



DEC 2023 & JAN 2024

ISSUE 23-12, 24-1

The Diligent

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ARP LAKE WALES, FL

“...a Christ-centered fellowship of believers devoted to glorifying God through true worship, personal evangelism, discipleship, and servanthood.”

AT A GLANCE

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Milestone Celebrations

IN FAVOR OF FEASTING

From Pastor Mackay

We all know the great miser Ebenezer Scrooge. His classic lines of selfishness ring as brutally now as they did straight from Dickens' pen. When a charity director explains that the fate of many London poor is hardly better than death, Scrooge growls: "If they would rather die, they'd better do it, and decrease the surplus population." Yikes!

Do you know that there is a lie (almost) as old as the universe that God is just such a miser? It first appears on the lips of Satan. As Eve took in all that God had given her, and as her husband had apparently found something better to do than love his wife, Satan whispered, "It's not enough. God is holding out on you. He's keeping all the good stuff for himself and not giving you a fair share." The fall of Adam and Eve into sin now has borne an entire human race who questions the goodness of God.

And, our lives show that questioning, don't they? We cling so tightly to our things and our wishes. We would often rather see the people around us just go away than giving ourselves to them in love and service. (Not too far from Scrooge's sentiments, eh?)

Yet, in Jesus, we see that God is really a God who delights to bless his people with riches. Consider so many parts of the Biblical material. The Garden itself was not just abundant in food and beauty, but in the fellowship God shared with his people. God promised Abraham abundance, and delivered it despite Abraham's sin. In the first half of Deuteronomy 28, God spells out the results of covenant obedience in Israel: great riches. In Psalm 23, God himself sets a table for his people as the great host. Jesus takes that same mantle as he miraculously provides food for "the 5,000" (which we all know was really more). And, what do we look forward to when Jesus returns, but a feast! Revelation 19 sets forth the greatest wedding party of all.

All of these blessings, of course, pale in comparison to the greatest blessing of all:

fellowship with God in Jesus. Immanuel has come, and we have in him the greatest gift of all.

So, what should Christians look like in this world? Perhaps that's a particularly good question at Christmas. Now, should Christians be hedonists; seeking pleasure in this world above all else? Certainly not; such is Scrooge in different clothing. However, of all people, Christians should be those who feast. We know the Good Source of good things, good food, and joyful fellowship. We know that when we see these things as a way to celebrate and glory in the God who loves us, we can enjoy them rightly. After all, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we *can* do it all for the glory of God.



What if we are in material lack? Well, that's when our theology is really proven, isn't it? In such times, God's presence with us is not lessened at all. Because we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, we can find joy even if our coffers are bare.

So, as the Lord allows, would you feast this Christmas? Push back against the darkness that has been defeated by Jesus, and celebrate what God has done for you. Give of what you have to bring joy to others. Invite your friends to come and feast on God's Word with you. Don't be miserly, for this blessing of Jesus is meant to be given to all the world.

Rachel and I wish each one of you a very Merry Christmas!

In His Love,
Mackay■

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

The elders of First Presbyterian Church meet monthly on the fourth Tuesday. The following are highlights from the meeting on November 28.

- The elders met in session on November 28, 2023. Laura Lynn Berkau, Ger Lippert (by profession of faith), John Rollins and MJ O'Reilly (by transfer) were received into communicant membership.
- Officer candidates were interviewed by elder teams, and the nomination slate was certified. (See slate below in Congregational Meeting announcement)

PRAYER FOCUS

DECEMBER 3 - Advent Season
DECEMBER 10 - Congregational Meeting
DECEMBER 17 - Christ's Glory
DECEMBER 24 - Christmas: Families and Salvation
DECEMBER 31 - New Year

• Prayer was given for the needs of our congregation and the ministries of our church.

•The Property Insurance Ad Hoc committee continues their work to find appropriate coverage for the church facility.

•The Session approved a job description for a full-time Director of Music Ministries for distribution. The music committee is serving as the search committee.

- The Stewardship and Finance committee reported strong giving in October, with income \$29,472 over budget. As of October 31, the operating account stood at \$352,473.
- Pledging for the 2024 budget has been strong, with more dollars pledged through four weeks toward 2024 than the entire pledge season toward 2023 (i.e., pledges received in late 2022).
- The Session and Deacons will meet jointly on Dec 12, followed by the next stated Session meeting. ■

Advent Series

Our advent series this year is "Advent according to Matthew," in which we will walk step by step through Matthew's account of Jesus' birth.

Dec 3rd - Matthew 1:1-17

"A Long Line of God's Amazing Grace"

Dec 10th - Matthew 1:18-25

Lessons & Carols

"An Unexpected Arrival"

Dec 17th - Matthew 2:1-6

"One Long Foretold"

Dec 24th - 9:30AM Morning Worship:

Matthew 2:7-12 - "Seeking the Christ"

Christmas Eve Service - 6:00PM

Matthew 2:13-15 - "A New Exodus"



CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

The session has called the annual congregational business meeting for election of church officers and the approval of the 2024 budget for **Sunday, December 10** following worship.

Any questions regarding the budget should be addressed to Doug Pace (elder, Stewardship and Finance chair), or Michelle Hurst (congregational treasurers).

Officer Candidates are:

Elder class of 2027: Chuck Loveless, Willard Pearce, Fox Rawlings,

Deacon class of 2026: Aaron Nelson

Chairman of the Congregation: Jim Weaver

Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer: Michelle Hurst and Daniel Hunt

New church officers will be installed January 14, 2023.

Discipleship

NOT OUR MEDIATOR BUT OUR MIRROR: A PROTESTANT APPRECIATION OF MARY

From Pastor Myers

What are we to make of Mary? We know that she is one who is “highly favored” by the Lord (Luke 1:28). We are aware that all generations will call her “blessed” (Luke 1:48) and so we are comfortable with calling her the blessed virgin.

But does it not seem as though Mary gets short-shrift in Protestant circles, especially around this time of year? We rightly give honor to Abraham as our great father in the faith (Gal 3:6). We rightly aspire towards David as the man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14). We marvel at Paul’s genius as the great theologian of the early church as well. But where are Mary’s flowers? Why does it seem as though Mary is so often overlooked?

Well...to ask the question is to answer the question. Protestants are hesitant to give any attention to Mary because we are aware of the danger of giving too much attention to Mary. We are wary of the temptation to elevate Mary to a place of religious centrality, a place that ought to be reserved for God alone.

And this danger of idolatry is more of an allurements with Mary than with the aforementioned biblical figures. Why? It is because of the far more intimate connection that exists between Jesus and Mary than between Jesus and Abraham, David or Paul. Mary’s connection to Jesus is that of a mother, not that of a distant relative or apostle.

Because of the fact that Mary is Jesus’ mother, confusion or false equivocation sometimes results when we assess her spiritual significance. We forget or lose sight of the fact that Christ is the sole

mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5) and so what do we sometimes do? We start to think of Mary as a mediator between God and man as well, so much so that we end up assigning to Mary the title of “co-redemptrix” (a title for Mary that actually exists in some Christian circles).

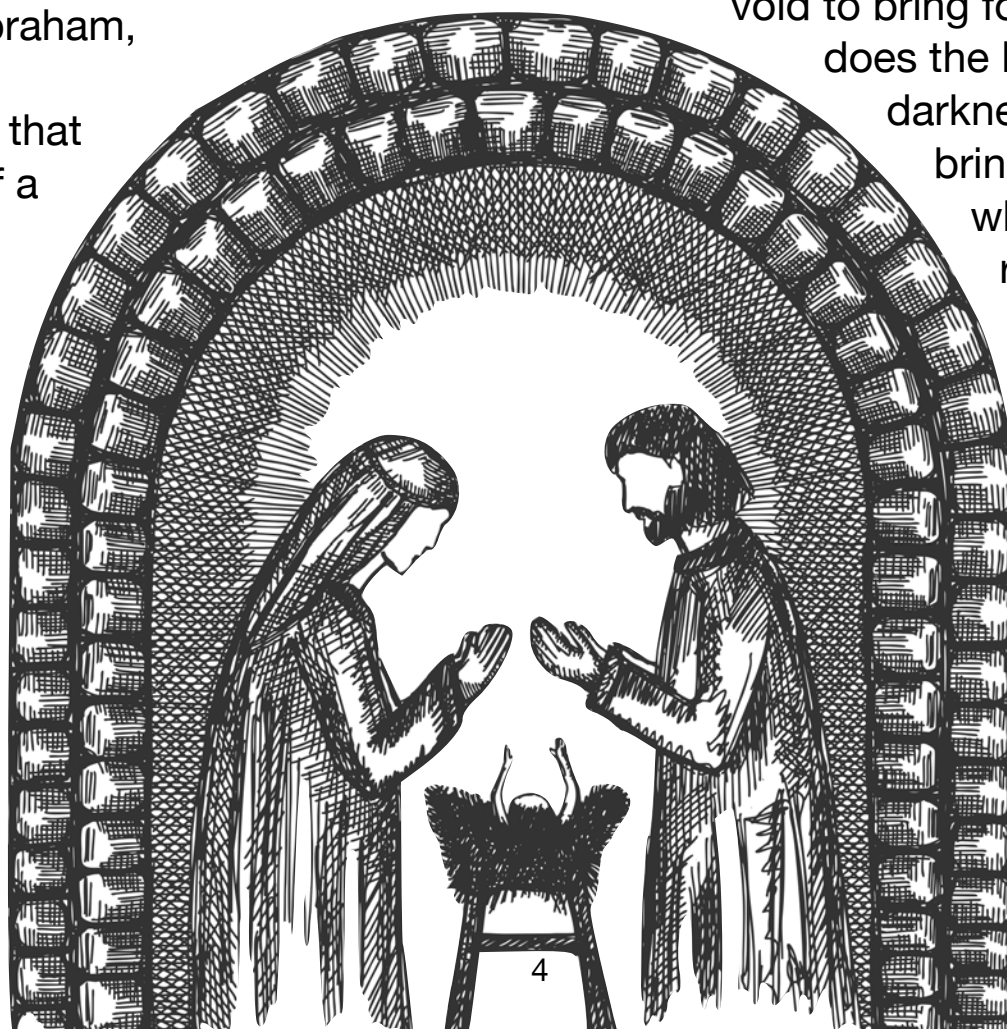
This heretical idea of Mary as “co-redemptrix” ought to rightly dissuade us against giving Mary undue attention that can bleed into idolatry. Such caution is right and healthy. But is it possible to have a deeper appreciation of Mary that does not lead to these troublesome conclusions?

I think yes. The safe way to have a deeper appreciation of Mary is to think of her not as a mediator but as a mirror of redeemed humanity. Mary’s encounter with God in history is a parable of the christian’s encounter with God in conversion.

How is this the case?

When the angel told Mary that the means by which she would conceive would be by the Holy Spirit coming upon her and overshadowing her (Luke 1:35), what is it that we’re being led to think here? Where else do we see the Holy Spirit overshadowing and hovering over darkness in order to bring forth life through divine power? We see that in creation! Just as the Holy Spirit hovers over the darkness of the void to bring forth life (Gen 1:2), so too does the Holy Spirit hover over the darkness of Mary’s womb to bring forth life. It is the place where God enacts the redemption of the fallen cosmos which he has been promising to do since the fall. It is not in a royal palace but in the womb of a humble virgin that God will bring salvation.

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The womb of the Virgin Mary is ground zero for the new creation, the place where the last Adam is brought forth to succeed where the first Adam failed. But Mary is not just significant on the stage of redemptive history writ large. She is also a parable, a model of what it means for any sinner to be saved. What happens when a person is saved? Paul says that whenever a sinner is savingly united to Christ, a lower-case n new creation takes place (2 Cor 5:17). The Holy Spirit hovers over the void that is our hard hearts and brings forth new life ex-nihilo, just as He did in creation (Gen 1:2) and just as He did in Mary's womb (Luke 1:35).

This is the way to honor Mary while keeping the focus on Christ. It's by looking at Mary and realizing that in an analogous way, all Christians are highly favored by God! All Christians are part of the great female in the grand story of redemption. Like Mary, the Holy Seed has entered us without the help of man (1 Pet 1:23). Like Mary, Christ is being formed in us (Gal 4:19). And like Mary, Christ comes out from us as well (Romans 8:29). This is the glory of Mary. She's not our mediator but she is our mirror. ■



CHRISTMAS PARADE COOKIE HOSPITALITY

R.O.W. COOKIE WRAPPING

Wednesday, December 6

Potluck Supper

LAKE WALES CHRISTMAS PARADE

Saturday, December 9

Central Ave. Portico

Please join us for our third annual Christmas Parade Cookie Hospitality. This includes two opportunities. First, we will wrap the cookies during our normal ROW schedule on Wednesday, December 6. Second, we will pass out cookies and hot chocolate during the parade on Saturday, December 9. If you would like to help please be there at 5pm. Parade begins at 6pm

Come enjoy fellowship as we serve our neighbors!

ROCK ON WEDNESDAYS

Wednesdays in Fellowship Hall

FIRST WEDNESDAYS - Potluck and Fellowship

SECOND WEDNESDAYS - Breakout Night

- "Unbreakably His: Part A" Led by Pastor Myers
Pastor Myers will teach on bible narratives that illustrate tenants of Reformed Theology
- Women's Study led by Rachel Smith
- Children's program, "The Biggest Story"
- Middle and High School, "The Bible Project"

THIRD WEDNESDAYS - Prayer Meeting and Hymn Sing

FOURTH WEDNESDAYS - Lesson Series

- "Unbreakably His: Part B" by Pastor Mackay
Pastor Mackay will teach on the confessional/theological perspective of Reformed Theology
- Children's program, "The Biggest Story"
- Middle and High School, "The Bible Project"

FIFTH WEDNESDAYS - Break

Last R.O.W. for 2023

DECEMBER 13

R.O.W. Restarts

JANUARY 3

Want to help?

Contact Scott Crews

(Discipleship Committee chair)

if you'd like to help with...

- Kitchen crew/clean-up
- Children's programming
- Fellowship Night programs

Music Ministry

MUSIC IN DECEMBER

From Vince Treadway

All of the choirs and musical ensembles at First Presbyterian Church have been working very hard to prepare wonderful music to worship the Lord in December! As a congregation, we will sing over 18 Christmas carols in December during worship.

On Sunday December 10, you will have the opportunity to enjoy our annual "Lessons and Carols" service during our regular morning worship. The Lessons and Carols Service will include Scripture readings about the prophecies of Jesus' coming; favorite Christmas carols, special music from our choirs, handbell choir and brass ensemble, and a wonderful sermon based on Matthew 1:18-25 entitled "An Unexpected Arrival." Then on Christmas Eve we have a full day of worshiping the Lord with song in the morning and during our annual Candlelight Christmas Eve service at 6:00 p.m. which will include the choirs and brass as well as communion and singing of "Silent Night" by candlelight.

All of the hard work that goes into preparing music for the Christmas season began in September and culminates in December for our Lord who is worthy to be praised! I want to wish everyone a blessed Christmas as we recall the amazing gift of God's own Son, Jesus Christ, who humbled himself and became a man in order to provide salvation for all who would believe in him.

Thanks be to God! ■



MUSIC IN DECEMBER DATES

December 6-
Last rehearsal for Musical Beginnings,
Covenant Kids, and King Singers

December 10-
LESSONS & CAROLS SERVICE, 9:30am

Performances by:
Adult Choirs
King Singers
Hand Bell Choir
Brass Ensemble

December 24-
Sunday Morning Worship, 9:30am

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE, 6:00pm

January 3-
Rehearsal resumes for Musical Beginnings,
Covenant Kids, and King Singers

Family Ministry

WORDS FROM WALKER

From Walker Kirkpatrick

Hi Everyone!

As we near the end of the year we go from being thankful to really busy in a matter of a few days. Although the busyness of the Christmas season is a good thing (sometimes), it brings us to a new year in which myself and the Youth program have a few needs.

First, please continue to support and encourage me/the program with prayer. I have thoroughly

appreciated and say thank you for the conversations, encouraging words, and continued support I have received from so many of you!

Second, I ask each of you to consider volunteering with the youth. There are so many ways you can get involved. From preparing food, to donating a snack, chaperoning, coming to youth events, or even serving on the youth council. We need your help! Please reach out to me if you feel led to help out in any way!

Thanks so much and God Bless!
Walker K■

UPCOMING YOUTH EVENTS

December 3
Youth Group

December 8
Film Friday

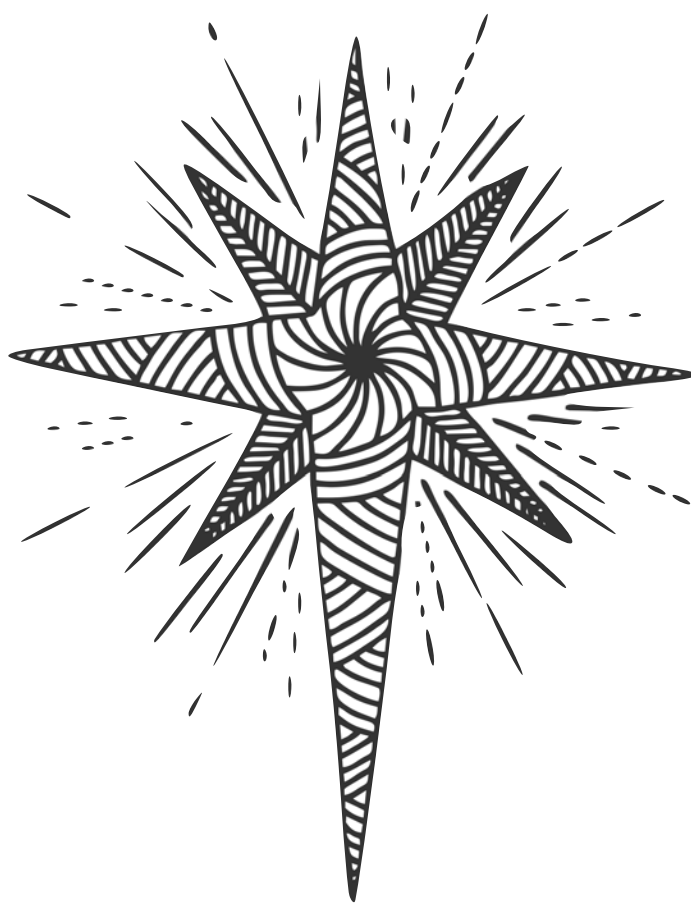
December 10
Youth Group

December 13
Youth Bible Study

December 17
**White Elephant
Christmas Party**

December 24
**Christmas Eve Service, 6pm
(No Youth Group)**

December 31
New Year's Eve Party



January 7
Youth Group

January 10
Youth Bible Study

January 12
Film Friday

January 14
Youth Group

January 21
Youth Group

January 24
Youth Bible Study

January 28
Youth Group

MILESTONE CELEBRATIONS

BIRTHDAYS

December 2, Dorine Bullock
December 4, Charlotte Lewis
December 6, Ann Mann
December 7, Julie Smith
December 8, Birdie Cockrell
December 8, Frank Hunt III
December 9, Stewart Hurst
December 10, Scottie Smith III
December 10, Joyce McCollum
December 14, Kathe Galloway
December 15, Kay Weaver
December 18, Michelle Hurst
December 21, Bill Schaffer
December 21, Rachel Smith
December 23, Evelyn Smith
December 26, Cindy Turner
December 28, Wyatt Caldwell
December 29, Patty Falk

January 4, Chandler Crews
January 4, Julie Seay
January 9, Jimmy Kahler
January 10, Darlene Krpata
January 15, Kelly Wheeler
January 18, Chris Waters
January 19, Mary Campbell
January 19, Mary Roberts
January 19, Barbara Sebring
January 20, Maria Herman
January 21, Emily Bass
January 21, Mary Benner
January 22, Cole Hixenbaugh
January 25, Wendy Moore
January 27, Audrey Hunt
January 30, Jaclyn Miller
January 31, Laura Hunt

ANNIVERSARIES

Lori & Tony Woods, December 2
Katie & Gerald Lippert, December 3
Beth & Ansel Buhrman, December 3
Christie & Lorin Bice, December 7
Nancy & Jim Ayers, December 12
Donna & Chip Carter, December 22
Debbie & Willard Pearce, December 23
Norma & Bill Schaffer, December 25
Dionne & Kevin Kohl, December 30

Danielle & Dan Miller, January 4

Church Family





First Presbyterian Church of Lake Wales
 16 N 3rd St, Lake Wales, FL 33853
 Phone: 863.676.0711
 fpclw.org

CHURCH OFFICERS

ELDERS

2023

Scott Crews
 Doug Pace
 David Falk

2025

Tony Woods
 Jim Underwood

2024

Daniel Hunt
 David Nelson
 Andy Hunt

2026

Stewart Hurst
 Ed Lamb
 Jimmy Seay

DEACONS

2023

Susan Coyne
 Bob Hulen
 Michael Matteson
 Karla Campbell

2025

June Ullman
 Cindy Turner

2024

Leah Gibson
 Dan Miller

Moderator: Rev. Mackay Smith
Clerk of Session: David Nelson
Chairman of Deacons: Karla Campbell
Deacon Secretary: Lea Gibson
Chm. of the Congregation: Jim Weaver
Treasurer: Michelle Hurst
Asst. Treasurer: Daniel Hunt