.

Want to be a shepherd, Magi, angel, Mary or Joseph? Call Linda Barnicott at 412-722-9413! Plan to be here to experience the miracle of Jesus' birth in the little town of Bethlehem on **Saturday December 17 from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.**

Martha Circle

Wednesday- December 7, 2016, 6:30 Christmas party - We will also decorate the tree in the Susanna Wesley room that evening.

Sunday-December 11, 2016 - we will host the Advent Dinner, providing the ham, rolls and beverages. Everyone who attends is asked to bring a covered dish and/or a dessert.

We wish everyone a very Blessed Christmas and a healthy New Year.

Luke 2:11 – *For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*



Church Library News!- “Season’ Readings”

It's that time again! The Church Library staff has the most enjoyable task of putting our Christmas books on display. We have so many Christmas books (more than 70 titles) they are kept in a separate location to save shelf space. This makes it so special when they appear again, like the magic of the season.

We have *Pearl S. Buck's* acclaimed Christmas Day in the Morning and *Dickens' A Christmas Carol*. A modern favorite is *The Polar Express*. This tale of children hopping on a night train to visit Santa at the North Pole is pure holiday wonder.

Because of Bethlehem, by celebrated Christian author *Max Lucado*, answers the questions: What's the big deal about the baby in the manger? Who was he? What does his birth have to do with me? And the answers he's found give us all hope. We also have *Lucado's* *The Crippled Lamb* and *The Christmas Candle*.



In addition to the works mentioned above, here are a few more you may wish to consider:

- * **Snowmen at Christmas** -- A beautiful award-winning children's book of poetry and pictures in which the secret life of snowmen is revealed. Parents will love this one, too.
- * **Frosty the Snowman** (of course)!
- * **Christmas Jars** -- Year after year, this 150-page novel is praised by booksellers and reviewers.
- * **Sarah's Song**, *Gideon's Gift* and *A Treasury of Christmas Miracles* by *Karen Kingsbury*.
- * **The Christmas Box** and *The Gift* by *Richard Paul Evans*.

SO MANY BOOKS, SO LITTLE TIME! Please stop by the Church Library for some Christmas cheer!

- Your Library Staff

Christmas Caroling!

Friends young and old will be sharing a measure of Christmas cheer this year as we go caroling in the community. Scheduled for **Friday December 9 at 5:30 p.m.**, we'll take our Christmas music to the residents of local nursing homes, many of whom have little chance to be with family on Christmas Day. Afterwards we'll come back to the church for some refreshments and fellowship.



If you'd like to brighten another's holiday by sharing the Christmas story in song, call Pastor Tom Barnicott at 412-722-8316 or the office at 412-835-0700 to sign up. **Drivers are always needed** for this evening so we offer a heartfelt invitation to you especially.

Calling all "Smarties"

At the Advent evening celebration, there will again be an opportunity to make gingerbread houses. We are low on inventories of traditional gingerbread house candies. If you have leftover Halloween candy that you would like to get rid of, the "gingerbread team" will welcome the donation. Packages of Smarties, Skittles, M&Ms, Twizzlers, and similar hard candies are best. (No chocolate candy bars, please.)

You may also purchase and donate any of the above suggested items as well as small candy canes, round peppermint candies, gummies, Lifesavers, or gumdrops. Be creative!



We are also in need of a bag or two of small pretzel sticks, and some Wheat Thins or Triscuits for roofing. Donations can be dropped off at the King School Kids office before December 9.



Come and Celebrate
The Real Meaning of Christmas...



A Birthday party for Jesus
December 10th from 11:30 to 12:30

Join in on all the Fun
Games, Crafts, Treats, and a Pizza Lunch
Please Bring a baby gift to give to
Shim or The Washington Women's Shelter

in Honor of
Jesus' Birthday
Please RSVP to Miss Lynda by
December 8th 412-835-6141

Thank you!

Thank you for all First Bethel has done for me before, during and after my knee surgery. The dinners, visits, calls, cards and prayers remind me I am not alone in this journey. FBUMC family has lifted me up and blessed me from the first Sunday I walked through the door. Again, thank you and God bless

~ Susan Puhlman

Book Club Notes!

Book Club will meet Friday, December 16th, at 7:30 p.m. at Gloria and Mike Stephan's house – 2840 Locust Drive, Pittsburgh, 15241, (Peters Township off Hays Road). We will discuss *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* by Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and Douglas Carlton Abrams. Here is a description of the book from Amazon.com:

In April 2015, Archbishop Tutu traveled to the Dalai Lama's home in Dharamsala, India, to celebrate His Holiness's eightieth birthday and to create what they hoped would be a gift for others. They looked back on their long lives to answer a single burning question: How do we find joy in the fact of life's inevitable suffering?

This book offers us a rare opportunity to experience their astonishing and unprecedented week together, from the first embrace to the final good-bye.

Join us for a discussion of the book. Even if you haven't read the book, the book club is always a great place to pick up recommendations about books that others are reading. Also, the club is always open to suggestions for new books to read. New members are always welcome. And, anyone who has an interest in a particular book is welcome to join us.

Looking Ahead: January – *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell

YEE HAW!

Well Partners we Moseyed the
Square Dance

to

Sunday January 22nd

In Hopes that Some of Our
Kin Folk can Get Together



6:00 to 7:30 p.m. in Founders Hall

Treats will be served

Please RSVP in the Narthex or call

Lynda by January 15th

Hey Y'all...let's support our friends and neighbors by bringing
a non-perishable food item. So....

Grab your Boots And

Saddle Up for A Stompin' Good Time

A Free Will donation will be taken to

offset the cost of the evening



Looking forward to 2017 and back to June 2016 - by Gloria Stephan

Looking forward to 2017, First Bethel is planning to travel to Perry County, Kentucky the week of June 18-24. The volunteers will be staying at the ASP Chavies Center in Chavies, Kentucky which at one time was a year-round center. There will be many more details coming, but mark your calendars and watch your bulletin for planning meetings if you're interested in joining us.



Looking back to June 2016 when the ASP volunteers went to Bland County, Virginia, we have been made aware of a dire need for one of the homes that we worked on. One of the First Bethel teams worked on installing laminate flooring and new insulation in a mobile home for Marsha and her family including Marsha's son Kevin who has a life-threatening illness that affects his respiratory system. Other teams completed work on laminate flooring in other rooms, as well as some temporary roof repairs.

Late this summer it was discovered that Marsha's roof was leaking in four places, the trusses were too heavily damaged to support the roof especially if she had much snow, and the work was beyond what the ASP organization could address. Marsha was concerned and so were we.

ASP engaged a contractor to remove the existing asphalt covering and a new metal roof was installed. The total cost was \$3425 for a permanent roof that will not leak.

The First Bethel ASP volunteers would like to provide funding to reimburse ASP for at least a portion of the cost of Marsha's new roof. If you'd like to help us, please make your checks out to First Bethel and mark your envelopes "ASP-Marsha's roof" and we'll be most grateful. Any amount will be greatly appreciated.

Giving Joy in Jesus' Name!

Once again the Outreach committee is sponsoring the Giving Tree and the Head to Toe Christmas Tree projects. The Giving Tree will have angels on it from the Ward Home, KSK, ASP, quilters, and our own kitchens.

This year we decided to not participate in the SHIM angel project because they only wanted gift cards. Please feel free to give us feedback about this decision.

Please return all gifts for the Ward Home angels by Sunday, December 11th, unwrapped.



The Head to Toe tree will be placed at the Educational entrance and those items will be given to the Melting Pot facility. Thank you for your support of these projects. It is one of the many ways FBUMC reaches out to the community to make it a better place.

Disciple Bible Study

The outstanding Disciple Bible Study returns with a new “Fast Track” format with shorter meetings and less reading on Wednesday Jan. 11, 2017 at 7:00 pm.



As we enter a new year, isn't it time to act on your interest in the Bible. Resolve to know the scriptures more fully and discover the

amazing transformative power of God in your life, Now's the time to study the Bible! There will also be morning sessions beginning on Thursday January 12 at 10:00 am!

Great Idea for Christmas!

Beginning November 20th through December, the Quilters will be offering Christmas-themed, place mats and table runners for sale in the Narthex of the church. If you are looking for some hand-made holiday

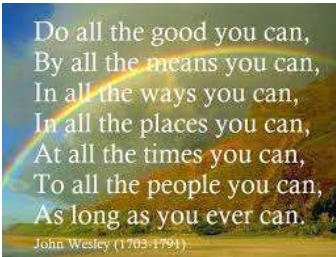


décor or possible Christmas gifts, please stop by or call the church office at 412-835-0700. 100% of the sale proceeds will go toward reducing the debt still owed on our Fulfilling the Faith loan.

More Than Thank You!

...and you thought that the graphic would be a chicken!

NOT SO! You see, you, my First Bethel Family and Friends, you



lived out the above words by simply purchasing a Chicken BBQ ticket(s) . Your amazing, generous support will benefit fifty teenagers in Nyadire, Zimbabwe. How? They will be able to take those O-Level Exams which permit them to continue their education and, therefore, open their lives to “better”.

Pastor Tom already told you: TNC, (The Nyadire Connection) has **again won** the **\$500.00 bonus** for selling the most tickets! For four years now, you have been faithful in supporting this annual Rotary event. Total sales from 5 churches was 794 tickets. Last year, FB was credited with 60% of the sales. This year, FB was credited with 70% of TNC’s ticket sales because of the huge, huge, I mean HUGE number of tickets sold under our FBUMC roof.

I am hoping that the Rotary will present TNC with a check in the Spring to completely cover the O-Level exams. I will keep you informed.

Tatenda! How can I say a greater “thank you”? (sigh)

- Phil

Coffeehouse Service!

Our next Coffeehouse Worship Service, featuring talented musician Michael Krut and others will be on **Dec. 3 at 6 pm** in



Founders Hall! Enjoy this casual gathering of talented musicians, artists and those interested in a unique worship experience.

Would you like to help with beverages and snacks? See Pastor Tom today! Bring a friend! The Coffeehouse meets on the first Saturday of every month!

Present possibilities, frontiers of faith

Brazilian theologian Rubem Alves called hope “the suspicion that the frontiers of the possible are not determined by the limits of the present.” Who among us doesn’t sometimes imagine our future based solely on present-day obstacles? Even biblical heroes did so.

Abraham and Sarah laughed at God’s promise of a child, seeing only their present circumstance of old age. Only in hindsight could Joseph see how God turned slavery in Egypt into great good.

At first another Joseph, learning his fiancée was pregnant, believed his world was limited to two possibilities: shame Mary publicly or divorce her quietly. But his heart was open to God’s message: “What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. Her son ... will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20-21). How exceedingly far this future must have seemed from the limits of Joseph’s present.

Christmas is a reminder that God calls us all into frontiers of the future we never could have dreamed!

Taize + Service of Light

Our next service of music, scripture, prayers and candlelight will be Wednesday December 21 at 7:30 pm. We will sing a number of gentle, quiet carols, share the beautiful story of Christmas and remember why Jesus came into the world, while recalling those we love who have passed away.

Bring a friend to share in the unique, healing spirit of this service which blends the serenity of Taize with the healing power of the Service of Light!



We Remember

Where's Our Security?

When *A Charlie Brown Christmas* debuted in 1965, religious references were unheard of on television. Yet the show's climax features the Christmas story verbatim. As Linus begins reciting Luke 2, he's clutching his ever-present blue blanket. Yet, as author Jason Soroski points out, Linus drops it right as he utters the words "fear not" (Luke 2:10).



I believe the timing is intentional and that "Peanuts" creator Charles M. Schulz sends a simple, brilliant message. "The birth of Jesus separates us from our fears," Soroski writes. It "frees us from the habits we are unable (or unwilling) to break ourselves. The birth of Jesus allows us to simply drop the false security we have been grasping so tightly, and learn to trust and cling to him instead."

Undaunted

The year just past was wracked with violence, racism and political rancor. We long to fix these problems, but how? We may feel as frustrated as the church board member who spouted, “We’ve already tried prayer. It didn’t work!”



Those words might resonate today, yet things aren’t always what they seem. We can’t see God behind the scenes crafting a new reality, but Scripture promises it. And though our prayers won’t undo earthly death, they surround the grieving

with strength and love. We can’t “solve” sin, but our prayers can bring communities together and spur us to look out for one another.

The Jewish Talmud states, “Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justly now. Love mercy now. Walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.”

In this new year, may we be undaunted in doing what we can. It might not seem like much, but things aren’t always what they seem.

Ignite!

It is with Christians as with burning coals. If these are scattered apart, one after the other, they are easily extinguished. But, when collected together, the fire of one preserves that of the other, and the glowing coals often ignite others that lie near.

August Francke

