



December 2020

Minister's Message
Rev. Dr. Mark Boyea



The Newsletter of the First Parish Church Congregational
The Church Bell

Friends...

Hi...

Minister, theologian and author, John Killinger, tells a story about a Christmas shop that caught his eye one past summer. Even though Christmas was still six months away, the shop was packed with items. There were crèche scenes from all over the world; elves and Santas; sleighs and reindeer of every size; bells and music boxes; angels and drummer boys; stars and snowmen. A loudspeaker broadcast a constant stream of carols. It was infectious, Killinger continues, even in the summertime.

Then, he says, he noticed it – a small sign in a place where it would be hard to miss. The sign said, “*Christmas Spoken Here*”.

There is no better slogan for us in the Christian spiritual tradition, Killinger proposes. And not just at this time of year, but in any season.

Hard to argue, since what we commemorate in this season, during Advent and then Christmas, is the embodiment of God’s essence coming into the world as one of us. Coming into the world in a way that we can see and hear. In a way that we can touch. In a way that we can personally identify with. In a way that is neither hypothetical nor theoretical, but is instead real and relatable. In a way that we can aspire to emulate.

Because of that, we are called to speak the language of Christmas year round – people who speak the language of hope, joy, peace and love; of compassion, justice and forgiveness to the world in every season.

That is our “*spiritual language*” as Christians. It is our true “native tongue”.

Perhaps then, we might consider treating this Advent and Christmas as a “refresher course” – as a time to brush up on our “spiritual language” skills.

Continued...

As a time to practice speaking Christmas in a way that can be better heard and understood in a nation in which so many people seem to have become unable and even unwilling to want to speak to each other. Perhaps, instead, we might try speaking a little less in the language of political party, or ideology, or geography, and a little more in the language of Christmas.

Individually and together, let's be a place where "*Christmas is Spoken Here*" as a first language.

Blessings,
Mark

WORSHIP NOTES

While we could not be together in person on November 22 for *Thanksgiving Sunday*, it was still a day of great celebration at First Parish. Not only did we commemorate Thanksgiving, we also blessed the financial pledges we are offering to God and each other in response to this year's Annual Fund Drive. And as if that wasn't enough, due to the loving and diligent efforts of Rebecca Shrimpton, it was also Jazz Sunday. Rebecca, Paul Knox, and guest musicians Carolyn Wilkins and FPCC's own Brian Price blessed us with several inspiring jazz pieces throughout the Worship time.

The following Sunday, November 29, was the start of the sacred season of Advent. This year's Message theme is "*The Family Christmas Tree*". Throughout the four Sundays of Advent, we will look at a character from the Bible who is in some way a part of Jesus' ancestry. We will consider how aspects of their spiritual journeys speak to us now as members of the same spiritual family tree.

Finally, we continue to work through the details for our first "*Virtual Christmas Eve*" celebrations. At 5pm on Thursday, December 24, Jeanne Westcott, our new Director of Youth and Children's Ministry, and I will offer a special "Christmas Story Time" on Facebook Live for children.

Then, at 7pm, our Worship team will present a time of hymns, solos, Scripture and Dramatic Reflection for all ages. Expect a special musical wrinkle or two as well! Lastly, on Wednesday, December 16, at 7pm, the Prayer and Meditation session scheduled for that evening will be devoted to a "*Silent Nights*" service. This time, which in other places is often identified as "*Blue Christmas*", is meant to acknowledge and reflect on the fact that the Advent and Christmas Season is also a time of current and past loss and struggle for many people. Please consider dropping in on this special sacred time.

CHURCH OFFICE ACCESSIBILITY

The Church Office continues to be open during regular hours if you need to see Nancy Klebart or Mark. We do ask that you call or email ahead if possible, wear a mask, and practice social distancing while there. **The Church Office will be closed on December 24 and 25.**

In addition, **Mark's "Virtual Office Hours"** continue each Wednesday from 11am-2pm, unless other obligations require moving it to a different day on a particular week. **There will be no Virtual Office Hours the week of December 28.**

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Wednesday Prayer and Meditation for December will take place on December 2 and 16 from 7-7:45pm via Zoom. As mentioned in the **Worship Notes** section, the December 16 time will be devoted to a *"Silent Nights"* service.

For December, Bible Study will take place from 4-5:15 on:

Thursday, December 3
 Thursday, December 10
 Thursday, December 17
 Wednesday, December 23

There will be no Bible Study the week after Christmas.

Spiritual Studies Units in December

"Isn't There Anyone Who Knows What Christmas Is All About?!"

Tuesdays: December 1, 8, 15 and 22
 7:00-8:15pm
 Via Zoom

The Jesus we prepare for the arrival of during Advent and then welcome at Christmas is often referred to in a popular sign and bumper sticker as, *"The Answer"*. But what are the questions? With a title borrowed from the question Linus asks near the end of the classic special, "A Charlie Brown Christmas", this four-week Advent unit will explore some of the vital questions that characters in the Bible ask regarding Jesus, looking to understand what they were searching for in their time and how those questions might speak to us now.

Join us for any or all of these evenings during this sacred time of year.

You will continue to receive details on times and how to participate in all our offerings from the Church Office either on the day of or day before each gathering.

ADVENT MESSAGE THEME

Throughout the four Sundays of Advent this year, we will take a look at “*The Family Christmas Tree*”. Each week, we will look at a character from Jesus’ ancestry. We will explore aspects of their spiritual journeys, and how their lives speak to us now as members of that same family tree.

December Birthdays

12/01	LARSEN, JOLENE	221 TURNPIKE RD MONTAQUE MA 01351	jolene.larsen@gmail.com
12/15	POTTER, HOLLY	1101 HEIGHTS AT CAPE ANN GLOUC.	hollyjeanpotter@gmail.com
12/16	SEITZINGER, NICHOLAS	17 UNIVERSITY LN MANCHESTER	
12/19	POTTER, MARK	15 NORWOOD AVE MANCHESTER	markpotter555@gmail.com
12/20	NICKLESS, GEORGE	124 BRIDGE ST MANCHESTER	georgejune@comcast.net
12/24	THOMSIN, ANNEKE	140 SCHOOL ST MANCHESTER	
12/28	STEFANOVICH, LILY	61 FOREST ST MANCHESTER	anapeter2005@yahoo.com
12/30	DEMOURA, DAVID	47 LEXINGTON AVE GLOUCESTER	ddemoura@comcast.net

Book Group

Our Book Group is not discussing a new book in December. We are instead sharing tips, recipes, classes and ideas to help us all make the Winter season more enjoyable.

Please join us **Monday, December 28 at 7:30 PM**. The link to the Zoom meeting goes out by email the day before or day of the meeting.

Contact Mary Ellen to find out how to send in your tip at 978-500-0018 or cook.maryellen7@gmail.com.

Our January book will be *Olive, Again* by Elizabeth Strout.

We meet **Monday, January 25 at 7:30 PM** via Zoom.



Director of Youth and Children's Ministry [Jeanne Westcott](#)

Best Practices in Faith Formation: Part 2

In the previous installment of this piece, I presented two pivotal concepts that are the foundation for the “how-to’s” of Christian Education. The first, was that all children are experiencing God, right now, regardless of what we do or do not. The second, was that living with a question is a welcome situation and one that adults will need to befriend to effectively guide the spiritual formation of our charges. These two concepts, to support the efforts and direction of Faith Formation programming, must first be merged to present a new model for our child and youth leaders as partners with our kids. We will minister as guides who walk together on the path of discipleship. This model of teacher serves the idea that children are already members of the kingdom of God *as children and that they need not reach an age of reason or accountability to effectively walk this path.*

So how do we serve the children and youth who are these wonderfully creative agents of the world, made in the image of God, ready to walk the path that holds no age restrictions? We walk with them and share with them in child-honoring ways. These ways include the knowledge that transcendent experiences of faith do not always translate into words. Given that, as guides we need to provide a variety of avenues for disciples-in-training to express their experiences and pose their questions. Words alone aren't going to do the trick.

The lecture model, appealing to the cognitive exclusively, is the least effective learning method in our repertoire. In fact, when children listen alone, it is determined that they remember a mere 10 percent of what has been imparted. When we add visual learning to the mix, including pictures, music and maps, the children's retention increases to 60 percent. Include hands-on experiences such as singing, building, competitions, puppets, and active research, and the student retains 90 percent of the intended concept. Experiential learning honors the way young minds learn and allows guides to share their own experiences of doubt and confidence, trial and resolution, negotiation, and compromise, as they work on any given project, side-by-side. Equally important is for guides and teachers to open themselves to receiving the stories of God that children share, as they choose to, as we respect the individuality of the child's experiences while affirming them as real and legitimate members of the faith community. As the children teach us, they learn even more, as do we!

Recalling the words of Jesus, “I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children” (Mt. 11:25). May we all minister *while together, we disciples do as was intended by our Creator: strive to be ever more His Image.*

In the last installment of this piece next month we will examine a plan for intentional faith formation to include all seekers from birth onward. Until then, look for God in every face, and don't forget the mirror!

Jeanne Westcott, DYCM

CE in the Land of Pandemic Restrictions

The dedicated folks of Christian Education want all children and teens to know that while we can not be together physically in groups of joy-filled Christian fellowship, we are all together in spirit, joined through the simple mandate given so long ago: to Love God and to Love Others!

What better way to show our love than to cut and tie fabric? The Fleece Blanket Project, to benefit those in need through Action, Inc of Gloucester is in full swing with enthusiastic participation. Safeguards and sanitizing always, kits have been distributed, blankets are getting created and families are chatting about those living under circumstances less than ideal. As we approach Advent, we tie each knot and remember the less than ideal conditions a young Jesus was found in. We are not just creating a cozy gift. We are recognizing the divine spark in both the givers and the recipients. Holy, Holy, indeed.



Families are also invited to share in the glory of this Advent season by participating in a download package created by *Illustrated Ministries*. The package will come via email with weekly enhancement ideas and challenges to share with your family no matter the configuration. All adults? No worries. Just say "Yes". To RSVP to this unique opportunity, contact Jeanne Westcott via email at Jeanne.fpchurch@gmail.com Downloads full of activities, ideas and devotionals will arrive to your email for the first Sunday in Advent, November 29. Each week of Advent is represented in one download. So simple to remember The Reason for the Season!

In addition, if you have not spoken with Jeanne directly, please feel free to contact her at 413-328-4802 to tell her about your hopes and dreams for Sunday School and Youth Fellowship. Dream big! Program offering decisions will be made with community input so let's chat.

Daily Lectionary Committee

Tues. Dec. 1 Psalm 79 Micah 4:6-13 Revelation 18:1-10	Tues., Dec. 15 Psalm 125 2 Kings 2:9-22 Acts 3:17—4:4	Galatians 4:4-7 Luke 2:22-40
Wed., Dec. 2 Psalm 79 Micah 5:1-5a Luke 21:34-38	Wed., Dec. 16 Psalm 125 Malachi 3:16—4:6 Mark 9:9-13	Mon., Dec. 28 Psalm 148 Jeremiah 31:15-17 Matthew 2:13-18
Thurs., Dec. 3 Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 Hosea 6:1-6 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10	Thurs., Dec. 17 Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 2 Samuel 6:1-11 Hebrews 1:1-4	Tues., Dec. 29 Psalm 148 Isaiah 49:5-15 Matthew 12:46-50
Fri., Dec. 4 Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 Jeremiah 1:4-10 Acts 11:19-26	Fri., Dec. 18 Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 2 Samuel 6:12-19 Hebrews 1:5-14	Wed., Dec. 30 Psalm 148 Proverbs 9:1-12 2 Peter 3:8-13
Sat., Dec. 5 Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 Ezekiel 36:24-28 Mark 11:27-33	Sat., Dec. 19 Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 Judges 13:2-24 John 7:40-52	Thurs., Dec. 31 New Year's Eve Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 Psalm 8 Revelation 21:1-6a Matthew 25:31-46
Sun., Dec. 6 Second Sunday of Advent Isaiah 40:1-11 Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 2 Peter 3:8-15a Mark 1:1-8	Sun., Dec. 20 Fourth Sunday of Advent 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 Romans 16:25-27 Luke 1:26-38	
Mon., Dec. 7 Psalm 27 Isaiah 26:7-15 Acts 2:37-42	Mon., Dec. 21 Luke 1:46b-55 1 Samuel 1:1-18 Hebrews 9:1-14	
Tues., Dec. 8 Psalm 27 Isaiah 4:2-6 Acts 11:1-18	Tues., Dec. 22 Luke 1:46b-55 1 Samuel 1:19-28 Hebrews 8:1-13	
Wed., Dec. 9 Psalm 27 Malachi 2:10—3:1 Luke 1:5-17	Wed., Dec. 23 Luke 1:46b-55 1 Samuel 2:1-10 Mark 11:1-11	
Thurs., Dec. 10 Psalm 126 Habakkuk 2:1-5 Philippians 3:7-11	Thurs., Dec. 24 Christmas Eve Isaiah 9:2-7 Psalm 96 Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]	
Fri., Dec. 11 Psalm 126 Habakkuk 3:2-6 Philippians 3:12-16	Fri., Dec. 25 Christmas Isaiah 52:7-10 Psalm 98 Hebrews 1:1-4 [5-12] John 1:1-14	
Sat., Dec. 12 Psalm 126 Habakkuk 3:13-19 Matthew 21:28-32	Sat., Dec. 26 Psalm 148 Jeremiah 26:1-9, 12-15 Acts 6:8-15; 7:51-60	
Sun., Dec. 13 Third Sunday of Advent Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 Psalm 126 or Luke 1:46b-55 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 John 1:6-8, 19-28	Sun., Dec. 27 First Sunday after Christmas Isaiah 61:10—62:3 Psalm 148	
Mon., Dec. 14 Psalm 125 1 Kings 18:1-18 Ephesians 6:10-17		



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Click on the links below to access First Parish Church online:

[Facebook](#)

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[Website](#)

[YouTube \(Worship Services\)](#)

Contact us at:
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office.fpchurch@gmail.com

Stewardship

“First Parish- For Such a Time as This”.

The Stewardship Committee is off and running with our Annual Fund Drive 2021.

The Board of Trustees has set the budget for 2021 at \$230,000, an increase of a 4.5% over 2020. As of December 1st we have received \$172,635 towards that target.

Please consider making a pledge to help us reach this goal.

Annual Fund Drive 2021 letters and pledge cards have been sent. If you didn't receive one, please call the Church Office 978-526-7661 ext. 1 or Mary Ellen Cook at 978-500-0018 to have another sent. You can also download a pledge card [here](#).

Mary Ellen Cook and David Lumsden-Co-Chairs
Chip Price
Bruce Warren