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## *From the Pastor's Keyboard*



Dear friends in this wonderful family of faith,

Advent/ Christmas / Epiphany evokes all kinds of emotions in us – from nostalgia and “warm fuzzies” to sadness and even depression (feeling guilty that one should feel joy but does not during this time of year) to indifference to exhaustion and weariness to grateful joy to God and others. Whatever you are feeling this holiday season, you and I know deep in our hearts that “Jesus is the reason for the season”.

That is because of the Incarnation – the Word becoming flesh and blood. If the Christmas season points to anything, we know that in scripture, the great miracle of the incarnation slips into the life of the ordinary life of a child; later the great miracle of the transfiguration fades into the demon-possessed valley below; and later still the glory of the resurrection descends into a breakfast on the seashore. All of these events are not an anticlimax, but a great revelation of God.

Oswald Chambers, in his book My Utmost For His Highest, reminds us that we often look for spiritual wonders and “spiritual highs” and people noticing us instead of go through mundane days glorifying God in all that we go through and in all that we do – even if there are no witnesses, no limelight, and no one paying even the remotest attention to us. After all, do you and I, even if we are not looking for halos, at least often want something that will make people say of us, “What a wonderful man of prayer he is!” or, “What a great woman of devotion she is!”?

If we are properly devoted to the Lord Jesus, who came in the flesh as a vulnerable baby, Chambers maintains that we have reached the point where no one would ever notice us personally. All that is noticed is the power of God coming through us all the time. As 1 Corinthians 10:31 states: “... whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.”

To do the most humbling tasks to the glory of God takes the Almighty God Incarnate (the same Incarnate God born that first Christmas) working in us. To be utterly unnoticeable requires God's Spirit in us making us absolutely humanly God's. The true mark of a Christian life is not successfulness (as the world and even as the church often defines success), but faithfulness and displaying the glory of God in human life, to live a life “hidden with Christ in God” in our everyday human conditions (Colossians 3:3). Just as God came to earth in the Incarnation at Christmas, Chambers claims that our everyday, unremarkable human relationships are the very conditions in which the ideal life of God can be exhibited.

May it be so for us this Christmas and all through the coming year of 2025!

And please join us for wonderful fellowship and uplift this holiday season at St. John's Blymire's UCC church. We have our

Christmas Marketplace on November 30, Cookie Walk on December 7, Ugly Sweater Event and Contest on December 8, Christmas Caroling to our homebound folks on December 15, Sunday School sessions on December 1, 15 and 22 on Max Lucado's reflections on Christmas, Christmas Messy Church on December 20, and our Christmas Eve Cantata and Communion and Candlelight on December 24. All of these events are detailed elsewhere in this newsletter.

And don't forget the questions that we continue to ask ourselves during this interim period: **Who are we as St. John's Blymire's United Church of Christ? Who are our neighbors? Who is God calling us to become as we journey into God's future? What is our unique niche here in Dallastown?**

See you around this month of December, Pastor Rick

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*YOUR ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS THAT PASTOR RICK ASKED US TO CONSIDER ON NOVEMBER 17:*

***(1) What one thing has this church done really well in the past (distant or recent)?***

Make recent comers feel welcomed and feel like we belong

Family atmosphere

A sense of love here

A lot of community outreach

Have developed creative programs / events

Fellowship / Outreach / Friendliness

Feel like a part of an adopted, created family that is provided support

New members are welcome

We are welcoming

"I feel loved, I feel I belong, the church wants what's best for me."

***(2) What is one of your hopes and dreams for the future of our church?***

We need to try new things

We need children and young members to become active

We need younger people to survive and to thrive

We need to develop a contemporary program to attract young families

We need to develop a mentorship program

We need more members

***(3) How are you praying for our church right now (using the words on the post-its from earlier in November and on that day)?***

That we will always have our church family

That we will have more outreach and church growth

To thrive

I pray every night for our church

### ***CARING AND SHARING FUND***

There is a plate on the table in the Gathering Room for you to contribute to the Dallastown Area School District's Caring and Sharing Fund which helps students and their families who are in special need. You may contribute to this Fund anytime by putting in the offering plate cash in marked envelopes or checks made out to the church and earmarked for DASD Caring and Sharing Fund.

In addition, you are encouraged to bring good, used clothing to Community Aid, tell them it's for DASD, and DASD will then get a certain amount of money per pound of clothing, to go toward this fund. If you are unable to take the clothing directly to Community Aid, you can bring them to the church and put them in the bins in the Gathering Place. The bins will be emptied and clothes taken to Community Aid on a regular basis.

We are currently collecting grocery store gift cards for local families who are food insecure during this holiday season. There is a Christmas tree where we will clip our gift cards onto. Deadline to bring in the cards is Sunday, December 8. In partnership with the Dallastown Area School District, these gift cards will be given to families of school children in need in DASD by December 11.

## **Come With Me If You Want (Your Church) To Live** *(pertinent to us here at St. John's Blymire's UCC Church)*

by [anna@convergenceus.org](mailto:anna@convergenceus.org) November 11, 2024

By: Rev. Dr. Anna Hall

More and more these days I am working with churches whose members express a wish that their church would just stay the same, for a while, anyway. Often, the unspoken part might be that they wish the church would stay the same until they are gone, unto death or the retirement home. They may want it to stay the same just long enough to have their funeral. Or to live out their elder years in the comfort and familiarity of the church they've always known.

It is easy to understand their feelings. We have been living in a whirlwind of change in recent decades. This change was accelerated even further by the global pandemic. The slow decline of white Western Christianity became a jump off a cliff. I could cite statistic after statistic about this change, but you can simply review my past research for that.

What I would rather focus on now is how we can navigate our longing for stability in this age of radical change.

First, we can focus on grief. Yes, grief. We have not spent nearly enough time allowing ourselves and our churches to grieve the things that will be no more. Maybe it is time for a monthly ritual where we lament and let go of those things we'll never get back, in church and in other parts of our life. We can light a candle for all that we have lost and spend time in silence, prayer, and mutual support for our losses.

Second, we can practice care. When we take the time to care for one another, we create powerful buffers of resilience that can carry us through times of change. Research shows that a supportive community and mentors/exemplars are key components of human resilience and aging well. We can make sure every church member is connected to at least two others for mutual support. If someone is really feeling down about how things are changing, we can make a visit and take them a casserole. We can make care packages for those struggling to take home from church any day that they feel buffeted and overwhelmed by life's changes.

Finally, we can preach and teach the Biblical truth that abundant life is only possible when we are willing to die to our old selves and be born anew. The title quote is from the Terminator movies, but we can also hear it in Jesus' teaching – "unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

Jesus says we must follow him into new life if we want to truly live. The same is true for our churches. There is no way to keep our churches the same. Using up our energy, time, and money to do so simply means that we are okay with their death as soon as we are gone. Because churches that never change have no room for anyone new to bring their whole selves into church life. They have no room for God to speak to them anew. No church that is truly alive avoids change.

Are you ready to live abundantly? If so, what are you willing to give up to do so? And what support do you need to help you loosen your grasp?

If you are ready to work on building change, skills, and resilience in your congregation, reach out to us at Convergence. We are happy to help through coaching and consulting that prepares you and your congregation for abundant life.

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**"Seeking Common Ground"** is a grassroots, nationwide movement that has taken hold in our country the last few months, particularly in light of our recent tumultuous election campaigns and the consequences of our recent election. "Seeking Common Ground" involves organizations (such as churches) to sponsor groups that are purposely comprised of "red", "blue", and independents. By design, these groups consist of folks with varying political and theological positions who meet together, with ground rules, to talk about real issues and values that are important to each person and to not gloss over differences. The purpose of these groups is to get folks to truly listen to those with opposing views from theirs, to fully appreciate our differences, to understand others better, and to truly respect each other.

Pastor Rick is wondering if folks from St. John's Blymire's UCC are interested in helping him set up such a group. He has also reached out to a couple of UCC churches in our area to ask if they are interested in partnering with us in this endeavor. Can the church, in fact, model for the world what it means to have faith-based honesty, respect, and inclusivity? Please contact Pastor Rick if you have questions or an interest.

## **MONTH OF SUNDAYS WORSHIP SERVICES FOR DECEMBER 2024**

### **DECEMBER 1, 2024—FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT / WORLD AIDS DAY**

Message Scripture: Luke 21:5-38      Centering Scripture: Jeremiah 33:14-16  
Message: First Capital Brass sharing messages in music  
Advent Wreath: Beth Innerst      Reflection/Question Time After Worship  
Sunday School: Max Lucado's reflections on Christmas – Ginny Weber

### **DECEMBER 8, 2024 – SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

Message Scripture: Luke 1:67-80, 3:1-6      Centering Scripture: Malachi 3:2-3  
Message: Andy Stump from ASAPH      Alternative: "John Revived Isaiah"  
Advent Wreath: Barb McFatridge      Reflection/Question Time After Worship  
Sunday School Time: Ugly Sweater Event, put on by our FUN Team

### **DECEMBER 15, 2024 – THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

Message Scripture: Luke 3:7-20      Centering Scripture: Isaiah 12:2  
Message: "How's Your Produce Section?"      Theme: Share, no greed, gladden  
Advent Wreath: Mike/Roberta Wills      Reflection/Question Time After Worship  
Sunday School: Max Lucado's reflections on Christmas – Peggie Free

### **DECEMBER 22, 2024 – FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

Message Scripture: Luke 1:39-55      Centering Scripture: Micah 5:2  
Message: "Why Me? Why Not Me?"      Theme: Life is good, even the struggles  
Advent Wreath: Mark/Diane Ness      Reflection/Question Time After Worship  
Sunday School: Max Lucado's reflections on Christmas – Ginny Weber

### **DECEMBER 24, 2024 – CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE AT 7:00 PM**

Message Scripture: Isaiah 9:2-7; Luke 2:1-20      Centering Scripture: Titus 3:4-7  
Message: Choral Cantata      Carols, Holy Communion, Candlelight  
Advent Wreath: Nelson & Marti Leader      Children's Message: Peace, Goodwill, Joy

### **DECEMBER 29, 2024 – FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS**

Message Scripture: Luke 2:41-52, Colossians 3:12-17      Centering: Psalm 148:13-14  
Message: Cindy Innerst-Axe preaching      Reflection/Question Time After Worship  
No Sunday School

***December Holy Humor:*** (from <https://cityimpactchurch.com/the-best-christmas-jokes/>)

What kind of motorbike does Santa ride?    *A Holly Davidson!*

What do you call a cat in the desert?    *Sandy Claws!*

What did Adam say to his wife on Christmas?    *It's Christmas, Eve!*

What says Oh Oh Oh?    *Santa walking backwards!*

What's Santa's favorite type of music?    *Wrap!*

How does an elf get to Santa's workshop?    *By icicle!*

What do Santa's elves learn in school?    *The elf-abet!*

What do you call an elf that can sing and dance?    *Elf-is Presley!*

Why are Christmas trees so bad at knitting?    *They have too many needles!*

What do you get when you mix a Christmas tree and an iPad?    *A pineapple!*

What is a Christmas tree's favorite candy?    *Orna-mints!*

Where would you find snowmen dancing?    *At a snowball!*

What do sheep say at Christmas?    *A Merry Christmas to Ewe!*

Which one of Santa's reindeer has the best moves?    *Dancer!*

Why is a broken drum the best Christmas present?    *You can't beat it!*

**DECEMBER**  
**BIRTHDAYS**



*May God  
Bless You on  
Your  
Birthday!*

- |     |                     |     |                |
|-----|---------------------|-----|----------------|
| 2.  | Sundi Neuhaus       | 26. | Thomas Miller  |
|     | Judy Bishop         | 27. | Donna Sleeth   |
| 5.  | Natasha Brenner     |     | Sylvia Kohler  |
| 6.  | Cindy Luckenbaugh   | 31. | Herbert Bosley |
| 7.  | Jamie Klyeman       |     |                |
| 10. | Kevin Myers         |     |                |
| 12. | Carl Criswell       |     |                |
|     | Jennifer Roelke     |     |                |
|     | Katie Stoops        |     |                |
| 14. | Jennifer Knickel    |     |                |
| 16. | Lori Corso          |     |                |
| 17. | Hannah Marshall     |     |                |
|     | W. Edwin Bishop     |     |                |
| 18. | Brett Innerst       |     |                |
|     | Kortney Troop       |     |                |
| 19. | Danielle Marshall   |     |                |
|     | Zachery Luckenbaugh |     |                |
| 22. | Carol Barnhart      |     |                |
|     | Callie Nugent       |     |                |

**CELEBRATING DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES**

- Dec. 16 - Rod and Linda Eichelberger - 57 years  
Dec. 18 - Pastor Curt and Ginny Weber - 53 years  
Dec. 28 - Terry & Sharon Stein - 33 years

# FINANCIAL REPORT

Undesignated General Fund

Red Brick Chapel

Cemetery

Month-2024	Income	Expense	Income	Expense	Income	Expense
January	\$10,102.00	\$9,943.43	\$600.89	\$319.65	\$784.93	\$0.00
February	\$7,747.00	\$10,447.49	\$1,200.83	\$318.91	\$1,652.89	\$500.00
March	\$8,402.00	\$10,244.71	\$0.91	\$556.38	\$26.59	\$792.24
April	\$13,187.00	\$11,317.37	\$0.81	\$258.87	\$2.74	\$3,187.50
May	\$9,242.00	\$9,355.00	\$0.71	\$178.64	\$438.87	\$3,159.28
June	\$9,161.00	\$10,126.11	\$0.84	\$390.96	\$907.30	\$3,840.02
July	\$10,860.18	\$18,635.10	\$0.78	\$126.04	\$15.71	\$2,742.49
August	\$7,379.00	\$9,311.18	\$0.74	\$126.99	\$309.62	\$2,395.26
September	\$8,702.00	\$12,148.91	\$75.78	\$344.31	\$203.74	\$2,684.38
October	\$10,686.00	\$9,158.72	\$5000.63	\$128.33	\$2502.81	\$3,376.42
November						
December						
<b>Total</b>	\$95,468.18	\$110,688.00	\$6,882.92	\$2,749.09	\$6,845.20	\$22,677.59

Balance of Undesignated General Fund @ November 1, 2024

(\$7,902.25)

Balance of Red Brick Chapel Fund @ November 1, 2024  
(Includes \$61,554.06 Endowment)

\$70,561.67

Balance of Cemetery Fund @ November 1, 2024  
(Includes \$875,504.97 CD's, Trusts, UCC Foundation)

\$892,907.88

## Financial Assistance Given through Hand of Hope Fund - 2024

	#	Total	Monthly	Available
	Families	\$\$\$	Donations	Balance
Beginning				\$ 956.17
January	1	\$25.00	\$ 48.00	\$ 979.17
February	1	\$50.00	\$ 192.00	\$ 1121.17
March			\$ 93.00	\$ 1214.17
April	3	\$420.00	\$ 404.00	\$ 1198.17
May			\$ 265.15	\$ 1463.32
June	2	\$100.00	\$ 110.04	\$ 1473.36
July	4	\$300.00	\$ 84.00	\$ 1257.36
August	3	\$225.00	\$ 90.00	\$ 1122.36
September	5	\$940.00	\$ 472.72	\$ 655.08
October	2	\$150.00	\$ 132.00	\$ 637.08
November				
December				
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	\$2,210.00	\$ 1,890.91	

# REMEMBER OUR SHUT-INS and those in need of PRAYER

## **Terry & Fran Doll**

Room 346  
Residence @ Fitz Farm  
2200 Springwood Rd.  
York, PA 17403  
Terry's cell (717) 968-2454  
Fran's cell (717) 968-8754



## **Linda Trone**

Room 604  
Colonial Manor Nursing Home  
970 Colonial Avenue  
York, PA 17403

Keeping in our prayers

## **Cindie McKinsey**

**Friends battling cancer  
Covid 19 patients**

**Peggy Luckenbaugh**  
Room 710B  
Colonial Manor Nursing Home  
970 Colonial Avenue  
York, PA 17403

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**Remember  
and pray for  
Our Members  
in the  
Military**

**A1C Ness, Brandon**  
6907 S. Camino de la Humanidad  
Tucson, AZ 85756

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## **Pairing of 50+- Year Members with Newer Members**

Our Pastoral Relations Team (PRT) has asked our 50+-Year Members of St. John's Blymire's Church if they would consider mentoring our newest members (those who joined our church in 2024). Mentoring involves checking up on folks from time to time to see how they're doing, encouraging church participation and continued spiritual growth, and being an example of a faithful and covenantal church member. Carol Barnhart is currently working on pairing our 50+-year members with our new members.

You are invited to join us in the Gathering Room after the worship service on Sunday, December 8. Wear an ugly sweater or bring one to decorate.



The FUN Team will provide materials. There will be a meal including ham and sweet potatoes. You are asked to bring a covered dish to go along with the meal. There will also be a Christmas ornament exchange. If you would like to participate in it, please bring a wrapped ornament. Come have some pre-Christmas fun with us!!

## **Gift Cards**

Would you like to help your church without spending any extra money? You can do this by buying gift cards to use for everyday purchases or as gifts. For every card sold we earn a profit from 1½% all the way to 16%, depending on the merchant. To get your cards, just fill out an order form (available on the table in the Gathering Room) and attach a check or cash. Checks should be made payable to St. John's Blymire's UCC. You may drop the orders in the offering plate or place them on Wanda's desk in the office. Payment must be included with your order. Orders will be sent in each Monday morning. You may pick up your gift cards from Sandy Innerst at church the following Sunday. **This is a great way to do your Christmas shopping!!**



## **COOKIE WALK**

Our annual Cookie Walk will be held on Saturday, December 7, from 9:00 AM until noon (or sold out). A large selection of all types of homemade cookies will be available. Buy as many as you like, mix and match flavors, all for just \$12.00 per pound.

In order for this to be a success we need lots of cookies, so get out your cookbooks, mixing bowls and cookie sheets. Cookies may be dropped off at the church that week from 8:00AM-11:00AM on Wednesday, 8:00AM-1:30PM on Thursday and Friday, also Friday evening 6:30-8:00PM. In addition to bakers, volunteers are also needed to help set up Friday evening and with the sales on Saturday morning. Questions, call Marti Leader at 717-858-6502.



## **MEN'S GROUP**



Our next Men's Group meeting will be Tuesday, December 10, at 7:00 PM at the church. Those attending will be invited to share their favorite Christmas memories.



On Sunday, December 15, at 6:30 PM we will be meeting at the church to go Christmas caroling at various nursing homes and the residences of some of our shut-ins. All are welcome to come along.



## **WOMEN OF WONDER**

Who? What? Where? When? We are a group of women who simply enjoy each other's company, conversation and compassion...while sharing a message of God's love to each other, our church family, and our community. We read scripture and share devotions. We offer advice, support, and sometimes a shoulder. We laugh together and find joy. If this sounds like something you or a friend would like to do, we meet on the 4th Saturday of every month at 11:00 AM at the church. (We also go out to lunch afterward). Hope to see you in the Gathering Room for our next meeting on December 28.

Our offering envelopes for 2025 will be ready to be picked up from the Welcome Table in the Gathering Room beginning Sunday, December 8. If you did not use envelopes in 2024, but would like some for 2025. please contact the church office. Using offering envelopes helps to ensure the privacy of your donations and also makes it easier for us to keep track of what you have given for tax purposes. Thank you.



## **Emmanuel's Closet**

We will be giving out grocery gift cards to our clients to be used to purchase meat and other perishable items for their Christmas dinners. We will also be giving gift cards in December for each child who is registered at Emmanuel's Closet. The parent can then use the card to buy gifts that they think their child would like or simply give the card to the child to choose their own gifts.

What is Messy Church? It's church, but not as you know it! Messy Church is a form of family church for children and adults. It involves creativity, celebration and hospitality! It's church for people of any age and at all stages of their faith journey. If traditional church is no longer a part of your life, come try out Messy Church!



Our next Messy Church gathering will be held on Friday, December 20, 6:00-8:00 PM. A meal will be provided.



## **CARD and GAME CLUB**



We have started a group to play card and board games here at the church. Everyone is welcome, and if you don't know how to play certain games, there will be someone who can teach you. You can bring lunch or order in.

We meet the second Wednesday of each month starting at 11:00 AM and playing until people are ready to stop. December's meeting will be on the 11th.



## **GUIDED MEDITATION and DRUM CIRCLE**

Meditation and Music are very good ways to deepen your personal spiritual practice. Relax, let go of worldly thoughts, and sink into your soul. We invite you to join us Saturday, December 21, at 10:00 AM, for Guided Meditation, followed by Drum Circle, with a variety of instruments available. We have moved the meeting place from the church to the home of Cindy Innerst-Axe, 2285 Swamp Road, Dallastown. Questions, call Cindy (717) 855-6330.

## **Tree of Lights**

As we did last year, we will be including a "Tree of Lights" as part of our Christmas Eve service. You may sponsor a light in memory of or in honor of someone or just as a year end gift to help support our church. This year's donations will be used to help pay for the recent upgrades to our HVAC system.



You can pick up a Sponsorship form from the Welcome Table in the Gathering Room.





Winter is the season in which people try to keep the house as warm as it was in the summer, when they complained about the heat.

Source Unknown

When it snows, you have two choices, shovel or make snow angels!



### GOD COMES TO THE COMMON

There's one word that describes the night Jesus came – ordinary. It was an ordinary night with ordinary sheep and ordinary shepherds. And were it not for a God who loves to hook an “extra” on the front of the ordinary, the night would have gone unnoticed. But God dances amidst the common, and that night he did a waltz.

The night was ordinary no more. The announcement went first to the shepherds. They didn't ask God if he was sure he knew what he was doing. Theologians would have consulted their commentaries. The elite would have looked to see if anyone was watching. The successful would have first looked to their calendars. The angels went to the shepherds. Men who didn't know enough to tell God that messiahs aren't found sleeping in a feed trough. God comes to the common, because his most powerful tools are the simplest.

Max Lucado

### “AS THE GOOD BOOK SAYS...”

*On entering the house, the magi saw the young child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. - Matthew 2:11 (NRSV)*

One of my favorite characters in musical theater is Tevye from Fiddler on the Roof. Tevye is fond of saying, “As the Good Book says...” usually followed by something that isn't in the Good Book.

The same is often true for Christmas. Luke's Gospel says Jesus was laid in a manger but says nothing about a stable or that animals were present. And what about those “Three Kings of Orient Are” in Matthew? Well, they aren't.

Matthew never calls them kings. There is no mention of camels. Matthew doesn't number them. There might have been three. There might have been 33.

Here's something else the Good Book doesn't say about the magi: they arrived in time for Christmas. In fact, they were late. Really late. They entered “the house,” not the stable, and they saw a “young child,” not a newborn.

That gives hope to a late bloomer like me. No matter how arduous the journey or how long the night or how reluctantly I move, the Christ child is content to extend the celebration until I arrive. Jesus will receive my presence and my gifts anytime. When that happens, it's not only Jesus' birthday party, it's also mine and yours too. As the Good Book says, to find Jesus is to be reborn. It doesn't say anything about when.

**Prayer-** Jesus, I'm on the way.  
Matt Laney

SNOWMEN  
FALL FROM  
HEAVEN  
UNASSEMBLED



May you grow still enough to hear the small noises earth makes in preparing for the long sleep of winter, so that you yourself may grow calm and grounded deep within. May you grow still enough to hear the trickling of water seeping into the ground, so that your soul may be softened and healed, and guided in its flow. May you grow still enough to hear the splintering of starlight in the winter sky and the roar at earth's fiery core. May you grow still enough to hear the stir of a single snowflake in the air, so that your inner silence may turn into hushed expectation.

Brother David Steindl-Rast

“Winter is the time for comfort, for good food and warmth, for the touch of a friendly hand and for a talk beside the fire: it is the time for home”

Edith Sitwell

## PRICELESS GIFTS TO GIVE THIS YEAR



*The gift of listening:* No interrupting, no daydreaming, no planning your responses. Just listen.

*The gift of affection:* Be generous with appropriate hugs, kisses, and pats on the back.

*The gift of laughter:* Share articles, funny stories, and cartoons to tell someone, "I love to laugh with you."

*The gift of a compliment:* A simple and sincere "You look great in red," "You did a super job." or "That was a wonderful meal." can make someone's day.

*The gift of solitude:* Be sensitive to the times when others want nothing more than to be left alone.

*The gift of a cheerful disposition:* The easiest way to feel good is to extend a kind word to someone, even if it's just saying hello or thank you.

*The gift of prayer:* Let your friends and loved ones know you pray for them, then do it!

## GIFTS

As a little girl climbed onto Santa's lap, Santa asked the usual, "And what would you like for Christmas?"

The child stared at him open mouthed and horrified for a minute, then gasped: "Didn't you get my E-mail?"



## THE GIFT OF JESUS

No greater gift has ever been given, no example of generosity so selfless. No time in human history was ever so important as when the Light of the World entered his own creation. The prophesied and long-hoped-for Messiah came for us, our glorious Prince of Peace, full of grace and truth and bearing the gift of eternal life. He was the ultimate gift of love!

Jill Foley Turner

## THE GIFT OF YOU!



God has given you the gift of you! Aren't you curious to see what has been lovingly 'wrapped' within your being? Your personality is your first amazing gift — a unique edition. This gift comes with many accessories, your talents being one of them. Your second priceless gift is the fragment of God that lives within you! Can you even fathom how blessed you are? The Father lovingly endows you with potentialities and leaves it up to you to develop them, so as to bring forth your own spiritual beauty as a heartfelt acknowledgment that His gifts have not been taken for granted and have been put to good use.

The Father does not gift you with the finished product. In His wisdom, He gives you kits that will require you to put your God-given intelligence, your God-given energy, your God-given intuition and your God-given imagination to good use. The Father provides you with all the parts and all the tools needed to put the gift together. He also lives within you, in order to "read the owner's manual to you" whenever needed. There is also a constant hotline that is accessible to you whenever you find yourself at a loss. All that you have to do is to turn within and seek His guidance. You will find that the Father is truly the best sounding board you could ever have — unconditionally loving, inspiring, understanding, encouraging and accepting.

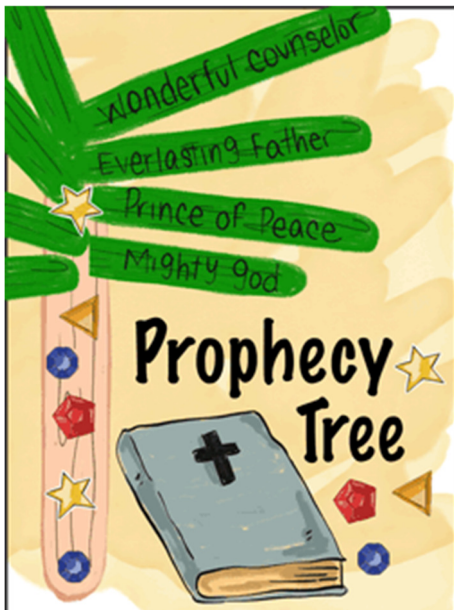
1111 Progress Group

## YOU'RE ALSO THE WRAPPING!



Did you know you're meant to be a gift to others too? We're His masterpiece. God gives Himself through people who follow Him. We are all special to Him, but we're just packages carrying the real gift, which is the spirit of Jesus. The trick is to try not to make too much of ourselves because we know we're not the main event at the end of the day. It's all about Jesus. God loves to give gifts which is why He sent Jesus. But He's also big on the wrapping, which is why He created you.

Bob Goff



## Prophecy Tree

Make this Christmas craft to display special names for Jesus.

### What you need:

- Large wooden craft stick
- Small green wooden craft sticks
- Scissors
- Ruler
- Bible
- Permanent marker
- Craft glue
- Optional: star stickers or craft jewels

### What you do:

1. Place the large stick on a table vertically, like a tree trunk.
2. Cut the green sticks into pieces that measure 4", 3½", 3" and 2½".
3. On each green stick, write a name for Jesus from Isaiah 9:6 — Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Write small or ask an adult for help.)
4. Use a dot of glue to attach each green stick to the large stick, like tree branches.
5. Decorate your Christmas tree with stickers or jewels.



# PUZZLE



## CLUES ABOUT CHRISTMAS

The Old Testament contains many details about Jesus' birth. Can you uncover what Isaiah prophesied?

Directions: Use the code to write the letters and complete Isaiah 9:6-7, NIV.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	!	@	#	\$
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
%	^	&	*	(	)	-	?	>	<	:	;	{

For to us a 3 8 9 # 4 is 2 ^ ( % , to us a ) ^ %

is 7 9 > 5 % , and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called Wonderful 3 ^ ? % ) 5 # ^ ( '.

\$ 9 7 8 - ; God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the

greatness of his government and & 5 1 3 5 there will be no 5 % 4 .

He will reign on David's - 8 ( ^ % 5 and over his @ 9 % 7 4 ^ \$ '.

establishing and upholding it with ! ? ) - 9 3 5 and righteousness

from that time on and 6 ^ ( 5 > 5 ( . Isaiah 9:6-7, NIV

Answers: child, born, son, given, Counselor, Mighty, peace, end, throne, kingdom, justice, forever