
DECEMBER 2021
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The Messenger

St. John's United Church of Christ



Message from the Pastor

My friends,

The character of Zechariah figures prominently in the story of Advent. He is introduced to us in verse five, chapter one of Luke's Gospel: "*In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah...*" We learn of his wife, Elizabeth, who was descended from Aaron, brother of Moses. And we learn that while the people of faith of Israel wait on his arrival to make his incense offering in the sanctuary, he was overwhelmed and made mute by an angelic presence, come to announce to him that he and his wife would conceive and bear a child.

Zechariah and Elizabeth had resigned themselves to childlessness. They had entered their senior years and no longer entertained such hopes. Yet his faith practice enabled him to hear a Divine word through his assumptions: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah... Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son...”

His silencing was the result of his expression of disbelief at the angel’s announcement. It was not until after the birth of their son, John, that he broke his silence: “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them...” In this story of our faith history, at least, it appears that a period of silence overcame the despair, resignation, and hopelessness he felt... with surprise!

The closing passage of Psalm 46 makes the case for silence under different circumstances, when the world and all of civilization seemed to be falling apart:

*“Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.”
The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.”*

Today, incredible events in the world, the nation, even this city, may leave us feeling fearful and sad, hopeless even. A feeling of barren-ness may lead to resignation in the church. Yet as a community of faith, we have these stories that yield valuable insights into the movement of the spirit through it all and always.

Being still, and silence, are essential practices that open all of our senses to the Divine presence and movement through all of the seasons of our lives.

This Advent, I encourage you to be still, and to make silence your practice. At least part of each day, stop and take a breath, and listen. You, too, may be surprised by what is being revealed to you and among us all.

Bless the day!
Pastor Tom

From the Church Council President

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid: for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." Mark 2:10-11

Happy Advent! In these four weeks leading up to Christmas, we have the opportunity for preparation and anticipation, celebration and the need to exercise patience. We prepare, in various ways, to celebrate the birth of Jesus, and I encourage you to see the notices elsewhere in this "Messenger" for upcoming events at St. John's. In addition to our Sunday worship services, which include the lighting of the Advent candles, these include the Christmas Cabaret on December 11th and 12th; the Fellowship Lunch on December 16th; the Christmas Tea after worship on December 19th; the Christmas Eve service at 9 PM on December 24th and a Christmas Day communion service at 10 AM which will be conducted by Redeemer Anglican Church in the St. John's sanctuary.

Amidst all the preparations of special meals, the anticipation of getting together with friends and families, and the exchange of cards and gifts, I hope that we will all find some time to be still and listen for the voice of God. During Advent we are really preparing for events on two dates. The first is December 25th, when we celebrate Christ's birth. The second one is the second, post-resurrection coming of Christ, when all who believe in him will be raised to new life. Our waiting for the first advent, Christmas, prepares us to wait for the second one, a bit like a dress rehearsal. That date is, of course, unknown. As Jesus is quoted, "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. (Mark 13:32-36). So we must be patient, but we must also be ready.

Perhaps during Advent this is also a good time to reflect on what we hope and expect for St. John's in the future, and also plan to be prepared to consider the unexpected. The ancient people of Israel were expecting a Messiah who would be a mighty king, a warrior who would lead them in battle to overthrow their Roman oppressors. Instead, they got (and many rejected) the spiritual leader of a religious movement that would come to influence, if not militarily conquer, the then-known world, but not in the way they expected. I believe that St. John's has an important mission to fulfill as part of God's plan, and a bright future if we can discern and perform that mission. Let us be open to where God and the Holy Spirit lead us, both personally and as a church.

With wishes for a happy Advent, and a very Merry and Blessed Christmas,

Jeff

Jeffrey W. Jacobs
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(202) 361-9887

December Devotional

As we enter Advent with both reflection on the birth of Jesus and Christ's return as well as the enjoyment of the holiday season, imagine if you knew this would be your last one. We all know the future is not promised, but most of us don't know when our time here on Earth will come to an end. I have a dear friend who will celebrate this Advent season knowing it is most likely her last. I try to imagine how I would approach each day but I honestly don't know what I would do. I do know that unshakeable faith is most visible during times like she is going through. Though there are many things that are uncertain, our faith should not be one of them.

Joshua 1:9

'Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.'

For those who endure the pain of accepting the process of dying and those who are grieving with them, we look for grace, mercy and peace. No matter what we face, we can take solace that God will stand with us. We will not be alone.

John 14:1

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me.'

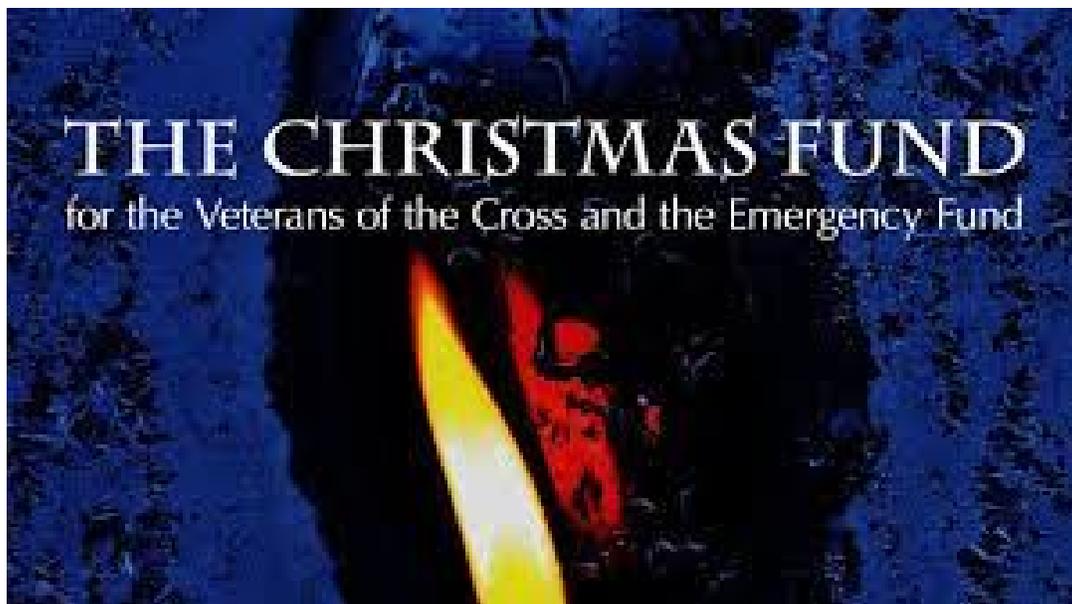
As you reflect on the importance of Advent in your life, take an extra moment. Would you do anything differently if you knew it would be your last?

Terri Weaver

December Mission of the Month: the UCC Christmas Fund

The December Mission of the Month is the United Church of Christ Christmas Fund.

The Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy, lay employees of the UCC, and their surviving spouses for over 100 years. The Fund provides emergency grants, supplements health insurance premiums and gives "Thank You" gifts at Christmas to those who serve the church and are facing financial difficulties. Your donation is greatly appreciated by those faithful "Veterans of the Cross" who are in need.



St. John's Giving Tree ends December 5th

The Holiday season will soon be upon us. In the past few months, we have been donating small gifts to different local non-profits, and this month we will be asking for your donations to the Salvation Army Toy Drive. In the Richmond area there are over 4,000 children whose only toys will come from the Salvation Army. All toys must be brand new and un-wrapped.

The Salvation Army is an integral part of the Christian Church, and you are all familiar with the bellringers during the holidays. The toys will need to be purchased during November and delivered to the Salvation Army by December 6th. The toys will be delivered to the children before Christmas. Please bring them to the church and put them under the Giving Tree; if you cannot do so, please contact Betsy Bighinatti (at 804-502-1007).

Below are some toy suggestions from the Salvation Army:

LOL dolls	Sports equipment/balls	Roller skates
Barbie	Gaming headsets	Skateboards
Dress-up clothes	Nail kits	Board games
Legos / blocks	Make -up kits for children	Costumes for Boys/Girls
Hot Wheels/ Cars	Science kits/STEM Kits	Ring Light
Marvel figures	Art and crafts	Baby Alive
Paw patrol	Coloring books/ crayons	Remote control Cars
Disney Princess	Hot Wheels/Trucks	Miscellaneous Toys

Thank You for Supporting St John's Giving Tree

December Announcements



St. John's Community Players
Present

We Need A Little Christmas Cabaret



St. John's UCC 503 Stuart Circle, Richmond, VA 23220

Saturday, December 11 @ 7:00 pm

Sunday, December 12 @ 3:00 pm

Tickets \$15 include dessert buffet

**Dessert Buffet, Coffee, and Hot Cranberry Apple Cider
will be served during intermission.**

Wine will be available for purchase.

Call the Box Office to Make Your Reservations 762-4870

or pay on-line at

stjohnsrichmond.org (use the Tickets/Events/Donate button at bottom)

Proof of Covid-19 Vaccination is Required

Wearing of masks is encouraged when moving about the building.

**Free Parking is located adjacent to the church in the alley
and in the parking deck of the new apartment building.**

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Wednesday Night Bible Study Fellowship — Study of Genesis

We have resumed our study of the Book of Genesis, on Zoom.

All are welcome to join other members of our blessed community to study the Word. Major themes, involving a fresh look at some very familiar Bible stories, include creation and creationism, the rebellion of humankind and the Flood, and how the experiences of Abraham, Esau, Jacob and Joseph speak to Christians seeking to live responsibly in our world today.

If you have any questions about the study, or would like to register, please contact one of our co-facilitators, Rev. Tom Gerstenlauer, at (413) 378-0828 or revtgerst@gmail.com, or Scott Siefert at (804) 350-0826, or sesiefert@gmail.com. It's not too late to join this study!

Committee Meetings after worship this Sunday

Immediately after church on Sunday, November 5th, both the Missions & Outreach and the Congregational Life & Care Committees will hold brief meetings to discuss future activities.

Pastoral Care

Our Interim Pastor, The Rev. Tom Gerstenlauer, is available to provide spiritual support and pastoral care to our congregation. He can be reached at revtgerst@gmail.com or (413) 378-0828.

Fellowship Lunch on Thursday, December 16th

The December Fellowship Lunch will be held on Thursday, December 16th, at 12:30 pm, at Zorba's Restaurant, 9068 West Broad Street in Richmond. Please contact Beth Stiegler at (804) 475-7340 or bsstiegler@verizon.net to reserve your place.

December Announcements

Christmas Tea December 19th

We will have a potluck Christmas Tea after church on Sunday, December 19th, in the Fellowship Hall. The Congregational Life & Care Committee will provide liquid refreshments, and everyone is encouraged to bring a plate with their favorite Christmas treat to share, either sweet or savory.

Church Finance Update - end of year tax considerations

As we enter the last month of the year, church finances seem to be on track to finish with a lower than projected deficit, largely due to not having been in the church building for the first part of the year and being able to save on cleaning and utility expenses during that time.

We are most grateful to all who continued to pay down their pledges while we were only having worship services on Zoom, as well as those who have been supporting the church since in-person worship resumed on July 11th and continues on Zoom as well. This would be a good time to bring your pledged contributions up to date; if you need to find out how much you have already donated please contact our Office Administrator, Melissa McKenney, at office@stjohnsrichmond.org. Also, if you have donated supplies or services to the church for which you would like to receive in-kind credit for tax purposes, please get your donation forms in as soon as possible, but in any case by the end of December so that we can reflect those donations on your end-of-year tax reporting form.

Ordinarily, people who choose to take the standard deduction on their tax returns cannot claim a deduction for their charitable contributions. But a temporary law change, affecting only last year and this year, enables taxpayers to claim a deduction of up to \$300 (for individuals) or \$600 (for married individuals filing joint returns) for contributions to qualifying charities (such as St. John's), even if they take the standard deduction. You may want to keep that in mind as you make your end-of-year donation decisions. Also, for those who are over age 70 1/2 and need to make minimum required distributions (RMDs) from a traditional IRA account, if you make those distributions through a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) you can avoid paying income tax on it. Finally, it can be advantageous to make a charitable contribution of appreciated stock to a Section 501(c)(3) organization (such as St. John's) to avoid paying capital gains tax and obtain a tax deduction. You should of course consult with your accountant or tax advisor, but if you would like any additional information on these suggestions, other tax-advantaged ways to donate, or including St. John's in your will, please feel free to contact Jeff Jacobs or Jeff Hetzer.

December Announcements

Pledge Campaign Update

Thank you to the members and friends of St. John's who as of December 1st had submitted pledges for 2022 amounting to just over \$60,000, four-fifths of the way to our budgeted goal of \$75,000 that was adopted unanimously by the Congregation on November 21st. As a reminder, financial support for all of the ministries, missions, services and activities at St. John's comes from several sources, the most important of which is based on annual pledges from church members and friends. During this time of Interim Ministry, your faithful financial support is especially important, not only to keep our ministries strong, but to signal to prospective candidates for our Senior Minister position that this congregation is committed to being a vital presence in the community and in the world.

By now you should have received a pledge card on which to indicate your interest in volunteering your time and talents at the church in various ways, as well as to record your financial pledge for the coming year. Pledge cards may be turned in at the church office, dropped into the offering plate, mailed to the church (at 503 Stuart Circle, Richmond, VA 23220), or you may email or call in your pledge to Jeff Jacobs at jwjacobs9@gmail.com or (202) 361-9887. Also contact Jeff if you have misplaced or never received a pledge card. Please remember that a new pledge card is needed even if you pledged last year. Many of our church members and friends donate generously without pledging, for which we are grateful. But even if you aren't sure how much you may be able to donate, it would be helpful for planning purposes to know how much you intend to give, with the understanding that pledges may always be amended if circumstances change.

Your generosity is greatly appreciated.

December Announcements

Sunday Parking

Although Sunday parking is still permitted along the Monument Avenue median strip, there are parking spots marked "CH" and reserved for St. John's along the alley just north of the church off of Lombardy Street and inside the adjacent apartment building parking garage.

Sunday Volunteers Needed!

With our return to in-person worship, we once again need volunteers to prepare simple refreshments for post-worship fellowship time and greeters to distribute bulletins and welcome members and visitors. Please contact Richard Bighinatti (at grandude42@aol.com or (804) 502-1005) if you'd like to be a greeter, and Betsy Bighinatti (at grandude42@aol.com or (804) 502-1007) to sign up to provide refreshments.

In Sympathy

Our Interim Pastor, The Rev. Tom Gerstenlauer, is available to provide spiritual support and pastoral care to our congregation. He can be reached at revtgerst@gmail.com or (413) 378-0828. As you may know, Pastor Tom is serving on a three-quarters time basis, and this month will be unavailable from November 8th through the 14th; during that time please contact the church office at (804) 358-9291 with any pastoral emergencies.

In Sympathy

We extend our sympathy and condolences to the family and friends of Robert Wing, who died on November 29, 2021. He was the former husband of Chris Wing and co-parent and co-grandparent of their children and grandchildren. May he know the peace of God's eternal rest.

December 2021 Calendar

Wednesday, December 1st, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, December 2nd, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee meeting by Zoom

Sunday, December 5th, 10 a.m. - Communion Sunday, with meetings of Mission & Outreach and Congregational Life & Care Committees after worship

Wednesday, December 8th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, December 9th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee meeting by Zoom

Sunday, December 12th, 10 a.m. - Worship in-person and by Zoom

Monday, December 13th, 6:30 p.m. - Church Council Meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, December 15th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, December 16th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Meeting by Zoom

Thursday, December 16th, 12:30 p.m. - Fellowship Lunch at Zorba's Restaurant, 9068 West Broad Street, Richmond

Sunday, December 19th, 10 a.m. - Worship in-person and by Zoom

Sunday, December 19th, after worship - Christmas Tea

Wednesday, December 22nd, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, December 23rd, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Meeting by Zoom

Friday, December 24th - 9 p.m. - St. John's Christmas Eve Service

Saturday, December 25th - 10 a.m. - Redeemer Anglican Church Christmas Day Communion Service at St. John's (all welcome)

Sunday, December 26th, 10 a.m. - Worship in-person and by Zoom

Wednesday, December 29th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, December 30th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Meeting by Zoom

December Birthdays

December 2	Robert Wieckmann
December 2	Ulysses Hall
December 3	Jeff Hetzer
December 6	Melissa McKenney
December 7	Anita Sharpenstein
December 9	Chris Burnette
December 14	Eric Hetzer



St. John's United Church of Christ

St. John's United Church of Christ is a diverse community forming a united congregation, seeking to grow our faith, share it with others, and serve God's people wherever the need is present. We are living God's love and all are invited!!!

An Open and Affirming Congregation

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