



Newsletter Update

December 3-16, 2021

Christmas Eve worship

Celebrate the Lord's nativity Dec. 24 at 7:30

We at FUPC are planning a traditional Christmas Eve worship service for Friday, December 24. The sanctuary worship will begin at **7:30 p.m.** and will include the Bible story, special music, and our annual candle lighting ceremony with the singing of "Silent Night".

For all those who are traveling or unable to come out, our congregation's website will also have a Christmas Eve version of Worship Online. It will be prerecorded so it can be viewed online at any time. Go to www.EdinboroPresby.org/videos to find videos of our special Christmas service and for Sunday worship 24/7. Watching our worship video is another prime way to worship with everyone in your household. (If you would appreciate a DVD version of our video, rather than watching via the internet, please make that request through the church office.)

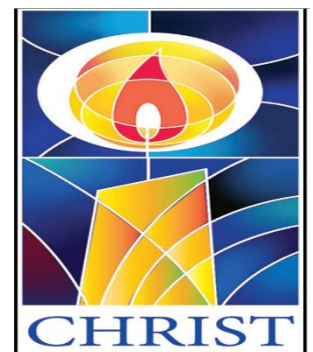
"Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people."

— God's angel, in Luke 2:10-11

How will you pause, prepare, wait, and keep vigil in this season of Advent?

In these four weeks of Advent, we are pilgrims who are sharing a journey together through this season of mystery, longing, and great anticipation. Here are some suggested activities and practices which will help you to spiritually prepare for the "reason for the season". Choose one or more which works for you.

- Open yourself up through the practice of prayer
- Move (and decorate) slowly. Let the surrounding hurriedness slide past you. Christmas will arrive, on time.
- Use the weekly suggestions FUPC provides. Printed versions are in each Sunday bulletin. These are also posted on our EdinboroPresby website.
- Travel the season with a guide. Young blogger Lacy Clark Ellman's "[A Sacred Journey](#)" is a good resource, with podcasts to hear and articles to read.



From the Pastor: Preparation time is a blessed, necessary gift

In various ways, across the years, I usually made a big deal about the start of Advent. I announce “Happy New Year” to everyone who attends worship on the last Sunday of November, still stuffed with turkey and all of those fixin’s. I speak about it in Bible studies and sermons. I write about Advent in church newsletters.

The timing of the Christian calendar isn’t exactly at odds with the secular timeline, but it isn’t lock-step-aligned either. Each year, we remember (literally “re-member”) the life of Jesus Christ as we move from four weeks of preparation to the festive celebration of Christ’s birth, then move on to his baptism and ministry and life-saving passion and life-giving resurrection.

These weeks ahead of Christmas Day are a blessed gift to us. The preparations you and I make are a necessary gift. Sure, there is a tree to decorate and wreaths to hang. Gifts need purchased and wrapped, feasts need organized, holiday parties need planned, and family travels need to be scheduled.

This multitude of tasks don’t just happen in a weekend. We need the time to prepare, and we do well to reserve the energy to carry out the work. What is true in practical logistics is also true of spiritual realities: **we need a season of preparation for our souls too.**

It developed across multiple centuries, but the Advent season as we have it now is exactly what you and I can use ahead of Christmas – the Biblical celebration and the modern-day activities. Unlike the people who expected (or at least *hoped for*) a Messiah in the “BC” time frame – before Christ – you and I know exactly when the Savior’s birth happens. The long-ago prophets didn’t. The people of God after the time of Malachi’s prophecies did not have a “Countdown to Christmas”. Mary and Joseph had a little bit of notice – nine months or so, but not a certain schedule. Jesus’ earthly uncle Zechariah had his own nine-month notice about his own son and less than that knowing that Jesus was on the way. The shepherds had NO warning that Christmas had arrived until the skies were full of that era’s version of a holiday light-and-music extravaganza.

No notice. No planning calendars. No overfilled schedule on the way to 12/25.

We DO know that Christmas is coming. Exactly when. We count it down in “shopping days”, and we also carry whatever excitement and dread and exhaustion and anticipation accompanies this annual journey of time.

We might do well though, to remember how Uncle Zechariah spent his pre-Christmas time. Sure it was enforced upon him by God (*read his story in chapter one of Luke’s gospel*) but he silently awaited the birth of his son who would become the primary forerunner of Jesus. John the Baptizer would announce our Lord’s identity and upcoming ministry. John’s father, Zechariah, spent those months of anticipation in silence, able to reflection on God’s power, on God’s promises, and on God’s interaction with the people.

Please don’t let your own December be so full that you have no time to think or to do. We don’t need to spend the entire length of a pregnancy in silence, but you and I would do well to step back from whatever frenzy seems “normal” and silently wait. Turn off the TV and the devices and the noise and the self-talk...then reflect on what Christmas is all about. Linus Van Pelt did that in “A Charlie Brown Christmas”. Mary the Mother of God was famous for sitting and quietly pondering all these things in her heart. (*Her story is in Luke 2.*) We can step back from whatever distractions keep us from reminders of how profound it is that the God of the universe wanted to come and dwell with us.

Use your Advent well — Prepare for the hosting and the cooking and the gift exchanges. Yes, stay sane and simple with all of that. Use your Advent even better — Invest the time and attention and focus and energy it takes to remember that Jesus has come into the world. Jesus has come into our lives. Yes, Jesus has a Second Coming on the way on a timeframe which we do not and cannot know. Yet, this meek and mild Savior is already here – ready to meet us, comfort us, empower us, and guide us.

ADVENT is a foot firmly planted against our calendar and cultural new year, announcing itself a month early and proclaiming God both on-the-way and already-present. It is a new year already playing with time, simultaneously saying “be patient” and “it’s already here.”

-- Eric Wall, FPC Asheville, NC

“Sing we now of Christmas...”

Come caroling with us next Sunday, December 12

FUPC’s annual Christmas caroling has been scheduled for December 12, and we hope that adults and teens and children will join with this group to bring happy delight to those on our little tour. We will gather at the church building at 5:00, organize the process, and travel about to Edinboro Manor and the homes of some of our members and friends. We will wrap up by 7:00, then those who wish to extend the evening a little bit further can go out for supper together.

Want to sing? Please let us know at sanctuary worship this Sunday or next that you would like to participate. (If you have a preference of riding or driving, please say so.)

Want a visit? If you or someone you know would like to have our caroling group to stop by your place that evening, please call or e-mail the church office. We will arrange as many stops as we can.

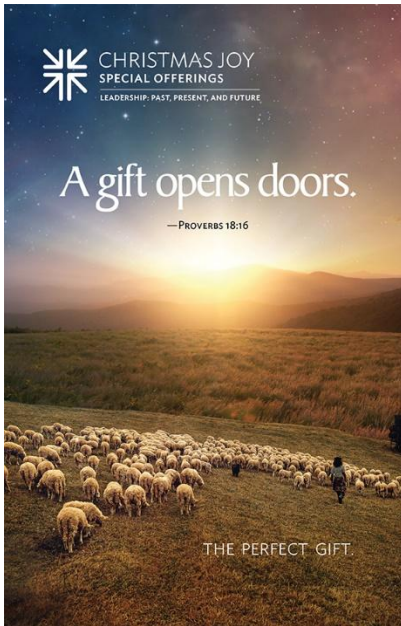
“Breaking bread together” – a simple meal shared with college students who were on Edinboro University campus over the holiday

Members of FUPC enjoyed meeting several of the international students attending Edinboro University. We had the pleasure of providing a soup lunch to those students who remained on the EUP campus over the Thanksgiving break. Delicious homemade soup, crackers, and homemade chocolate chip cookies filled the take-out bags for students from EUP’s tennis team living far away from their homes in Taiwan, Germany, Brazil, Spain, Pakistan, and Belgium. Thank you to both the volunteers and the students who participated, and to Katie Spagenberg, EUP’s Manager of Global Education, who organized the event.

This occasion on Saturday, November 27, revived a long-standing Edinboro Presbyterian tradition of connecting with students on campus during holiday breaks and sharing meals. FUPC was one of several local churches to provide such a meal during Thanksgiving weekend.

-- Sue Johnson





 **CHRISTMAS JOY**
SPECIAL OFFERINGS
CHURCH LEADERS—PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

“A Gift Opens Doors” — Proverbs 18:16

The Perfect Gift

In the story of God, as we tell it, there is a barrier that exists between the Created world and its Creator. A wall. Sin, we say, separates us from God, and separation from God is unbearable.

And our story goes on to say that God, seeing that we had no hope in ourselves of getting over, or through or around what separates us, offered us a gift in Jesus Christ who opens a door — a door we could not open ourselves.

What a gift!

But the story goes on to say that Jesus is the *perfect* gift; not only opening a door but coming through it. Our story says God is with us.

In Jesus, God joined with humanity, pointing the way to the end of our separation. And in his life, death and resurrection, so our story of God goes, Jesus *is* the door, now standing open. The giving continues because God is with us, still — and always.

Because being with us is part of God’s story, being with others is part of our call.

The **Christmas Joy Offering** opens doors of opportunity for the leaders who are shaped and supported through our gifts — doors that lead to hopeful futures for young people at Presbyterian-related schools and colleges. Scholarships will be used to equip leaders who will guide communities of color throughout the generation ahead. Our gifts also open doors that lead to relief for church workers and their families when emergency needs arise.

Proverbs, a book of wisdom sayings, states that **it’s a person’s gift that opens doors**. As we give generously to the Christmas Joy Offering, we seek to not only meet needs, but to meet people, to come through the door that generosity opens. We open the door to celebrate “God with us!” We open the door with each and every student who will soon inspire and lead the world. We open the door with each and every church worker who helps us share God’s story with the world.

The story of God, as we tell it, is not about a barrier, but about a gift. It’s not about the separation, but about the gift of “being with.” Please give generously to the Christmas Joy Offering, in celebration of God’s perfect gift to us. Give because it brings us together, to open doors of relief and opportunity and to relationships that are part of God’s story, a part of God’s perfect gift to us.

Let us pray:

God, with us, we are grateful for your perfect gift, Jesus Christ. May we learn, through your open door to us, to be open to others and offer ourselves to those in need. Amen.

At Edinboro Presbyterian, as we do each December, we participate in our church’s national CHRISTMAS JOY OFFERING. You may make your gift at Sunday worship on any of the first three Sundays in December. You may also arrange to have a check sent to: FUPC, P.O. Box 789, Edinboro PA 16412. Either use the special “CJO” envelopes or mark that your check or cash is for “Christmas Joy”.

Congratulations – and **thank you** – to our officers-elect

Sue Payne and **Jan Zeart** were recently elected to be elders on our Session for new three-year terms. At the November 21 meeting, the congregation also elected **JoAnne Austin**, **Margo Roberts** and **Jan Schulz** for our Board of Deacons, also for three-year terms.

These officers-elect will meet with current leaders for a period of orientation and preparation for their God-given callings: elders carry out ministries of governance and discernment, and deacons lead us and teach us ministries of compassion, care and service. The formal installation ceremony will be scheduled on a convenient date after the first of the year.

FUPC will have one vacancy among our elders starting in 2022. Anyone who wishes to make a nomination (including a self-nomination) is encouraged to speak with Rick Walker or Sue Payne.



Express your gratitude to God and your congregation with a gift to your church.

It's a season that is full of wonder and reflection. It is a time that you may be grateful for the blessings that God has bestowed upon you. This may inspire you to make a charitable contribution to your church before year-end.

Each person's financial situation is different and you will want to consider the type of assets and the gift plan that will be most effective for your situation. Below you can find a brief overview of your options. You are encouraged to speak to your financial advisor as they can help determine the most effective type of assets and/or gift plan for your situation.

As always, the planning specialists at the Presbyterian Foundation are available to answer your questions regarding the giving opportunities we provide. Find guidance at www.presbyterianfoundation.org or call 800-858-6127 for a confidential, no-obligation consultation.

TYPES OF ASSETS FOR YOUR GIFT

CASH: When you itemize your tax deductions, gifts of cash may be used to eliminate federal income tax on up to 60% of your adjusted gross income. You may be eligible for both federal and state income tax savings.

APPRECIATED SECURITIES: Using long-term appreciated securities for your charitable giving (such as stocks, bonds, and mutual funds) can provide you with additional tax savings. Donors do not realize long-term capital gains upon making these gifts. Market value at the time of the gift, rather than your cost basis, may be reported as an itemized deduction. If you donate securities, please call 800-858-6127 for further information. (If you wish to apply this gift during the current calendar year, please start the process to donate securities by December 17 to allow enough time for securities gifts to be processed.)

RETIREMENT PLANS: Donors 70 1/2 years old and older can make qualified charitable distributions (QCD) directly from their IRA to charity. QCDs can lead to tax benefits, such as having the amount of the gift count towards an individual's required minimum distribution while being excluded from income for federal income tax purposes. Please note that the special tax treatment granted under this tax law provision does not apply to gifts or additions to donor-advised funds. Call the Presbyterian Foundation for more details.

GIFT PLANS TO CONSIDER

ENDOWMENT: The funds are used to create a memorial or a legacy gift that will support to your church in perpetuity.

DONOR-ADVISED FUND: Combine all your giving into one fund and you may receive an immediate tax deduction when you open the fund. You can then recommend grants from the fund throughout the year to your local congregation and all the ministries or charities that are close to your heart.

DECEMBER 31: MAKE ALL GIFTS

To ensure you receive your applicable tax deductions for this year, gifts must be received on or before December 31.



Order your poinsettias for our worship space

You still have a few days to order poinsettias to decorate FUPC for Christmas Week. Each plant is \$10, and donors can designate your poinsettia in memory or in honor of loved ones or simply “given to the glory of God”.

Thanks for helping with our “Giving Tree” efforts

Dozens of teenagers and children in our area will receive special gifts at Christmas, thanks to the generosity of the people of Edinboro Presbyterian Church. Thank you for taking the gift tags from our “Giving Tree”. The items you bring back will be distributed to families through the Edinboro Food Pantry and the participants in the Hermitage House program. If you would like to contribute toward these gifts, but without needing to do the shopping, you may send a check marked “Christmas” to the FUPC Deacons Fund.

Access options provide more people the ability to worship here

Accessibility issues have seen a greater awareness in many areas of our culture, and we at FUPC do quite a lot to bring down barriers which might otherwise keep some people from participating fully in the life of this church. Here are some of the proactive steps we have here to enhance accessibility for all people:

The double doors at the front of the building provide an accessible entrance.

Our movable sanctuary chairs provide flexibility to move seating around, for wheelchair users and those who sit with them

We have increased the number of chairs with arms which provides additional support and confidence to people who may have challenges in standing up, staying standing, or sitting back down. One of our sanctuary chairs was modified by volunteer woodworker Art Smaltz. modified by volunteer woodworker Art Smaltz. modified by volunteer woodworker Art Smaltz. As an experiment, we have also moved some other chairs with arms into the congregational area to help more people. (If you would like to use one of these put would prefer it to have it moved to a different location in the sanctuary, please ask an usher.)

Our sound system provides for personal hearing-assist receivers which worshipers can use to amplify the speaking parts and music. New earphones are provided to each individual.

For people whose health, work schedules or other circumstances keep them away from Sunday worship, we offer a worship option on our website.

First United Presbyterian Church

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