

# The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, United Church of Christ

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## Living into the Christmas Challenge

Advent is a season of anticipation and preparation. I have mentioned before that the Season of Lent ends at the grave. Its meaning and purpose are to focus our attention on Jesus' suffering and death. The Easter resurrection is distinct from this. This separation mimics the real trauma of the cross and then the unexpected joy of the empty tomb. Advent, however, climaxes on Christmas. It anticipates the Messiah's birth and it calls on the faithful to prepare for the coming of God into the world as one of us for all of us.

This is represented in the symbolism of the Advent wreath's four candles. Each Advent Sunday more light is added and then on Christmas Eve the final candle, the Christ Candle, is lit. The fullness of light is revealed with the Messiah's birth. Advent slows us down so that we do not rush carelessly and unprepared to the Bethlehem manger. We must learn to wait. We must take the time needed to first appreciate and absorb Advent's lessons of hope, peace, love and joy.

The profundity of Christmas is so much more than ho-hoing Santas, flying reindeer and a talking snowman. There is nothing wrong with these Christmas offshoots, but they are packed away on December 26<sup>th</sup>. Advent prepares us for a Christmas transformation. It anticipates that the feelings of this holy season are planted and nurtured in the soul and shared with the world. Advent recognizes that creation changes with Christmas and we are called upon to be the embodiment of that change.

Advent's four Sundays represent the nearly 4,000 years the world waited from creation to Christmas. That number is based not on science, but on the number of biblical generations. It is a symbolic number, but a meaningful one. It links Christmas to creation. It testifies to the divine mystery that the Messiah comes not for one people alone and not only for "the saved." Rather, the Messiah carries the presence of God into all the world not as other, not as observer, but as an extraordinarily ordinary part of creation, as, again, one of us for all of us. It is evidence that the reality of change can be lived in the world. It is proof that the holy can abide among the ordinary and within all of us.

A fundamental difference between our Jewish siblings and Christians is that the Hebrew Scriptures assert that the coming of the Messiah will usher in a reign of universal peace. This means that we share in the same Messianic hopes, such as this one Isaiah offers, but separated by the essential difference of vast epochs of time: "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little

child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (11:6-9) Christians have been forced to reinterpret these prophecies for obvious reasons. We cannot even manage localized peace between Christian nations never mind the universal peace associated with the coming of the Messiah.

We live with the exact same Messianic prophecies, but Christians reinterpret them by changing anticipation and preparation from a passive to an active understanding. Rather than expecting the Messiah to impose God's peace upon creation, Christians propose that the Bethlehem manger reveals that the Messiah's life, teaching and ministry inspire and empower the faithful to build peace on earth. The promises of the Messianic reign are not handed fully developed to humanity. They must be achieved by those who believe in and collaborate with the Messiah.

Advent's anticipation and preparation remind us of all that we are called upon to accomplish in the world. It links the celebration of Christmas with the work of building a Christ-like world filled with hope, peace, love and joy. These gifts are made possible and real in the wonder that is Jesus' birth, but they require our buy-in. We need to become better at living the life Jesus lived. And Advent's message is that this work is not futile nor exhausting. Think to how Advent feels as we approach Christmas. Remember the warmth and community and caring that inhabit this season. This is the work of fulfilling the Messianic prophecies and they are rewarding in themselves. Why can't we really believe this? Why can't we really invest in this? What is it about the alternatives that confront us daily in the news that sounds so much more appealing than this?

Christmas is God's statement that we are trusted with creation and salvation. God believes we can continue what Christmas begins. It is God treating us as adults. May we live and work into this Christmas revelation.



## DECEMBER EVENTS

Sun. 1 <sup>st</sup>	Season of Advent begins.
Tue. 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Rev. Randy will attend the online meeting of the Association Committee on Ministry at 5:45pm.
Sat. 7 <sup>th</sup>	Christmas Craft Fair from 8:30am – 2:00pm.
Mon. 9 <sup>th</sup>	Online Bible study group from 7 – 8:00pm.
Tue. 10 <sup>th</sup>	Rev. Randy will attend the Association clergy lunch in Hadley at noon.
Wed. 11 <sup>th</sup>	Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Mon 16 <sup>th</sup>	Monthly meeting of the Board of Deacons at 5:30pm. Online Bible study group from 7 – 8:00pm.
Sat. 21 <sup>st</sup>	Luminarium Concert at 4:30pm, followed by gathering at Town Hall, and then s'mores.
Sun. 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Christmas Fund Offering accepted.
Tue. 24 <sup>th</sup>	Christmas Eve Service at 7:30pm.

## REGULAR GATHERINGS

Sundays: Worship Service begins at 9:30am online and in person. Sunday School begins after the children's sermon during the worship Service.

Tuesdays: Yoga classes are offered every Tuesday in the church parlor at 5:30pm.

Thursdays: Choir rehearses in the parlor at 7:00pm, except July and August.

## SEASON OF ADVENT

The Season of Advent's four Sundays represent the putative 4,000 years the world awaited the birth of the Messiah. Each Sunday we light one symbolizing the increasing light in the Bethlehem birth of the Child Saviour.

Advent is a time of anticipation and also casual. However, the mystery of God and wondrous, hope-filled and joyous. of us for all of us. To participate in this spiritual homes so that they may become the symbolic manger for the Holy Infant.



additional candle of the Advent Wreath, world as we approach ever closer to the

of preparation. Christmas can easily become entering the world in the birth of Jesus is amazing Christmas is the celebration of God becoming one lived revelation requires that we build-up our

Please make time to worship with us on Sundays, to pray at home, to think about Bible study, and to do acts of charity and kindness. Advent is a sacred season. May we treat it accordingly.

## ADVENT BULLETINS

We use coloured bulletin covers for the Advent Sundays and Christmas Eve. If you would like to donate the bulletins for any available Advent Sunday or Christmas Eve, the cost is \$5. Please make arrangements with Amy Novak.

## CHRISTMAS FLOWER COLLECTION



A traditional part of the Christmas celebration is the Christmas poinsettias. Their bright green and red colours are the basis of those being the Christmas colours. They brighten our church sanctuary and add more joy to our celebration. If you would like to have a poinsettia offered in memory or in honour of someone, please contact Marcia Sheehan at 413-247-9285 with your information, or do so at church. The suggested offering per poinsettia is \$7. If paying by check, please make payable to "Real Folks." The deadline is December 8<sup>th</sup>.

## CHRISTMAS CRAFT FAIR

The Christmas Craft Fair will be held on Saturday, December 7<sup>th</sup> from 8:30am – 2:00pm. Please bake your pies, breads, cookies and more, then package and label them. Maki Reopel is in charge of food. Donations of jewelry, collectibles, and hand-crafted items are always welcome. The Gift Card Tree is hugely popular. Please think about donating a gift card to a local restaurant, shop or grocery store. If you would like to put a gift basket together for the raffle, any theme works beautifully. Be as creative as you'd like. Volunteers are asked to remain after the Service on December 1<sup>st</sup> to help with some early set-up. Donations may be dropped off at the church on the 4<sup>th</sup> from 1 – 4:00pm, the 5<sup>th</sup> from 1 – 4:00pm and the 6<sup>th</sup> from 2 – 6:00pm.

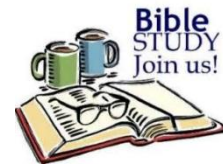
Please advertise this event with your friends, family and neighbours.

## STUFF OUR STOCKINGS SOCK COLLECTION

New socks will be accepted throughout the month of December. Then, they will be donated in the cold of January to help the homeless in our area stay a bit warmer. It must be a horrible thing to live without shelter in the winter, but a warm, dry pair of socks makes it a bit more bearable. Thank you for your donations offered in the truest spirit of Christmas generosity to those most in need.

## ONLINE BIBLE STUDY GROUP

Advent is a perfect time to become more engaged with the still-speaking Word of God. Advent is a time of spiritual preparation, a season to ready our souls to receive again the newborn Christ Child. Returning to the Bible or delving deeper into it, is an especially rich way to get ready for to weeks online the Bible. If you may be interested in joining our group, please send an email [randyc1897@gmail.com](mailto:randyc1897@gmail.com) for the Zoom login. Our group meets on alternate for one hour. Currently, we are working our way through the first books of the Bible. If you would like to learn more about this crucial period of biblical history, you are invited to join us for Bible study.



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## LUMINARIUM CONCERT

The Luminarium concert begins at 4:30pm on Saturday, the 21<sup>st</sup>. Performers at the concert included the Chancel Choir, Joyful Ringers bell choir, ukulele ensemble, and guest string players. After the concert, everyone is invited to Town Hall to share in further celebrations and to greet Santa. Then, people are invited back to the church grounds where s'mores will be provided by the fire pit as the fireworks display lights the sky by the Elementary School. It is a beautifully festive night shared by the entire community. Thanks to all who make this beautiful Christmas tradition possible.

## CHRISTMAS FUND COLLECTION



On Sunday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, the various congregations and members of the United Church of Christ are asked to support the Christmas Fund. This year's theme is "The glory of God shone around them." The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees. This program is administered by the Pension Boards. Please consider supporting those whose ministries supported the church.



## CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

Our joyous, music-filled Christmas Eve worship Service begins at 7:30pm. We come together on one of the longest nights of the year to break through the darkness as we together announce the birth of Jesus. Mid-week is not a usual time for us to come to a church Service, but Christmas is not a usual time. In Bethlehem, God sends angels to humble shepherds in the fields. The angelic chorus announces the birth of the Messiah, the Christ Child. They rush to this newborn king and find Him resting in an animal's manger because there was no room for them anywhere else. What a glorious, inspiring and unusual message. I hope you will accept this invitation to come



and be like those Bethlehem shepherds who rushed to witness the miracle of Christmas. And I invite you to share this same invitation with family and friends so that more people may share in the spiritual wonder that is Christmas.

**NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE**

The Annual Congregational Meeting will be held on January 19<sup>th</sup>. Our worship Service will be at the special time of 11:00am and the meeting will follow directly afterwards in person and via Zoom. In preparation for the Annual Meeting, the Nominations Committee will be asking people to serve the church on Boards and Committees. We are a thoroughly democratic church. This only works when the congregation’s members invest themselves in the work of the church. You are needed.

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

Don’t forget to check in at our website and FaceBook page. The links are directly below. They are updated several times each week and often share information from the larger church that we may not know of otherwise. Please like our pages and posts and share them as you choose.

The Conference has created and constantly updates a new social media presence called *Find Hope Now*. It can be found at [www.findhopenow.org](http://www.findhopenow.org). The site is a concerted effort to offer messages of hope when so much involving religion is defined by judgment and aspersion. As the site grows, it will allow individual congregations such as ours to maintain a presence and to reach out to people in the southern New England region who are looking for churches of hope. Take a look if you have a chance.

**GROCERY CARDS**

*Big Y* grocery card sales are a continuing fundraiser of our congregation. Please contact Linda M. if you would like to purchase any. The church earns 5% on all sales. Thank you.

**CONTACT INFO: HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

Website: [www.hatfieldchurch.org](http://www.hatfieldchurch.org) Facebook: [www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC](http://www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC)

Pastor: Rev. Randy Calvo 413-824-1630 [randyc1897@gmail.com](mailto:randyc1897@gmail.com)

Music Minister: Anthony Tracia [anthonytracia@gmail.com](mailto:anthonytracia@gmail.com)

**Committee Chairpersons:**

<i>Benevolence, Amy N.</i>	<i>Music Committee, Sue M.</i>
<i>Christian Education, Anita W.</i>	<i>Real Folks Society, Amy N.</i>
<i>Church Moderator, Jonathan B.</i>	<i>Trustees, Ed M.</i>
<i>Deacons, Jeff F.</i>	

