

The Parchment

Monthly Newsletter of First Congregational Church UCC

December 2016



Greetings from Dr. Bob

Journey of The Magi by T. S. Eliot

*A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.*

These are the opening lines of “Journey of the Magi” by T. S. Eliot, my favorite Advent-Christmas-Epiphany poem. The magi (aka “wise men”) set off to find the Jewish messiah-king whose birth they “detected” while gazing at the stars. One magus (singular of magi) first laments at what they have left behind, including summer cottages, girls, and sherbet! Then, a list of hardships: recalcitrant camels, objecting camel keepers, campfires that won’t stay lit, inhospitable towns with price-gouging merchants, not enough sleep, and doubts. Oh, the doubts.

The landscape changes and warms. Is that hope we see? In rich symbols the writer describes their discoveries: where Jesus “began,” where he went, what he taught, what tragedy, and what becomes of us as a result of believing in him. In Eliot’s poem, they discovered the birth and death of Jesus Christ, but also the death and rebirth of themselves. They didn’t return home until Jesus returned “home.”

They went to see birth, which they found. But they also witnessed death, only to discover that there are similarities between the two. For a new birth—in this case, the resurrection—something has to die. And when we embrace the resurrection and are “born again,” the old just doesn’t fit anymore.

(Continued on the next page.)

I know. Christmas is on the horizon, not Easter. But it all begins in Bethlehem. We'll get plenty of ho ho ho's and *Deck the halls* this season, but we won't get close to truth unless we read the nativity stories themselves: Matthew 1 & 2; Luke 1 & 2. The tinsel and snowflakes and presents are fun. The real story isn't what I'd call fun but it is what I'd call life-changing.

And that's what I want to leave you with as Betty and I leave. For a birth to happen – your next adventure and ours – some dying has to happen. But only to make way for something very good, directly from God.

Thank you for fifteen Advents and Christmases and Epiphanies and Ash Wednesdays and Lents and Easters and Pentecosts together. Thank you for smiles and frowns, laughter and tears, births and marriages and deaths, with all the emotions and questions and affirmations that came with them. Thank you for being a church where I have served with joy, where Betty has taught almost non-stop because of her love of children, where we all have worshiped and served and shared.

And thanks to God above all. For if there had been no Jesus, there would have been no journey of the magi, nor journey for any of us. We would never have been traveling companions. It's a journey that began long ago, will continue long after us, and on which we have had the privilege to travel in partnership with God.

Here's the full poem. Merry Christmas.

Bob

Journey of the Magi

T. S. Eliot

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.

There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.
Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.

But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: Were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and
death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.



Outreach Opportunities

The Missions Board recently donated a substantial amount of money to the First Presbyterian Church of Benton Harbor, for their building project, "Open Wide Our Front Door." The money came from the bequest funds so generously given to our church. The Missions Board has requested from First Presbyterian if there could be some outreach opportunities for our congregation to work with them. Below are some ideas:

- ◆ Every Thursday at 6:00 p.m. a family dinner is provided for church members and people in the community. We are always welcome.
- ◆ There is opportunity for our youth to join their youth in making and serving dinner.
- ◆ One of their main partners is the Boys and Girls Club. You could volunteer to mentor or find other ways to support the Club.
- ◆ In the spring there will be a Morton Hill improvement project, a big "Bluff Clean Up." More details to follow closer to spring.

If there are any individuals, couples, youth, friends joining with friends. If you're interested, please call Joyce Vance (983-2457) Missions Chair.

"I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people." Luke 2:10

Library News

New selections have been purchased for Advent. You'll find the books and DVD's in separate locations. Please feel free to borrow and return for your reading and viewing pleasure. If you have any requests for books that you would like to see in our library, please leave the title and author in the library suggestion box. As 2017 begins, we will continue to organize the shelves for ease in locating materials. May this season bring you peace and memories.
Caryl, Nancy & Patty.

Women's Groups

Mary Martha Circle will meet on Tuesday, December 13 at noon for their annual Christmas lunch. Following lunch we will pack cookies for our homebound members.

Mary Preston Guild will be meeting for a catered luncheon on Wednesday, December 14 at noon at Lucy Eisele's home. The program will be at Midge Carr's on spinning. Reservations please.

Women's Fellowship Council will meet on the 14th at 10:30 a.m. All women of the church are invited to join them.

Women's Bible Study - Advent is Here!

All women are invited for our Advent study by Max Lucada, *Because of Bethlehem*. We will meet on Thursday, December 1, 8 & 15 at 1:00 p.m. in the Greeting Room. We hope that you will join us! (We will finish up our current Bible study in January.)

Church Women United next event will be in March 2017. Watch for more information in January. If you are interested in learning more about this group, please contact Patty Nordberg at 429-7297 or pnordberg@comcast.net.

Music Ministry

Once again, I am writing from an airline seat. This time I'm on my way to visit my sister, Teresa in San Francisco. I'm looking forward to spending my favorite holiday, Thanksgiving, relaxing with my mom and youngest sister. This past weekend I squeezed in a complete move from Benton Harbor to Saint Joseph. Given the upcoming schedule, I don't expect to be settled in until the week between Christmas and New Years. Here's where you'll find me either performing on organ, piano or handbells and/or directing between now and Christmas: (Bold = FCC)

November 29, 7:30 p.m., Christmas in Kalamazoo
December 6, 7:00 p.m., Kalamazoo Ringers Wyndham Concert
December 9, 7:00 p.m., Harbert Christmas Dinner and Carols
December 11, 10:25 a.m., CE Christmas Program, Unfrozen
December 11, 4:00 p.m., Kalamazoo Ringers Christmas Concert
December 14, 7:00 p.m., Christmas Carols in St. Joseph
December 18, 10:25 a.m., Chancel Choir Christmas Program
December 24, 5:00 p.m., Early Christmas Eve Service
December 24, 10:30 p.m. Candlelight Christmas Eve Service
Each weekend at church services at First Congregational UCC

I performed with the Kalamazoo Brass for the Christmas in Kalamazoo concert on Tuesday, 11/29. This Christmas concert featured the Kalamazoo Ringers, the Kalamazoo Men's Chorus, and the Kalamazoo Brass. This is the second year that it's been held at the Centerpointe Church. The Brass quintet and I opened the concert with the Grand Chouer Dialogue by Gigout. I mention this because I also plan to perform this piece with the SB Symphony Brass Quintet for our Christmas Carols in St. Joseph concert on Wednesday, December 14 at 7 p.m. Kory Heitzig and I have also prepared another organ/piano duet which we will perform here as well. Having two or more performances of these larger works makes life easier when they can be scheduled on additional concerts.

Here at First Congregational, both the Kids Connection Choir and the Chancel Choir are busy learning their Christmas repertoire. I had so much fun working with a large group of kids this past Wednesday! The kids are working hard and singing very well. The older CE youth are preparing a great program that will incorporate the music pieces the Kids Connection Choir has prepared into a special performance in worship on Sunday, December 11. The handbell choirs are busy learning their pieces for the various upcoming concerts, preludes and church services including the Carols concert and Christmas Eve Services. I don't think there is a better season of the church year than Advent and Christmas. The combination of Christmas music and decorations is unbeatable. I never tire of working hard on these programs.

(Continued on the next page.)

"Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord."

- Luke 2:11

Looking ahead, keep in mind that we have a very special service, luncheon and program being planned to celebrate Dr. Bob's 15 years of leadership here at First Congregational. Please make plans to attend this tribute to a great leader and his wife, Betty. We will miss them immensely but this is our opportunity to show them our gratitude and send them off into retirement with lots of love and best wishes. I can't tell you everything that's being planned, but I can assure you that it will be yet another great event here at FCC.

Onward in His Service,

Paul Flyger

Important Dates for Christian Education

- December 7* Wednesday night dinner and programs
- December 10* Children's Christmas program dress rehearsal, 3:30-5:30
- December 11* Children's Christmas program during worship, no Sunday school (nursery is open for children 3 and under)
- December 11* High school book club & Christmas party, junior high included in Christmas party
- December 14* No Wednesday night programs, **join us for a special dinner** and an evening Christmas concert
- December 21* No Wednesday night dinner or programs
- December 25* No Sunday school and no childcare in the nursery, children are welcome to join their parents for worship
- December 28* No Wednesday night dinner or programs
- January 1* No Sunday school and no childcare in the nursery, children are welcome to join their parents for worship
- January 4* Wednesday night dinner and programs resume

December's Teaching Themes

Preschool

During December children will be celebrating the birth of **JESUS**. We're going to count down to Christmas with the children as they learn the different parts of the Christmas story. Children will learn that Jesus is special because he is God's son.

Elementary

During December students will learn about **JOY** and that joy is finding a way to be happy even when things don't go your way.

Each week will focus on a different bottom line which include:

- I can have joy because God keeps His promises.
- I can have joy because anything is possible with God.
- I can have joy because God sent His son.
- I can have joy because God's story is for everyone.

(Continued on the next page.)

Youth

During December students will complete a series called *ANOTHER CHRISTMAS STORY* where we will be teaching this: It's Christmas. Nativity scenes are everywhere. You know, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, angels, and the drummer boy (who wasn't actually there). Maybe you grew up seeing these scenes and wondered what they were all about. Or maybe you've heard the story a million times. Either way, there's another story we bet you haven't heard, characters you barely know, scenes you don't see in the plastic nativity on your neighbor's lawn. As we explore two often-untold parts of the Christmas story, we discover that God had something bigger in mind from the very beginning. And, just as it was true for those at the first Christmas, He may just have a bigger story in mind for us as well.

Stewardship 2017

As we head into the Advent Season, we hope you are giving thought and prayer to how you can support the congregation's important work in 2017. If you haven't yet made your pledge for the coming year, we encourage you to do so very soon. We now have on-line options that make giving easy - visit www.fccstjoseph.com or we also offer automatic withdraw. If you need a pledge card, call the office (983-5519) and one will be mailed to you.

Year-End Contributions

Please remember that any contributions you want applied to your 2016 statement need to be in the church office by 2:00 p.m. on Thursday, December 29.

Office Christmas Schedule

The office will be closed on December 26 & 30th.



Merry Christmas from your



Dear Church Family,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). The angels gave this message of hope and love to shepherds (and us) on the very first Christmas. There were no champagne toasts, decorated trees, sugar plum fairies, or shrimp cocktail (I would have missed the shrimp cocktail). However, I bet it was the best, most amazing Christmas ever! It was the real thing, a birthday party for Jesus, which took place in a barn.

Fast forward to 2016. How many of you noticed in the stores that the Christmas Nativities were right next to the Halloween zombies for sale in October? People are groaning over the never-ending "only __ more days till Christmas!" It's almost a chore to get everything done and not be broke. Does this look anything like that very first Christmas so long ago?

As I prepare for Christmas with my family, I stress out about it every year. I remind myself every year as long as I don't burn the dish I'm expected to take to our holiday dinner, no one will care about anything else. I worry about having everything "perfect" (it never is, but we continue to celebrate as a family anyway). But the first Christmas was PERFECT, and it took place in a barn, with a beautiful baby boy laid in a manger. The focus was the baby Jesus and He was perfect. The focus was Jesus, same as it should be now. If I interpret the bible correctly, Christmas is all about love. So if you simply show love to someone else, possibly someone in need, I think you are creating the perfect Christmas and honoring our Savior in a way He would like.

We have a few church members who may not be celebrating with family or friends or will be unable to worship with us in fellowship. A telephone call, card, or visit is always appreciated. For your convenience, an address list is included in this month's Parchment. The Called to Care Ministry will again be seeking out folks to bring gifts and offer fellowship. Contact Beth Kenagy of the Called to Care Ministry if you would like to participate in sharing God's love and blessings of the true Christmas season. It's an annual tradition here at First Congo.

I wish you all a very peaceful and joyous Christmas, focusing on what is most important!

Merry Christmas Church Family!

Nurse Jan



Overcoming Despair

Christmas can be a difficult time for people who are hurting or grieving. In the 1860s, poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow had reason to despair: America was at war with itself, his son was severely wounded in battle and his wife died in a fire.

The first Christmas after his wife's death, Longfellow wrote, "How inexpressibly sad are all holidays."



Three years later, on Christmas Day 1864, Longfellow penned a poem that later became the song "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." The lyrics move from despair to hope — and, thanks to Jesus, so can we.

And in despair I bowed my head.
There is no peace on earth, I said!
For hate is strong, and mocks the song
of peace on earth, good will to men!

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
God is not dead, nor doth he sleep!
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
with peace on earth, good will to men!

Birthday Wishes

01 ~ Bob Kenagy
01 ~ Paula Thompson
03 ~ Gary Callendar
03 ~ Collin Morrow
03 ~ Emily Morrow
03 ~ Logan Morrow
05 ~ Bob Braman
05 ~ Maisy Gable
06 ~ Joan Gleiss
08 ~ Andrea Giandiletti
09 ~ Pam Eichler
09 ~ Wayne Root
09 ~ Nancy Worthington
10 ~ Tom Hollowell
11 ~ Dennis Thompson
12 ~ Steve Nordberg
13 ~ Garron Sternaman
13 ~ Jeff Yircott
13 ~ Winnie Zimmerman
14 ~ Mary Caple
14 ~ Jeff Terry
15 ~ Cindi Collum
15 ~ Evert Martin
18 ~ Joanne Van Den Berg
20 ~ Cindy Ehrenberg
23 ~ Kaley Schlipp
24 ~ Bev Hollowell
25 ~ Jennifer Ort
25 ~ Phyllis Root
27 ~ LucyAnn DeVries
28 ~ Bob DeVries
28 ~ Evelyn Reczek
28 ~ Gordon Schreiber
29 ~ Florence Hill
31 ~ Will Christy



Christmas Card List for Shut-Ins

Caretel Inns

3905 Lorraine Street

St. Joseph 49085

Chuck & Nancy Worthington

Pine Ridge

4368 Cleveland Avenue

Stevensville 49127

Florence Hill

Norm Smith

Royalton Manor

288 Peace Blvd.

St. Joseph 49085

Ron Guertel

The Willows

3440 Niles Road

St. Joseph 49085

Marion Darr

Bink Seaburg

Whitcomb Senior Living Community

509 Ship Street

St. Joseph 49085

Nancy Conybeare

Marilyn Eller

Jean Spelman

Robert Ticknor

Doris Tippet

Jerry & Sue Warren

Woodland Terrace

8850 Red Arrow Highway

Bridgman 49106

Jeanne Atwood

Burt Baker

Shirley Garey

Bev Hollowell

Elaine Mehlhaff

Ruth Yeske

Living at Home

Dave & Anne Brockway

722 W. Shawnee Road

Baroda 49101

Stella Casey

2460 Shoreham Highlands

St. Joseph 49085

Ron & Carol Drews

551 Ansley Drive

St. Joseph 49085

Wesley Hemerling

318 Kingsley Avenue

St. Joseph 49085

Margaret Klos

2700 Highland Court

St. Joseph 49085

Bess Miller

2874 Robin Hood Drive

Stevensville 49127

*Thank you for remembering our
faithful members at this holiday season.*



WHAT OUR CHURCH IS ABOUT

Our Vision

As believers in Jesus Christ, we will be a church of vibrant Christians.

Our Mission

We welcome people to faith in Jesus Christ to:

Discover God

Equip one another for life

Reach inward and outward to serve

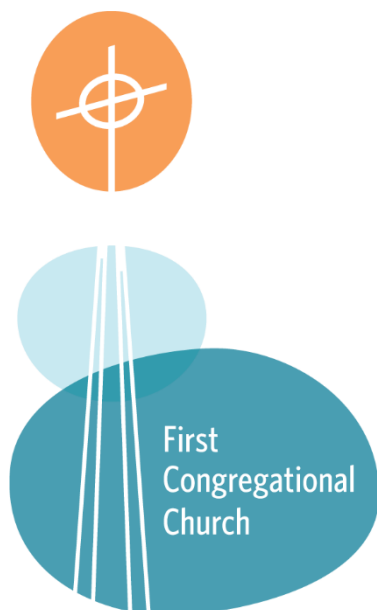
The Invitation to Discipleship from Jesus Christ

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30

We grow as disciples through these 6 practices:

- Daily Prayer
- Bible Reading
- Weekly Worship
- Generous Giving
- Selfless Serving
- Spiritual Friendships



SENIOR MINISTER

Rev. Dr. Robert Braman

SUNDAY SCHEDULE

September thru May

8:30 a.m. Handbell warmup (if scheduled)

9:15 a.m. Christian Discipleship

9:30 a.m. Chancel Choir

10:25 a.m. Worship

10:45 a.m. Christian Education classes

June, July, and August

9:55 a.m. Worship

Childcare available during worship.

WEDNESDAY FAMILY NIGHT

September thru April

5:00 p.m. Jubilate Ringers

5:45 p.m. Church Family Dinner

6:30 p.m. Kids Connection
Middle High Youth Group

6:30 p.m. Dr. Bob's Class

THURSDAY NIGHT

5:00 p.m. Alleluia Ringers

6:30 p.m. Chancel Choir

OFFICE HOURS

Open: Monday - Thursday
8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Phone: (269) 983-5519

Website: fccstjoseph.org

Facebook: FCCStJoseph

Email: office@fccstjoseph.org

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