

Grace and Peace

A Newsletter from Grace Methodist Church *(The Miracle Church)*

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{Grace Methodist Church where people gather to celebrate, serve, and grow in Christ.}

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A Message from Pastor Bill....

Restore us again, God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your unfailing love, LORD, and grant us your salvation. Psalm 85:4-7

Hello Friends,

December has arrived. The Season of Advent begins, and we start thinking about Christmas and all the wonderful aspects of this glorious season. Advent is all about getting ready for the coming of our Lord, the Messiah. The Advent season takes us back to the manger in Bethlehem and Jesus birth, wow, what a great event to celebrate. I remember standing with a crowd of seminarians around that birthplace now elaborately furnished and thinking, this isn't how it was when Jesus entered His earthly domain. It was a cave, it was cattle shed, it was the most humble of beginnings—and so it is with each of us.

We are all at different places in our earthly journey. Some have all the things they could ever want. Others are hungry every night, some need shelter, comfort, and hope. During Advent we are called to think about our own real needs in life. The externals are necessary, wonderful, and bring happiness for a short time. Without these essential needs it is hard to think about spiritual needs. Our internal, spiritual, needs are far more important. During Advent we as pastors try to emphasize the internal needs for hope, peace, joy, and love. We all know we need these intangible traits but find them very elusive until our faith rests in the one who came once at

Christmas. He is also the one who comes to us individually when we invite Him into our lives. He is the one that is coming again to restore the world to what it was meant to be in the beginning.

During this Advent/Christmas season, I encourage you to be aware of the needs of others. A friendly gift of word or deed can make a real difference to one who is grieving a loss or struggling with a difficult situation. This season brings extra stress and loneliness to many. Offer them Christ through a gift of hope, peace, joy and/or love in one way or another.

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Bill Farmer

Faith Community Nursing...Karen Kline

Mary's Christmas

Have you ever contemplated what childbirth was like for Mary? What were the thoughts going through her mind as she and Joseph set out for Galilee for the census? What did she take with her to prepare for the birth? Not much information is available to answer these questions, and we can only speculate by looking at the overall culture of the time.

"Birth labor" is mentioned several times in the Bible. When Eve was thrown from the Garden of Eden one of the punishments, she experienced was the pain of childbirth. Giving birth was considered hazardous in Biblical times but children were welcomed. Many children added a sense of security and family protection as well as more workers to help in the fields or with the herds. Prenatal care mostly consisted of not drinking wine or eating unclean meat.

Women would normally prepare for their labor by collecting soft sea sponges, pieces of wool, strips of cloth a pillow, oils or ointments, things to smell, a midwife's stool or chair, clean water, a bed and a "proper room". How many of these items did Mary have with her? Women were not left alone during labor; they received assistance from midwives, friends, and relatives. Males usually played a very passive role in childbirth. So, who helped Mary?

Midwives were very significant figures in ancient times, although their duties were not as clear cut as those of midwives today. They were expected to provide comfort, pain relief and encouragement, assist with the birth and supervise the aftercare of mother and baby. After the baby was born, he/she was washed with salt and wine for antiseptic reasons, oil was rubbed on the baby's skin and they were wrapped in swaddling cloth.

How trusting in God were Mary and Joseph to accept their role in God's plan.

But, did you ever wonder about Mary's mother and how she was raised? There was a recent posting on Facebook by Sarah Trent that raised this very issue by asking various questions, such as: someone had to raise Mary to treasure purity, honor Joseph, raise Mary to find favor with God and know the voice of God? How did she do this?

All their lives were turned upside down, yet they remained faithful to God and his plan for them. Can we, in our day-to-day life attain such a level of faith? A Blessed and Merry Christmas to each of you and your families.

Church-Wide Christmas Project...Women of Worship (W.O.W)...Sharon Miller

Women of Worship has been doing Santa for Seniors each year as a mission project. This year W.O.W. is making this Christmas project a church-wide event. A tree is in our mini-fellowship area with senior "bulbs" hanging on the tree. These bulbs have the gift items the seniors would like to receive for Christmas. Please select as many bulbs as you like. When you have completed your shopping, **place the unwrapped gifts in a gift bag, attach the "bulb" to the bag, and place it back under the tree by December 10**. W.O.W. will take all the gift bags to the Home Instead Office. They in turn will give the gifts to each senior.

Another W.O.W. mission is to collect canceled postage stamps as a year-round project. With Christmas coming, please put stamps you receive in the stamp box on the table by the Food Pantry items. W.O.W. trims the stamps and send them to a group in Ft. Myers. They in turn sell them to collectors and use the money they receive for Sunday School materials for third world countries and the U.S.

Blood Donors...Carolyn Bright

What a better Christmas present to give than helping save someone's life. Please sign up to give blood at our church on **December 10 from 8:30 am to 11:30 am**. There will be a sign-up sheet at the welcome desk. If you have any questions, please see Carolyn Bright at (352) 220-2542.

Christmas Decorating...Alice Trusley

Angels are among us. Grace Christmas tree was put up on November 28; however, **YOU** are invited to participate in decorating our tree. **Please bring your favorite ANGEL ornament to church on Sunday, December 3 and decorate our tree**. We would like to see the tree covered with angels.

Also, I would like to say a big "thank you" to our great decorating team (Priscilla Frederick, Cindy Kulp, Judy Chambliss, Carolyn Bright, and Alice Trusley) for an awesome job. We hope you enjoy our decorations.

Ways of the Kingdom.....Jan Wise

Remember the words the angels sang on the night of Jesus' birth: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests"? We sing about this "peace" every Christmas, wondering where it is and why God is not giving it to we "men" on earth. God loves all mankind. So why doesn't his peace rest on earth, especially in America where we are a nation (maybe not all, but many of us) of people who know and use his name to show our reverence. But rereading the verse, we find the peace the angels sing about comes *only* to those on whom God's favor rests--those in whom the Holy Spirit of Christ will live because they have chosen to receive Jesus as their Savior.

The shepherds immediate response to the angels' song shows how God works in willing hearts: "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has happened, which the Lord has told us about". Then the scripture tells us the shepherds returned to their flocks after seeing the Christ

child in the manger, "glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen, which were just as they had been told". The lowly, often-scorned shepherds contributed to peace on earth by obeying the Lord, receiving his promise, and glorifying him for what they had been blessed to experience.

So what about us in this Christmas season? Paul writes, "The entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbor as yourself. If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other". What we have allowed the world to do to Christmas seems to lead to a great deal of biting and devouring!

The song says, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." As a Christian, Christ's peace resides in you by his indwelling Holy Spirit. Can you bring peace to the checkout line by a kind word of encouragement to the harassed cashier? How about the frazzled mom trying to control a restless toddler and a cart full of groceries? Look for someone you can speak peace to or silently pray for to receive God's encouragement.

How can peace begin with you--with us--in the turmoil of the season? If we enter a place in a fully-frazzled mood ourselves, we will only increase the fray. But if we enter each place with the prayer, "Lord, help me to bring your peace to this place," our being there will make a heavenly difference. We, like the shepherds, will come out of that store or restaurant or family gathering praising and glorifying God for the blessed opportunity God has given us.

Samaritan's Purse...Donna Farmer

Christmas is one of the most joyful times of the year, but as we celebrate the birth of God's Son, Jesus Christ, we must remember that the Lord has called us to care for those in need. The 2023 Samaritan's Purse Christmas Gift Catalog offers unique and meaningful ways for you to not only meet critical physical needs, but also to provide opportunities for our teams and partners around the world to share the Gospel. We invite you to prayerfully [browse the Catalog of Opportunities](#) that are available at the Church. See which giving opportunity God may lay on your heart to bless someone with His love this Christmas.

W.O.W. Gift Wrapping...Katie Snowberger

Fun Fact! Women of worship (W.O.W.) will be providing a service available to all church members. We will be happily **wrapping Christmas presents for free**. Simply bring your gifts to church on December 3 or 17 in the box, and we will get them beautifully wrapped. We will provide a wide selection of gift wrapping paper for your selection. **Donations are not necessary but will be accepted** to further the mission of W.O.W. which is to purchase a printer for the Church!

Dates to Save

December 3 – First Day of Advent and lighting the first Advent candle

December 3 – Communion Sunday

December 14 – W.O.W @ 2:00 pm

December 24 – Sunday morning worship @ 10:00 am

December 24 – Christmas Eve Service 4 p.m.

December 25 – Christmas Day

December 31 – Sunday morning worship @ 10:00 am
December 31 – New Year's Eve
January 7, 2024 – Communion Sunday
February 14, 2024 – Ash Wednesday
February 14, 2024 – Valentine's Day
March 24, 2024 – Palm Sunday
March 29, 2024 – Good Friday
March 31, 2024 – Easter Sunday

Bible Studies, Prayer Groups, & Other Meetings at Grace Methodist Church

Mon 1:00 pm Memory Lane Support Group & Respite

Tues 9:00 am Weight Management Meeting (women & men)

Wed 7:00 am Men's Prayer Group at GMC followed by breakfast out

Wed 4:00 pm Choir Practice led by Katherine Cornelius

Thurs 10:00 am S.O.A.P. (Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer)...Jan Wise

Thurs 11:30 am 1:30 pm Women's Lunch Bunch Bible Study led by Sharon Miller

Note.... Women of Worship (WOW)...Meets once a month on the second Thursday...**Next meeting is December 14 @ 2:00 p.m.**

Fri 10:00 am Bible Study led by Jan Wise (10:00-11 Prayer concerns, joys, & fellowship)

Fri 11 am -12 pm Bible Study...led by Jan Wise

Fri 10:15 am Bible study led by Pastor Farmer, Meadow Crest Clubhouse

Articles for future newsletters and if you have a testimony that you wish to share, please send to Alice Trusley @ atrusley@pantherbranch.com

Grace Methodist Church is a member of the



Merry Christmas

· HAPPY NEW YEAR ·

