



First Presbyterian Church of Gulf Shores

NEWSLETTER



"Loving God, Growing in Faith, Sharing Christ's Love"

December 2011

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Madeleine "Engle asks, "Was there a moment, known only to God, when all the stars held their breath, when the galaxies paused in their dance for a fraction of a second, and the Word, who had called it all into being, went with all his love into the womb of a young girl, and the universe started to breathe again, and the ancient harmonies resumed their song, and the angels clapped their hands for joy?"

Was there a moment when we held our breath, paused in our dance, and marveled at the Word who made all things, visible and invisible, became flesh to take up his dwelling among us, to be Emmanuel, God with us?

Theologian Karl Rahner says, "If God's incomprehensibility does not grip us, if it does not draw us into his super-luminous darkness, if it does not call us out of the little house of our homely, close-hugged truths...we have misunderstood the words of Christianity."

Mary asks the angel Gabriel "*How can this be...?*" Gabriel answers that the Holy Spirit will make it happen. It is an answer that provides details without providing an explanation. It is a moment simply to hold one's breath; a moment for the dance to pause; a moment to be held in the grip of God's incomprehensibility.

It is a moment that calls for response. Mary shows us the way. "*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.*" Eugene Peterson speculates that Mary taught Jesus to make this response to God's call. He echoed his mother's words in the garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his death, praying, "*not my will but yours be done.*"

Take time to be quiet this Advent season. Take time to be still, to almost literally hold your breath, pause the dance, and consider the mystery we celebrate. Know that Christ's coming is also Christ's call. What will our response be? May ours be as Mary's response; "*let it be with me according to your word*" and Jesus' response, "*not my will, but yours be done.*"

Advent blessings, *Pastor Steven*

***At its stated meeting of November 30, 2011, the
Session***

- Approved the treasurer's report showing total income for the month of October \$14,209.93 and total expenses \$17,626.17.
- Thanked Bill Ribelin, Linda Wallace and Craig Jackson for their work on the session these last three years and thanked Craig for remaining for the next three years.
- Welcomed Russell Gaston, Ellen Roberts, Gary Klussman, and Bob Roberts, the incoming class of elders, who were present to observe the meeting.
- Talked about the Craft Fair on December 10th, plans to help and donate.
- Heard that Sandra Kant has prepared a children's lesson and is always ready to receive any children who attend the traditional service – the lessons will also be available to the contemporary service when needed.
- Heard staff job descriptions and performance reviews have been done.
- Were glad to hear the work on the thermostats is almost complete – are ready to be programmed.
- Received the provisional budget for the year 2012 from treasurer Larry Rice.
- Set a congregational meeting for December 18th following the traditional worship service.

Elder for the Month of December

The Elder for the month of December is Ken Ketzler (968-6742). You may contact Ken if the pastor is temporarily unavailable for any reason. This contact will be completely confidential.

The Lord's Supper: our schedule



We celebrate the Lord's Supper every Sunday in the Contemporary Worship. In the Traditional Service, we celebrate on the first Sunday of each month and on the major Christian Feast Days. These include Christmas, the Baptism of the Lord, the Transfiguration, Maundy Thursday, Easter, Pentecost, Trinity, and Christ the King. These eight feast days, plus the twelve Sundays of the year together mean that we celebrate the Lords Supper twenty times a year in the traditional service, compared with fifty-two times a year in the contemporary service.

This year, Christmas falls on the last Sunday in December, the Baptism of the Lord falls on on January 8th, and in between these two feast days is the first Sunday in January. So, as it turns out, we will celebrate the Lord's Supper three Sundays in a row.

It is my prayer that the natural unity of Word and Sacrament, the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper will be a blessing to all of us as we hear the Word proclaimed in scripture and see, feel, and taste the Word enacted in the sacrament. As our Book of Order says, "It is appropriate to celebrate the Lord's Supper as often as each Lord's Day. It is to be celebrated regularly and frequently enough to be recognized as integral to the Service for the Lord's Day." [W-2.4009]

"Let us say what we believe"

The Lord's Supper is a meal shared together. As with other meals, this one has moments in which we are encouraged to speak to one another. The Lord's Supper is rich with meaning and is personal to each of us as we individually receive the bread and cup. As the bread tray comes, it is all the more meaningful and personal when the one handing it to us says, "This is the body of Christ, given for you." We make the moment all the more meaningful and personal to others as we say to them, as we hand them the bread likewise, "This is the body of Christ, given for you." Saying the name of the one we hand the plate to, and making eye contact only increases the personal nature of the words. Similarly, as we receive the cup tray, the one handing it says, "This is the blood of Christ, given for you" and we likewise say the same as we hand the cup to our neighbor.

In speaking these words to each other, we are “saying what we believe,” thus affirming our own faith, and encouraging each other’s faith as well.

Communion and the 2 Ways of Knowing

from “Invitation to Christ” (PCUSA Office of Theology and Worship)

“In Luke 24, the evangelist narrates the first post-resurrection appearance of the risen Christ to two disciples who have departed Jerusalem for Emmaus in a state of dejection. In this well-known encounter, Jesus appears as their companion along the way. Conversation around the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures concerning the Messiah leads to a meal where the stranger acts as host. It is a revelatory meal, one in which the identity of the host is made known to the two disciples, who are left to ponder the meaning of their experience. The Gospel narrates that they said to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” Returning to share this experience with their fellow disciples, “They told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

This story holds together different and indispensable ways of human knowing: hearing and sensing, word and symbol, Scripture and sacrament. Only after their experience of a shared meal did the two disciples recognize Jesus. The meal made it possible for them to return to their hearing of the Word and discover a depth they had not previously understood. The relationship of experience to understanding is of great importance to our sacramental practice. Indeed, when the disciples report their encounter with the risen Jesus to those in Jerusalem, they name the meal as the place where recognition took place even though, in retrospect, their hearts were burning while he spoke the Word to them.

Communion Schedule: how frequent?

from “Invitation to Christ” (PCUSA Office of Theology and Worship)

“At the Lord’s Supper, or Eucharist, or Communion, we are fed and nourished to live the baptismal life. The Christ with whom we are joined in baptism, and whose body we are, continues to give himself to us in the meal that bears his name. As the only repeatable part of Christian initiation, the Lord’s Supper draws us more deeply into the Easter mystery of our dying and rising with Christ. Trusting

the integrity of our Reformed tradition and its affirmation of Word and Sacrament as normative for each Lord's Day, we encourage the increased frequency of the Lord's Supper. Congregations might consider adding particular Sundays in the liturgical year or try celebrating the Lord's Supper through an entire season, like the season of Easter. Whether you increase the annual number of Communion Sundays by one or by several, more frequent and regular use of these means of grace strengthens the church in its baptismal identity and call.



A Very Special Thank You

Our thanks to our church family for the cards, calls, prayers, and wonderful food dishes that we received while I was recuperating from my fall and surgery. It was all truly appreciated!

Larry & Eula Patzer



A Special Christmas Message

In this season of giving and peace, it is important to me that I recognize the everyday gifts of God. I know that we should all give the gift of love especially to our personal loved ones as well as ourselves. That love is multiplied when I see their of happy smiles and contented hearts. I wish for all of us a season and new year full of peace, love, and joy with family and friends.

Have a year full of the wonderment of love and family.

Sandra Kant

Happy Birthday!

Sue Betz
Ruth Johnson
Dale Dusenbery
Lois Williams
John McCausland



Please make sure the church office has your birthday month!

Presbyterian Women

The next meeting of the Presbyterian Women will be held on Tuesday, January 10 at 10:00 am. Fellowship will be begin at 9:30 with the meeting at 10:00. The lesson for this month is *Greatly Honored Are Those Who Show Mercy!* All women are invited. .



Lunch Bunch



Lunch Bunch will start back up after the holidays, and when our winter family is here to join us. Please watch your Newsletters and bulletins for date and place. Thanks.

The Book Club



The Book Club will meet on Monday, December 12 at 9:30 a.m., in the church library . The book for December is *Red Bird Christmas* by Fannie Flagg. The reviewer will be Toni Turner. All are invited.

Our Christian Sympathy is extended to:

Mrs. Ruthie Carr and family on the loss of Bob on Monday, November 21. Please keep the Carr family in your prayers.



We need your help!



We are hosting our first Arts & Crafts Fair and we welcome donations of hand crafted items to be sold on Dec. 10th. What type of items? Home canned pickles, smocked or crocheted items, needlework, baked goods, jars of bean soup mix, etc. We will also have a table of Christmas items for sale. Perhaps you have an extra nativity set, or a few unwanted Christmas mugs. Bring your unwanted Christmas decor and craft donations to Room C in the Education Wing. Baked items can be dropped off Dec. 9 from 4 - 7 PM, or Dec. 10 from 7 - 9 AM. The day of the sale we can use your help to man our craft or Christmas table, or to sell refreshments. A sign up sheet is in Fellowship Hall.

Christmas Day Pot Luck



We will be getting together for a Christmas Day Potluck dinner at our church at 2:00 p.m. on Christmas Day. If you would like to join us please sign up on the sheet in the Fellowship Hall and include what you would like to bring. We are in need of an accurate count so that we may plan accordingly. Thank you.

Christmas Eve Service



Our Christmas Eve Service will be held on Saturday, December 24 at 5:30 p.m. Please make plans to join us for this very special time of worship.

Joy Gift



Joy Gift will be collected on Sunday, December 18. Please give as you are able.

Church Office

The Church Office will be closed Monday, December 26 and Monday, January 2, for Christmas and New Years holiday. Have a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



Church Decorations



A very special thank you to all those who turned out to help decorate the church for Christmas. Your help was very much appreciated. The church looks beautiful.

Thanks,
Linda and the Worship Ministry Team.



The Chancel Choir

presents

“The Sounds of Christmas”

A Traditional Christmas Concert

Tuesday, December 20

6:30 pm

*Please mark your calendar for this special evening of music
followed by a reception hosted by the
Presbyterian Women*

2012 Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women



The 2012 Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women will be held on July 18-22, 2012, in Orlando, Florida. You may register online beginning, December 1, 2011, at www.presbyterianwomen.org/gathering. You may begin registering on January 15, by phone 502-429-5825. If you plan to attend and register by May 15 you save \$40.00.