

Pastor's Log 12-16-20

What are you expecting this Christmas? No, that is not "what do you want for Christmas," but what are you expecting this Christmas?

We could take that question to be what are we expecting Christmas to be like in a pandemic blighted year? And that might be a good place to start. For our family, expectations have been dimmed. We will be gathering, but at a place chosen for its isolation and possibility for a few days we will be able to create a safe bubble from others. Our daughters' annual trip into NYC the day before Christmas will not happen. We will not head out to a movie the day after Christmas as we have in past years. Our Christmas meal will be different because it will be prepared in someone else's kitchen. But we will be together, and we will share in the joy of family gathered.

How fortunate we will be. For we are not carrying the grief of family members who will not be present because of health, or death. It forces me to recognize how privileged I/we am/are this year, and aware of how my Christmas expectations are so often shaped by the privilege in which I live.

This Advent season is causing me to reflect ever more deeply on the message that God is sending us in the birth of Jesus. He was born not in royal privilege, but lowly estate. The Son of God came not to a royal court, but to a maid, in a barn, surrounded by the cast-offs of the society.

So, this year, in this unprecedented, challenging, difficult year, I am realizing once again that God became flesh and dwelt among us, not for me in my privilege, but for the lowly with whom God has found favor. I am reminded that Christ our Savior declared that he came

to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed, go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19)

What am I expecting for Christmas this year? That once again I will be part of the proclamation that God has broken into the darkness of our world, and that the light of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ will be shared with my family, with all of you who are part of this church family; and I expect that that light of love will come into the lives of all, for all are indeed the children of God.

May the hope, peace, joy, and love of God be with you, and shine through you this Christmas season.

*Pastor Paul*

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.... *for as soon as I heard your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.....(Luke 1:44)*

Such are the words spoken by Elizabeth to Mary during their visit with one another. Many surprises can be discovered in the story about the Christ child, but here in Luke's account, a particular surprise is emphasized: the experience of joy which is simultaneously human and divine.

Last evening, Julia, a dear friend of my daughter's visited. Julia and Audrey-- now college students-- have been BFF's (best friends forever) since grade school. When they visit together, they often exchange gifts. But last night's visit was different: they had plans to create the ultimate Christmas cookie. As the smell of chocolate chip cookies wafted through the air, so did the sounds of laughter and conversation. It wasn't that I could hear the specific conversation, rather it was the tone, the feeling, the excitement which captured my attention. I could not help but smile as the joy of their friendship filled our entire house. Who could not recognize their gift of relationship, *presence*, to each other?

Several nights ago, I woke to recall a past winter's day; a particularly cold day on which the sun was shining with an unusual brightness. I had earlier that day gone cross country skiing. It was exhilarating to hear the crisp crunch of my skis upon the snow and feel the chilled air in my lungs, the sun on my face. My whole body felt especially alive. Then word came to me that my uncle was not well. I immediately traveled to see him. As usual I took note of the boulder alongside the driveway to his house, but this time I did not stop to climb it. (Often I climbed the boulder because, there at the top, I could feel like I was Queen - of - the - world!) My uncle and I did not exchange many words. We both knew that he was dying. Yet the moments were filled with a sense of contentment. It was his smile which communicated to me the joy of his heart. I will never forget the gift of *presence*, and the sense of holiness and peace which filled us both.

Since COVID-19, I have become aware of the many ways all of you bring *presence* to each other. I think of two women in our congregation, Betty Newberry and June Scott, who for years now have made it their spiritual practice to call each other every morning to see how the other is doing. I think of the recent Presbyterian Women Zoom meeting: Jane Kidder and all of us lamented that the usual Christmas party/ cookie exchange could not happen this year. Despite our grief, laughter broke in upon us as we realized that the joy and sharing of good news could still happen, just by a different way - phone or letter. And despite isolation becoming the norm during this pandemic, the invitation, energy, and excitement of God's Holy Spirit cannot be thwarted.

In this Advent season, may you experience moments of extraordinary joy wherein relationships, both human and divine, converge. Open your eyes, your ears, your mind, but most of all your heart to the Christ child in your midst.

**Pastor Ann**

**Friday Car-Caroling** - Remember to contact the Church Office or Carol Houghton if you would like our Car-Carolers to stop by on Friday, or if you would like to join in the caroling. **We will be caravanning from the Church at 4:00PM on Friday.** Masks are required, we will be singing outside, and traveling in “Pandemic Bubble” groups.

**Change to Sunday Adult Education** - The Sunday Afternoon Adult Education Class will **not meet** this Sunday. **It will next meet on Sunday, January 3, at 1:00 PM** with continuing discussion of the book, **Good White Racist**, by Kerry Connelly.

**Advent and Christmas Worship at Ewing-Covenant**\_\_\_\_\_

**All services will be found at our Worship Zoom Link:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/910100569>

Or by telephone dial 1-929-205-6099, if asked, enter the Webinar ID: 910 100 569

**Sunday, December 20 - 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent**

**10:00 Worship Service**

Rev. Paul Rhebergen preaching

Advent Word – Love                      Jesse Tree Symbol – the Lamp

Lectionary: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

**Wednesday, December 23 - Service of Solace and Hope**

**7:00 PM** This service is for those who are grieving, struggling with uncertainty, suffering or loneliness during this Advent season. Encouraging each other by remembering our deep connection with God’s story, blessing, and promise, we will experience God’s solace, love, and peace through the miracle of the Christ child already in our midst. The sacrament of communion will be shared during this service.

**Thursday, December 24 - Christmas Eve**

**8:00 PM Christmas Eve Service**

Rev. Paul Rhebergen preaching

Be sure to have your candle ready to light as you sing **Silent Night**

Jesse Tree Symbol – the Star

**Sunday, December 27 - 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Christmas**

**10:00 Worship Service**

Here are the Ewing-Covenant Zoom Links: \_\_\_\_\_

**Ewing-Covenant Presbyterian Church at Worship**

**Every Sunday - 10:00 AM**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/910100569>

Or by telephone dial 1-929-205-6099, if asked, enter the Webinar ID: 910 100 569

**Sunday Morning Bible Study - 9:00 AM Led by Sam Bonner**

<https://zoom.us/j/564813133?pwd=WxV3dk5zYlkvUGJDUUEwZEc2R3REdz09>

By phone, dial 1-646-558-8656 and enter when asked the meeting ID 564-813-133

**Sunday Afternoon Adult Ed. Next Session January 3, 2021 at 1 PM**

Join Zoom Meeting <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81923102879>

By phone, dial 1-929-205-6099, Meeting ID: 819 2310 2879

**Tuesday and Thursday Chat's with Pastor Ann**

**Tuesdays - 10 AM to 11 AM.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81010467123?pwd=UDNqWG5pN0t3MFJUeDN5SFcvQnpzd09>

Meeting ID: 810 1046 7123 Password: 271785 By phone +1- 929- 436-2866 enter password: 271785

**Thursdays - 7 PM to 8 PM.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/960150849?pwd=bTdYTVV3S1MOR2xmenZSWlc5MnhMUT09>

Meeting ID: 960 150 849 Password: 079496 By phone dial 1-929 -436- 2866 Password: 079496

**Wednesday Vision Conversations with Pastor Paul Dec. 16**

**7:00 PM**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86079729283>

By phone dial 1 929 205 6099

Meeting ID: 860 7972 9283