



UPLIFT Newsletter

The United Presbyterian
Church of Blairsville, PA

DECEMBER 2023

The word Advent means arrival, and it refers to the arrival of Jesus Christ into the world. Some churches emphasize the Advent season more than others, but all Christians look forward to celebrating Christ's birth during this season of the year. Why was Jesus' birth so important? The reason is because slightly over 2,000 years ago, God stooped down from Heaven and became a human being: Jesus Christ. As the Bible says, *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us"* John 1:14. Think of it: God became a man! He did it because He loves us—and that's what we should celebrate as Christmas approaches. Take time between now and Christmas to reflect on this great truth. Below are readings for each week as you prepare to celebrate the coming of the Christ child.

Week 1 reading Isaiah 9:6 *"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*

In this scripture we find the message and meaning of Christmas. Isaiah the prophet gave five awe-inspiring names of our Lord that encourage us, thrill us, and fill us with hope at this Christmas season.

WONDERFUL. When He did His many miracles, the scripture says, *"The people wondered"* (Luke 11:14).

COUNSELOR. The people said, *"No one ever spoke the way this man does"* (John 7:46).

THE MIGHTY GOD. He is the God-Man. He said that He and the Father are one (John 10:30).

THE EVERLASTING FATHER. It was by Him, the living Word, that all things were created. He is the designer of the whole universe (John 1:3; Hebrews 11:3).

PRINCE OF PEACE. There will never be lasting peace on earth until He comes again to reign in righteousness. But He is also the Prince of Peace in other ways. None can have peace with God apart from Him and the peace that He made through the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20).

The full meaning of these words from Isaiah should give us enough strength, hope and joy to face any crisis, endure any sorrow, and meet any temptation.

Week 2 reading Matthew 1:19-21 *"Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'* "

We're given just a little glimpse of Mary and Joseph before Jesus was born. They lived in the hill country of Galilee. Joseph was a religious man. Mary gives every evidence of having a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, even though she was a teenager. The Bible teaches that God was so pleased with her that He chose her to be the mother of Jesus. Mary and Joseph weren't married, and yet Mary became pregnant. I've often put myself in Joseph's place—imagined his thoughts, his aspirations about the girl to whom he was engaged. But Joseph decided to break the engagement privately. While he was thinking about these things, God's angel appeared to him in a dream to give Joseph an explanation of the situation. All Joseph's suspicions were put away. He accepted what God had said through the angel, and he was immediately married to Mary. Both Joseph and Mary followed the call and plan of God, and through their obedience the way was prepared for Christ to come and bless us.

Week 3 reading Luke 2:8-10 *"In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:'"*

On that first Christmas night, the angels appeared to shepherds on a hill near Bethlehem. Alfred Edersheim, the great 19th century Jewish-Christian scholar, wrote in his book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* that the shepherds and the sheep to whom the angels appeared near Bethlehem were no ordinary shepherds and sheep. The sheep were those bound for the temple sacrifices. The shepherds were outcasts because of their necessary isolation from religious ordinances. And their manner of life rendered legal observances unlikely, if not absolutely impossible. How wonderful that in God's wisdom and love the angels should appear to them—the doomed and the outcast—that night. Today we can declare to the world that the Good Shepherd cares for all people and wants to give them peace. Christ came on that first Christmas for one purpose—to die on the cross for our sins. Now God offers forgiveness, inner peace, and eternal life to all who will repent and believe in His Son. This is the Christmas message!

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Worship Leaders

December 3—First Sunday of Advent

Speaker Clark Bruner
Liturgist Mary Anzelone
Advent Readers Kristi & Olivia Eckenroad
Property Mgr. Terry Brown

December 10—Second Sunday of Advent

Speaker Randy Degenkolb
Liturgist Barb Brown
Advent Readers Zack & Lindsay Barto
Property Mgr. Bob Cosharek

December 17—Third Sunday of Advent

Worship Christmas Cantata
Advent Readers Adam Doak Family
Flowers Christmas Poinsettias
Property Mgr. Dennis Gould

December 24—11 AM—Fourth Sunday of Advent

Speakers Clark Bruner
Communion Gene Artman
Liturgist Dennis Gould
Advent Readers Elaine Jellison & Jean Heberling
Flowers Christmas Poinsettias
Special Music Handbell Choir

December 24—7:00 PM Christmas Eve

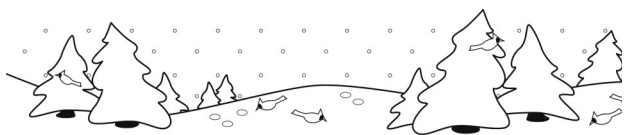
Worship Carols & Scripture

December 31

Worship Lessons & Carols
Liturgist Rick Shoemaker
Special Music Blairsville Brass
Property Mgr. Kim McKinney

December Offering Counters

Bob & Charlotte Cosharek



Chancel Choir Update

Our Chancel Choir rehearsals are held each Wednesday evening from 7:00-8:00 p.m. in the sanctuary. We would love to have new voices join the choir! Many of our seasoned members are no longer with us. If you are interested in singing in the choir, please see Cindy Borbonus. All are welcome!

January Newsletter

All articles to be published in the January 2024 edition of the UPLIFT newsletter are due to the church office by Sunday, December 17th.



Advent & Christmas

First Sunday of Advent 12-3-23

10:15 Cookies & Coffee-Tea
11:00 Worship with Clark Bruner

Second Sunday of Advent 12-10-23

10:15 Cookies & Coffee-Tea
11:00 Worship with Randy Degenkolb

Third Sunday of Advent 12-17-23

10:15 Cookies & Coffee-Tea
11:00 Christmas Cantata

Fourth Sunday of Advent 12-24-23

10:15 Cookies & Coffee-Tea
11:00 Worship with Clark Bruner
Communion with Elder Gene Artman
Special Music by our Handbell Choir

Christmas Eve 12-24-23

7:00 Lessons & Carols



Christmas Cantata

Rehearsals for our Christmas Cantata are held each Wednesday from 8:00-8:30 p.m., following Chancel Choir rehearsal. Advent and Christmas are beautiful times in the church and music is part of that beauty. If you would like to participate with the special music for the holidays, you are invited to attend rehearsals. The Christmas Cantata will be presented during worship Sunday, December 17th at 11:00 a.m. Please see Cindy Borbonus for additional information.

Christmas Music & Children

This year's Christmas cantata has a part for children! Any children ages 4 – 12 years who would like to sing in the cantata are welcome. There will be two practices for the kids, Sunday, December 10 and Sunday, December 17 before worship. For more information, see Cindy.

Handbell Choir News

Handbell Choir rehearsal begins at 6:00 p.m. each Wednesday evening. We need 1 or 2 more ringers to complete our 2-octave choir and 3 or 4 more ringers to be able to play our 3-octave music. If you have ever thought of giving handbells a try, please contact Vicky Westley. We can plan a time to meet so you can "test it out" before committing to ringing with the Bell Choir.

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Week 4 reading Luke 2:11, 13-14 *“To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’”*

The greatest sermon ever preached was delivered by angels on this historic night. It has always been interesting to me that this message was delivered at night. It wasn't night because the sun had gone down. It was night because the world was surrounded in spiritual and moral gloom. People were driven by greed, intolerance, and lust for power. Religion had become a device for the rich in the exploitation of the poor. Men robbed and swindled and profited under the cloak of religion; they even fought wars in the name of religion. In every arena of life, it was night when Jesus came. Things haven't changed. Today, there seems to be a moral night that has settled over our world—sexual immorality, pleasure-mad people, lusting for money and power—the same as it was in the days when Jesus came 2,000 years ago. It is in the darkest hour that Christ often comes. He brings the joy, the thrill, the peace, and the glory such as you have never known—when you and your loved ones give your lives to Him.

Week 5 reading John 3:16; 5:24 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”*

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life.”

The word Christmas begins with Christ: the virgin-born Christ child, our Savior. The babe of Bethlehem was not merely a remarkable child but the Son of God. In His infinite grace, He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was born into this world as a man, yet He never ceased to be God. Jesus Christ in His infinite love did not begin when He was born in a stable and laid in a manger; He left Heaven's best to come to this world to be the Savior of mankind. He was offered as a free gift. God's gift to the world was despised and rejected 2,000 years ago. In the life of every person who has rejected Him since that time, there has proved to be a fatal defectiveness. Only when we accept the free gift of eternal life through Christ can we know the true meaning of Christmas, the forgiveness of sin, and life everlasting. God gave His all for you. By giving Him your all this Christmas, you will reach others with the Gospel that they, too, may receive God's gift. In what tangible ways can you give Jesus your all today and in the coming year?

-Advent Meditations By Billy Graham from “Preparing to Celebrate Christ's Birth—Arrival.”

Church News Email

In addition to emailing members of the congregation information weekly about upcoming Sunday services and other special events, we are considering emailing the monthly newsletter to interested individuals. If you aren't receiving the weekly updates, that means we don't have your email address! Please email upchurch@r-church.com so that we can add you to the list to receive updates.

Please let us know if you would prefer a digital copy of the newsletter or if you would like to continue receiving a printed format. upchurch@r-church.com

Church Anniversary Ornaments

Keepsake ornaments of the church from Wendall August Forge are available to purchase at a cost of \$12.00 each. Checks can be made payable to the church. Please see Linda George or call the church office.

Welcome

On Sunday, November 12th we welcomed a new member to the congregation. We would like to introduce her to you.

Barbara Barto is married to Brad Schry. She has one son and one daughter and two granddaughters, Lennon and Hayden. (If you attend worship, you may have met Hayden!) Barb was raised in the Lutheran Church and attended the Catholic Church. In her free time she enjoys reading and painting. Barb is employed as a pediatric nurse. As a congregation we can help Barb by remaining a family oriented and welcoming faith community.

Homemade Quilt

The Grannies are accepting silent auction bids for the full size, hand appliqued Dresden Plate pattern quilt at the back of the sanctuary. A recommended starting bid is \$200. Proceeds from the auction will benefit the grannies outreach ministry.

Advent Devotionals

ADVENT devotionals will be available for you at the back of the sanctuary beginning the First Sunday of Advent, December 3rd. This year's devotional is entitled, "The Light of Grace, Welcoming God's Amazing Gift of Christ" by Michael Hoy. These guides are meant to help you as you move through the season to the coming of the Christ Child.

Worship Assistants

Volunteers to assist during the worship service are always needed. There are a variety of ways you can become involved as an assistant.

Greeter—welcome those coming in for worship and hand them a bulletin; answer questions like, "Can I sit anywhere?"

Liturgist—assist from the pulpit, by leading the Call to Worship, Prayer of Confession and reading the first scripture.

Audio-Visual Tech—after training, take your turn in rotation to run the sound and slides from the balcony during worship, and live-stream the service for those at home.



MADE IN AMERICA

(Blairsville, to be exact)

The Grannies sewing group has several handmade items available for your purchase. Funds raised through the sale of these items help to support our mission of providing a blanket to each person baptized in our church, quilts distributed to fire victims and Habitat for Humanity, stuffed bunnies, bears and ducks given to the Alice Paul House and Citizen's Ambulance Service, dignity robes to the Indiana Hospital Women's Imaging Center, lap robes for those in our church, hats to be given with the Coat Drive, and dining scarves for residents of St. Andrew's Village. These are just some of the distribution points of our sewing projects.

As you consider your needs for the upcoming holiday gift-giving season, look to fill your stockings or gift bags with some of the following. Your generosity will help to support the sewing projects within our church and the community. Items available year round-special orders taken, contact the church office-724.459.7991.

Animals, stuffed	\$10
Aprons	\$5
Bags	\$3
**Casserole Cover	\$5, special order
Coasters, quilted	4/\$6
Dining Scarf/Bib	\$5
Dish Cloths, knitted	medium \$4, large \$5
Hats	\$6
Hot Pads, quilted	medium \$5, large \$6
Hot Pads, knitted/crocheted	medium \$4, large \$5
Kitchen Sets (2 hot pads, dishcloth)	\$10
Lap Robe	\$20
Place Mats, Steelers	\$5 each
Place Mats, Christmas	\$5 or 4/\$16
**Plastic Bag Holder	\$3, special order
Runners, quilted	\$17
Runners	medium \$10, large \$12
Scrubby, netting	\$3
Swiffer Cover	\$5
Walker Bib	\$5
Towels	\$6

We will celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion at our Christmas Eve morning service at 11:00 a.m. Please take time to prepare to receive and share the sacrament.

2024 Community Lenten Devotional

The ministerium has decided to compile and publish another Community Lenten Devotional in 2024. There are several scriptures to choose from each day through Lent. Those who volunteer will share a devotion of about 450 words, list the biblical reference from one of the listed lectionary texts or a text of the writer's choice citing the version of the Bible used, followed by the devotional and a two-sentence prayer. Giving your name is optional but appreciated. Send devotionals to the church office email, upchurch@r-church.com or drop off a hard copy by Sunday, January 21st. Lent begins Wednesday, February 14, 2024. Easter is March 31, 2024.

All submissions will be gathered and compiled into booklet form, duplicated, then distributed to area churches for use during the Lenten Season. Our congregation has been assigned 3 days. There are several texts per day. Volunteers are needed to write devotional thoughts for these days. If you feel led to share with your brothers and sisters in Blairsville, please contact the church office and let Jill know of your willingness as soon as possible.

Thursday, March 7—Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9; Jeremiah 7:23-28; Luke 11:14-23

Friday, March 8—Psalm 81:6-11, 14, 17; Hosea 14:2-10; Mark 12:28-34

Saturday, March 9—Psalm 51:3-4, 18-21; Hosea 6:1-6; Luke 18:9-14

Thanks for All the Help

Thank you to all who helped make our Church Family Thanksgiving Dinner a success again this year. To Doug and Andrea Clayton, those who stepped up to help Doug and Andrea, those who prepared food, set up and cleaned up, those who contributed monetarily, and especially all the kitchen help, it was much appreciated. Thank you to all who stayed and enjoyed the meal and fellowship. We are so thankful for our church family!

2024 Flower Chart

The Flower Chart is located on the bulletin board in the hallway by the church office. You may sign-up for your choice of dates. Gary's Floral provides our arrangements. After worship, you may take your flowers home or we ask that you pick up by the following Tuesday. Those remaining after Tuesday will be delivered to one of our home bound members. Dedications to be printed in the bulletin can be noted on the sign-up chart. Flower arrangements are \$20 each and checks can be made payable to the "Board of Deacons."

Community Christmas Concert

A Christmas Community Concert will be held Monday, December 11th at 7:00 p.m. in our sanctuary. The concert is being sponsored by the Blairsville Monday Music Club and all area church choirs, music groups and area musicians are welcome to participate. Each group is asked to present one or two musical Christmas songs and there will be two combined songs performed with all participants. We hope you will join us for this evening of holiday cheer!

Congregational Meeting

A congregational meeting is planned for Sunday, January 7th immediately following worship to accept the report of the Nominating Committee regarding members of the Pastoral Nominating Committee.

End of the Year Reports

Committee chairs are asked to begin thinking about end of the year reports for the Annual Ecclesiastical/Corporate Meeting. Reports are due to the church office by Sunday, January 21st.

Financial Statements

End of the year financial statements will be mailed early to mid-January. If you would like your statement earlier, contact the church office at 724-459-7991.

2024 Offering Envelopes

Offering envelopes for the New Year are available for you to pick up at the back of the sanctuary. If you do not have church offering envelopes and would like a box set, please drop a note in the offering plate or contact Jill in the church office at 724-459-7991.

ICCAP Food Bank

The Blairsville Area Food Bank is held the second Tuesday of each month. Food bags are distributed from Fellowship Hall to folks from the Blairsville Borough between the hours of 10:30 a.m.—12:00 p.m. Proof of address in the Blairsville Borough is needed when signing up.



How Well Do You Know Your Bible

Bible Trivia

Answers in the next newsletter

1. Who was Jesus' adoptive father on earth?
2. Who was Jesus' human mother?
3. Who first heard the good news of Jesus' birth?
4. What symbol marked the birthplace of Jesus?
5. Who visited Jesus as a toddler and what did Jesus receive?

BIBLE TRIVIA ANSWERS

1. It is "better to obtain wisdom" than what?
Answer: Gold (Proverbs 16:16)
2. What are the nine fruits of the Spirit?
Answer: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self Control. (Galatians 5:22-23)
3. What did the Philippian jailer say to Paul after he heard the gospel?
Answer: What must I do to be saved? (Acts 16:30-34)
4. Who helped pay the bills for Jesus and the disciples ministry?
Answer: Several women who Jesus had healed. (Luke 8:1-3)
5. How did Samson die?
Answer: Pushing over the temple pillars, killing himself and many Philistines. (Judges 16:23-31)

Our Leadership

We thank Jeff Lewis, Joan Moran and Pat Swope, elders and Steve Moran, Bobbi Monroe and Janet Smith, deacons for their leadership and service. Those elected to leadership positions at our September meeting include: Bonni Dunlap, Todd Faulk and Rick Shoemaker, elders; Lindsay Barto, Lynnette Borbonus, Kristi Eckenroad and Diana Messenger, deacons.

Cards for the Holidays

A card is a nice way to brighten someone's day at this time of year. Remember our homebound members and friends or those you haven't seen in a while when you're sending your holiday greetings. You can check with the church office if you need a mailing address.

Prayers for Our Church

As Pastor Monroe comes to the end of his time with us, we ask that you keep the church leaders in your prayers as they seek a way forward in the New Year. Please pray for wisdom, guidance, patience, and unity. Pray also for the work of the Pastoral Nominating Committee.

"Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose."

I Corinthians 1:10