

# The Epistle

**ST. PAUL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA**

December, 2013

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## FROM THE PASTOR

No doubt most of you are familiar with Barbara Robinson's delightful book, "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever." Whether as a play, TV program, movie or the book, this story of how the wild Herdman children wreak havoc on the church Christmas pageant and its harried director has brought enjoyment to millions of people since 1972.

Although most of the angst is caused by the antics of the Herdmans, especially Imogene (who smokes cigars during pageant practices), the conflict is made worse by the fact that in the mind of the director, Grace Bradley, the Christmas pageant has to be "just so." The "story" has to be told correctly, with all the angels, shepherds, animals and other assorted characters saying and doing precisely the "right" things.

As you might imagine, it all works out in the end, and the pageant is a great success. But Grace's struggle with "accuracy" brings to mind an issue that many people seem to have trouble dealing with today: the "story" becomes more important than the "event."

Each year at this time we see pageants, nativity scenes, cards, programs of all types and many other depictions of the "Christmas Story." They all pretty much have the same characters in the same positions, as though there is one true way that things just "have" to be. Believe it or not, I have seen heated arguments break out in churches over the placement of certain characters or items in a manger scene or pageant.

But much of what we deem to be "fact" about the birth of the Savior is really the product of legends and imaginations. For example, many if not most pageants and stories have Mary riding to Bethlehem on a donkey. But there is no donkey mentioned in either Matthew or Luke, the two gospels that deal with the birth. Likewise, we always depict (and sing about) three "wise men" or "kings." But the Bible doesn't specify how many there were, just that they brought three types of gifts.

Even some of our beloved hymns and carols cloud the issue. In "The First Noel" we sing that the shepherds "looked up and saw a star." But in Luke's account, the shepherds didn't see a star; they had to be told of the birth by messengers from heaven.

Now, my point in all this is not to belittle or detract from the pageantry of the season. I love the sights and sounds of Christmas, and would never want to be without them. But I do think that if we're not careful we can get caught up in all of that "assumed truth" and miss the "real truth" of what we are celebrating.

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From the Pastor (continued from page 1)

The REAL "Christmas Story," it seems to me, is not in Luke, or Matthew, but in John, a gospel that does not even mention details about Jesus' birth. John says in his opening chapter that "The Word became flesh and lived among us." In Chapter 3 he records Jesus' own explanation: "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life." THAT is what and why we celebrate, and it must never be lost or minimized

So enjoy the traditions, experience them to the fullest. But do not let a beautiful story become a substitute for the real beauty of Christmas: God's unspeakable love which sent His Son into the world, "not to condemn the world, but to redeem it."

I wish a joyous and blessed Christmas time for each of you!

See you in church!

*Lay*



DECEMBER HYMN OF THE MONTH - #12 – "People, Look East"

"People, Look East" was written by Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965) and was first published as "Carol of Advent" in The Oxford Book of Carols, 1928, using the tune from a French Carol popular at the time. It is a strange carol, for while it looks to Advent, and the coming of Christ, it does not use stock religious imagery, but breaks free with new forms. Eleanor Farjeon was London born, and in 1951, became a Roman Catholic. She regarded her faith as "a progression toward which her spiritual life moved rather than a conversion experience". However, her faith was not conventional, and if you are interested in learning about a fascinating spiritual journey, look her up in your search engine. Another of her texts, one which we at St. Paul like to sing – "Morning Has Broken" – grows out of that spiritual journey.

The tune used in our hymnal for "People Look East" is an old English carol dating from the late 1800's. It was originally used for the text of "Shepherds, Shake Off Your Drowsy Sleep."



ANSWER TO NOVEMBER BIBLE KNOWLEDGE QUIZ

**When Jesus told his disciples to beware of the "leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees", to what was he referring?** Leaven, or yeast, is put into bread dough to make it rise. A small amount can affect a large batch of dough. Jesus used this example to show that the wrong teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees were leading many people astray. See Matthew 16:8-12.



**THE WORD PROCLAIMED**

	<u>Sermon topics</u>	<u>Scripture Readers</u>
<b>December 1</b>	<b>“What Child IS This?”</b> Text: Matthew 24:36-44	<b>Janice Woods</b> Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5
<b>December 8</b>	<b>“May I Say Who’s Calling?”</b> Text: Matthew 3:1-12	<b>Diane Taylor</b> Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10
<b>December 15</b>	<b>“Seeing Is Believing”</b> Text: Matthew 11:2-11	<b>Ben Parke</b> Reading: Isaiah 35:1-10
<b>December 22</b>	<b>Choir Cantata</b> Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25	<b>Margaret Tewes</b> Reading: Isaiah 7:10-16
<b>December 24</b> Christmas Eve	<b>“The Gift That Keeps On Giving”</b> Gospel: Luke 2:1-20	<b>Kathy Carroll</b> Readings: Isaiah 9:2-7 Titus 2:11-14
<b>December 29</b>	<b>“Joseph and the Christmas Surprises”</b> Text: Matthew 2:13-23	<b>Jim Tewes</b> Reading: Isaiah 63:7-9



**IN HIS SERVICE**

DECEMBER USHERS

Bronda Coleman  
Frances Koontz  
Liz Miles  
TBA

DECEMBER COMMUNION SERVERS

Sunday, December 1 – Bronda Coleman  
Kathy Carroll  
Liz Miles  
TBA  
Wednesday, December 24- TBA  
(Christmas Eve)



**LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLES**

- December 1 – Louise Coble, Gayle and Katie Lancaster
- 8 – Bronda Coleman, Merrilou Williams
- 15 - Michelle, Megan and Michaela Saunders
- 22 - Dana Reece, Ashley and Grace Wyrick, Kathy Carroll
- 24 - Andy and Diane Taylor



Birthdays This Month

- December 4 – Liz Miles
- 4 – Ann Patzsch
- 8 – Jack Metzler
- 11 – Judy Cook
- 13 – Lisa Boyd
- 15 – Eb Hancock



Anniversaries

- December 17 – Aiden and Jeanetta French
- 18 – Jack and Rosalee Brewer
- 19 – Tony and Dot Jones
- 20 – Ron and Jane Lochbaum

“A wedding anniversary is the celebration of love, trust, partnership, tolerance and tenacity. The order varies for any given year.”

*-Paul Sweeney*



**TEST YOUR BIBLE KNOWLEDGE**

To escape from the king, the angel of the Lord told Jesus’ family to leave and go where?  
Bonus: Where did they live after they returned?



On Sunday, December 22, our choir will present “Breath of Heaven,” a Christmas Cantata by Craig Adams, with recorded orchestra accompaniment. Both original and traditional music are combined to make this a beautiful celebration of the birth of Christ. Be sure to be with us!



**PRAYER CONCERNS:** Luke Finison, Barbara Carter, Marjorie and Jack Herndon, Andy and Emily Bristow, Lucy Smith, Aiden and Jeanetta French, Bob Berthold, the families of Myrna Stell and Earney Walker, Katie Williams, Georgia Giberson, Betty Lawson, John Patzsch, Ron Ervin, Dale and Nita Holder, John Perkins, Joe Miles, Edith Taylor, Gary Houglan, Roger Coleman and family, Mark Griffin, Luke Neal, Carl Hollman, Carolyn Davis, Kevin Tewes, Terri Battle, Zachary Reavis, Joe Herndon, and our own family members in the military: James Lochbaum, Andy Bristow II, Shane Finison, Brian Fountain, Rob Salka, Brandy Zehr, and all who serve in our armed forces.

**“...pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.”**

**James 5:16 (NLT)**

*\* \* \* OUR NOVEMBER RECORD \* \* \**

	<u>Worship Attendance</u>	<u>Stewardship</u>
November 3	50	\$ 3,575.00
10	58	\$ 1,948.00
17	53	\$ 1,290.50
24	45	\$ 2,125.00

**OUR MONTHLY “REGULARS”**



- Sunday School – Sundays, 9:45am
- Worship – Sundays, 11:00am
- Session meets at 12:15pm on the 2nd Sunday of each month (except July)
- Good News Ringers – Sundays, 5:00pm
- Men’s Fellowship – Mondays, 7:30am
- Bell Tones – Mondays, 6:15pm
- Alanon – Mondays, 7:00pm
- Circles normally meet on the 1st Tuesday, times and places announced
- Gad-A-Bouts normally meet on the 4th Tuesday, times and places announced
- BYO Bag Supper – Wednesdays, 5:30pm
- Bible Study – Wednesdays, 6:15pm
- Choir Rehearsal – Wednesdays, 7:30pm

**SAVE THE DATE!!**

The Annual Christmas Covered Dish Dinner and Bell concert is  
Sunday, December 15, 2013!

The Dinner will start at 5:30pm and  
the bells will perform around 6:30pm

The church will provide ham and chicken and drinks.  
The congregation is asked to provide the sides and desserts.

Take a break from the Holiday rush and  
plan to attend and enjoy a night of fellowship and great music.  
Please invite friends and family to join us!

There will be sign-up sheets in the narthex and fellowship hall.

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**THANK YOU**

Thank you church family for the support and love you have shown my family during our most trying time. Thanks for all the prayers, cards, calls and food. We will not forget you.

Love,  
Jan and family

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To our St. Paul Family,  
Once again you amaze us with your calls, cards and mostly your prayers while I was going through my heart problem. Medication and diet are working. December 3<sup>rd</sup> they will shock my heart back into rhythm. Thank all of you.

Our love,  
Joe and Liz



**SUNDAY SCHOOL CHRISTMAS SOCIAL**

The Sunday School classes will meet for a time of fellowship on Sunday morning, December 22 from 9:30 to 10:00am.



## Women's Fellowship

The St. Paul Presbyterian Women's Gathering will be Tuesday, December 3 at 7:00pm in McCann Hall. The circles will meet briefly before the program. Michael Smith will present a program of Christmas music. A history of several Christmas carols will be part of the program.



The St. Paul Presbyterian Women would like to thank all who participated in the Operation Christmas Child shoebox project. Because of their generosity, eighty-two shoeboxes were completed, which is outstanding for a congregation our size.



In October we collected 182 pounds of food for Urban Ministries food cart. The featured items for December are dried beans and Duncan Hines mix.



### **ELDERS INSTALLED**

Newly-elected elders Kathy Carroll and Jean Shuping were installed during our November 24 worship for 3-year terms on the Session beginning January 1, 2014. Our support and prayers are with them as they begin this ministry. Also, special thanks to Elders Margaret Tewes and Janice Woods who will complete their terms of service this December 31. We are grateful for all of these Elders and their ministry to God's people in this place.