

Keeping In Touch

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF STAFFORD

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"What Christmas Reveals"

Pastor Rich Knight

Luke 2:8-20

This message is entitled, "What Christmas Reveals". That's one of the basic questions of Christmas. What does Christmas reveal to us? What is Christmas trying to teach us? My focus in answering questions like that is always, Christmas reveals the heart of God.

And it's a heart of love. "For God so loved the world . . ." It's a heart that reaches out to us. Love has to be shared. Love has to reach out to connect with us. Christmas shows us God's heart, God's character, God's nature. In the person of Jesus, we see God's love embodied. We see God's love in action – healing, forgiving, affirming, blessing, lifting up the oppressed, welcoming in the outcast. In the life of Jesus we see how God loves . . .

us.

God loves like Jesus. Jesus loves like God.

Illustration. A father was putting his little girl to bed one night, and they said their prayers together. For the daughter there was the usual long list of Thank You's. "God, I thank you for my mommy and my daddy. I thank you for our dog and my pet hamster. And I thank you for my best friend, Teddy." When she finished her father commended her for the sincerity of her prayers. But then he asked, "Honey, I thought God was your best friend, not your teddy bear Teddy." The little girl then said to her father, "Teddy has a face."

Christmas puts a face on God. What does God look like? God "looks" like Jesus, loves like Jesus, forgives like Jesus, is gracious like Jesus. Jesus puts a face on God. The Apostle Paul wrote, "We see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (II Cor. 4:6) So that's the heart of Christmas, Jesus came to earth to show us what God is like.

But I want to take it one step further, because Christmas not only reveals who God is, Christmas also reveals who we are – we're Children of God! Jesus came to tell us that we're Children of God and to teach us what that means. When he taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven" he was teaching them this spiritual truth – we're Children of the Living God. He also taught it with these words, "Who are my mother and brothers and sisters but they that do the will of God." He also treated everyone as if they were a child of God just like he was and is!

Illustration. "Jesus never saw a prostitute." I may have told you about the time Tony Campolo was teaching sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, and he happened to mention Jesus in one of his classes. Specifically he said that, "Jesus had a habit of reaching out and spending time with those who were outcasts in society – tax collectors, notorious sinners, even prostitutes."

With that one of his students raised his hand and said, "Jesus never met a prostitute." Dr. Campolo said, "Yes, he did. It's right there in the gospels. You must have missed it." "No. I didn't. Jesus never met a prostitute. Because when he saw a woman who was trapped in prostitution, he didn't see a prostitute. He saw a child of God."

A 4th Century church leader named Athanasius once said this about Christmas, "He became what we are, so that we might become what he is – a child of God."

Christmas teaches us that we're children of God I'll bet the main characters in the Christmas story came out of Christmas feeling that way – Joseph, Mary, the Wise Men, and certainly the Shepherds. They couldn't be-

lieve that they were given an angelic birth announcement, that the Savior was born and “that the Lord had made it known” to them! They went right away to see if it was true, and they left that manger scene changed men. It says they left “glorifying and praising God.” – shepherds walking through the streets singing their praises to God. Not something you see every day. But they were touched by God’s goodness. They had a new sense of who they were as beloved sons of God.

There’s only one other thing I want you to see. The Christmas event not only shows us who we are, it also shows us who we can become. The life of Jesus shows us what is possible for human beings – because everything Jesus did he did in a human body. It wasn’t that Jesus looked human. It’s that he was human.

Max Lucado writes: “God entered our world not like a human, but as a human.” As a baby he cried, nursed, had to be changed, and as a toddler learn to walk and talk. That’s why he got tired, hungry, thirsty, and angry. That’s why he bled and died. He not only looked human; he was human. And everything he did he did in a human body. This explains why Peter thought he could walk on water. Have you ever wondered that? (probably not, but work with me here!) It’s a fairly familiar story. The disciples are in their little boat and a storm is raging, and Jesus appears to them walking on the water.

Peter says, “Lord, if it’s really you, tell me to come to you.” Jesus says, “Come,” and so he steps out of the boat. Now, if that’s me – I’m staying in the boat. I’m staying warm and dry. Why on earth does Peter think he can walk on water? Because Jesus in the flesh – is doing it right before his very eyes. And so if one man from Galilee can walk on water, why can’t another?

Back in the First Century when a rabbi called disciples to himself to be his students, his disciples – the rabbi called those that he felt could become rabbis in just the same way as he was. The whole purpose of gathering disciples was to train them to do what the rabbi did. So the whole purpose of Jesus gathering disciples is to train them to do what he does. “So if he’s walking on water, I guess I must be able to, too!”

Set aside the miracles for a minute, think about what else Jesus modeled for his disciples and for us – certainly love, forgiveness, acceptance of imperfect people, loving when it’s hard to love, loving when you’re beaten and weary. Jesus modeled teamwork, leadership, humility, passion, conviction, kindness, grace. He also modeled having an ongoing relationship and dialogue with God. He taught these things to his disciples and modeled these things because he believed that they could do it, and he believes that you can do it.

–Can you actually forgive the person who intentionally hurt you? Jesus believes you can.

–Can you actually have a genuine relationship, dialogue, and friendship with God? Jesus believes you can.

–Can you actually make a difference in this world, and be salt to the earth and lights to the world? Jesus believes you can.

You see, Christmas isn’t just about God. Christmas is also about us – who we are, and what we can become. How we’re meant to live, what kind of life we’re invited into. Christmas shows us who God is. Christmas show us who we are. Christmas also shows us who we can become. Think about it. Let’s pray about it.

TREASURER’S REPORT

Category	Year-To-Date	Budget-To-Date	Percentage
R21—Freewill	\$ 3759.00	\$ 1,250.00	301%
R22—Pledges	\$ 15,962.00	\$ 15,833.33	101%
R23—Contributions	\$ 6,179.00	\$ 4,375.00	141%
R24—Fund Raising	\$ 8,417.25	\$ 8,666.67	97%
Capital Campaign	\$ 2,405.00	\$ 2,500.00	96%

Through October 31.

CHURCH COUNCIL

Church Council Report for November.

- Treasurer Report: All bills are paid and current as of now things look good with an ending checkbook balance of \$5,964.51. We still have to consider the heating bills that will start soon.
- Clerks Report: No report
- Diaconate Report: The Deacons Fund has proven to be a valuable resource for our members and has been used over the years. There should be two names on this account so with Pastor Bob's passing Ken May was added to the account.
- Trustee Report: The cable bill increased as the promotional deal we had has ended, Andy is in negotiations with Frontier. Trustees may decide to remove internet from our service until such time as we have a need of it again. Also the workers compensation bill for 2025 came in and is being looked at.
- Financial Secretary: We are doing better than last year as far as money coming in but as noted in treasurer report we are going into the heating season which is a costly time of year.
- Christian Education: We continue to have a great time in classes this year. Our nursery is being used and we have volunteers to man it but we are still looking for another volunteer as well as a Sunday School teacher if you are interested in either position see Andrew. We plan to have a Christmas Pageant the Sunday before Christmas sometime during service that morning
- Stewardship Stewardship Sunday November 24th.
- Missions: Delivered Thanksgiving baskets and there was a total of 161 lbs of food delivered. Thanks to all who donated food or cash. The Christmas collection for grocery gift cards will be next on the missions committee agenda along with the annual coat and hats and mitten collection.
- Nominating Committee: There are numerous openings for officers and committees please consider signing up for one of them. See Andrew Greaves for information on the opportunities available.

Also discussed: Membership, Christmas Eve plans and the offer of assistance from pastors of surrounding churches in our time of grieving. The Reverends Jeff Gallagher, Scott Spence and Alisa Dickhoff have all offered help along with the Tolland Association during this difficult time. If you have questions or want to speak with one of these pastors, see Andy for info.

Christmas Eve service will be Dec. 24th at 5:00 pm and at this time it looks to be around 40—45 minutes in length so families can come and still be able to attend other family activities.

These are some of the items discussed and worked on at our November Council meeting.

Bruce Ladr
Moderator

DEACONS

Hello everyone. As you may be well aware, we will be seeking out pulpit supply in the next few months. The current plan is for me (Sarah) to cover the pulpit during December, and have supply preachers lined up for January onward. I will fill in on the days when we can't find someone. This involves going through the pulpit supply list (provided by the Southern New England Conference), finding the ministers who are nearest to our area, and reaching out to them by e-mail and phone to see if they would be interested in coming here for one or several weeks.

Those who have experienced pulpit supply before may know that it can be a unique opportunity to meet many talented ministers, and experience different preaching styles. It can be a good time to make connections as well - pulpit supply is how we first found Pastor Bob.

Ministers who come to fill in on the pulpit are just meant to fill in on Sundays and special circumstances- however, if you have a major life concern and need support beyond our church community (emotionally, spiritually), we have the support of the Tolland Association and their ministers. They have expressed an eagerness to help out if we need it. If you have any questions on the process, feel free to reach out to me.

Other news for the deacons:

- We will be reaching out to those on our check-in list soon, as we do seasonally.
- If you are interested in serving as a deacon next year (2025), please contact one of our current deacons and let them know. It is an excellent opportunity to be actively engaged in the worship service. The more the merrier!

Special thanks to our current deacons, who will be heavily filling in during Advent on deacon duties while we establish pulpit supply. When we have established a steady pulpit supply, I may be away on some Sundays as I practice supply ministry (as a Member in Discernment) myself.

Sincerely in the peace of Christ, with wishes for a warm holiday season for all,

Sarah R.G.
Head Deacon

IN AND AROUND THE CHURCH ...

Our Hearts and Prayers reach out to our Brothers and Sisters who have various needs and struggles: prayers of strength for Ann, Jane, Rita and Flo ... prayers of healing for Pastor Bob ... continued prayers for Carey, Tina, and Eric's father ... joy as Sarah was accepted as a Member in Discernment ... prayers for rain ... prayers for peace ... prayers for Bob Campbell who is recovering from a heart transplant! ... prayers for anyone suffering with mental health issues ... prayers for continued health and happiness for my family ... continued prayers for Bertrand and Claire and their family ... prayers for co-worker Mia who is running in the NYC marathon ... prayers for Florence from Madie ... prayers for Trish, their children and their families as they get through this time of grief ... prayers of joy—my grandson Ethan is coming home for a visit Wednesday ... prayers for the family of Bill Simpson ... prayers for a successful Holly Bazaar ... continued prayers for Carey ... prayers for the USA and unity ... prayers for all who suffer from mental illness and addiction ... prayers for Dave that he may continue to heal ... prayers for our veterans at home and overseas ... thanks to our veterans active and retired, here and passed, for your service ... prayers for my neighbor's granddaughter having surgery for colon cancer ... prayer of safe travel for Aidan coming home ... prayers for work to be ready for snow season ... prayers for Pastor Bob's family from Madie and Julie ... prayers of healing for Ann and Jane ... prayers for Uncle Billy who passed away and prayers for his family... prayers for Shirley in St. Francis Hospital ... prayers for people who are hungry and worried this holiday season ... prayers for Gary Moore and Shirley Kabet ... prayers for the Californians affected by the floods ... prayers for Lulu and baby for a healthy delivery ... prayers for unity and guidance.

Celebrations: prayers of thanks for a successful Holly Bazaar.

A LIGHTER MOMENT. . .

Squirrels

A small town had four churches Presbyterian, Methodist, Catholic and Baptist.

All four had a serious problem with squirrels in the church. Each church in its own fashion had a meeting to deal with the problem.

The Presbyterians decided that it was predestined that squirrels be in the church and that they would just have to live with them.

The Methodists decided they should deal with the squirrels lovingly in the style of Charles Wesley. They humanely trapped them and released them in a park at the edge of town. Within 3 days, they were all back in the church.

The Catholics also humanely trapped them and attempted to teach them the "rhythm" method which of course did not work.

The Baptists had the best solution. They voted the squirrels in as members Now they only see them at

Christmas and Easter.

* * * *

Directions

A little boy was waiting for his mother to come out of the grocery store.

As he waited, he was approached by a man who asked, "Son, can you tell me where the post office is?"

The little boy replied, "Sure, just go straight down the street a couple of blocks and turn to your right."

The man thanked the boy kindly and said, "I'm the new pastor in town, and I'd like for you to come to church on Sunday. I'll show you how to get to Heaven."

The little boy replied with a chuckle, "Awww, come on; you don't even know the way to the post office!"

* * * *

The Pastor's title

A local Pastor joined a community Service Club, and the members thought they would have a little fun with him. Under his name badge they printed, "Hog Caller" as his occupation. Everyone made a big fanfare as the badge was presented.

The Pastor responded by saying, " I usually am called the "Shepherd of the sheep"... but I guess you know your people better than I do."

BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

December Birthdays

December Anniversaries

6 Sarah Roman Greaves
6 Forrest Burke
13 Emma Hatch
26 Brian Miller
31 Janice Gowdy

None

MISSION MOMENTS

We want to thank all of you for your generous donations towards the purchase of food items for six families to enjoy a Thanksgiving feast. We took forty pounds of assorted groceries plus one-hundred twenty-one pounds of Thanksgiving dinner foods to the Crystal Lake food pantry where they were gratefully accepted. Now we are zipping right into the Christmas season which is a busy time for all of us. We will again this year offer a Christmas family meal to six families. The collection envelopes are in the pews and once you have added your donation to the envelope, please place it in the offering box. We will be accepting your donations December 1st, 8th and 15th.

Once again this year we will offer eight Christmas gifts to eight children whose families are in need of a little assistance. The Angel tags will be hanging on the tree in the narthex. Gifts, unwrapped, with a maximum cost of \$50 should be returned to the Narthex on December 8th in order to be distributed on the 12th by Stafford Social Services. We're sorry it's a short time in which to shop. The tree will remain in the Narthex in order to collect winter hats, gloves, mittens and scarves which will be donated to Stafford Social Services for distribution.

We will also run our annual winter outer wear drive. If you have any gently used coats that you no longer want, please bring them to the church and hang them in fellowship hall. We will take them to the Stafford Thrift Store where they will be given to people who have a FREE coupon from Social Services.

The Christmas eve offering taken this year will again be sent to United Church of Christ as part of their Christmas Fund (formally Veterans of the Cross) which is used to give direct financial support to retired and active United Church of Christ ministers, church workers and their families.

We know that this is a lot to ask of you in such a short span of time but please give what you can during this Blessed time in our Christian year.

Thank you all,
Judy, Linda and Michele, your Missions Committee

STEWARDSHIP

At this time we have received thirteen pledges for \$15,300.00 for current expenses, \$1,136.00 for Missions, and \$2,740.04 for Capital Campaign. If you have not returned your pledge there is still time to do so, as well as the need for you to do so. The more we receive from pledging and fund-raising the less we will depend on invested funds for current expenses. Thank you all for your support.

Thank you all,
Lisa Ostrowski for your Stewardship Committee

HOLLY BAZAAR

A heartfelt thanks to everyone in our Church Family for your help and moral support to make our biggest Holly Bazaar yet a big success! We raised an amazing \$2,633.78. We have the best people here at the Second Congregational Church. Have a wonderful Holiday Season, be safe and God Bless each of you.

Kim Dickson
Event Coordinator

DECEMBER PULPIT COVERAGE

The Pulpit will be filled for the month of December and the Christmas Season by Sarah Roman Greaves.

UPDATED ADDRESSES

Two of our members have recently moved to new residences. Please use the following addresses to contact them:

Florence Demars
C/o David Demars
P. O. Box 72
New Portland, ME 04961

Vi Irish
2387 Boston Road #226
Wilbraham, MA 01095
(860)749-3890

OTHER STAFFORD CHURCH ACTIVITIES

St. Edwards Ladies Guild will be hosting a Christmas Bazaar on Saturday, December 7th from 8:30 AM to 1:00 PM in the Church Hall at 27 Church Street, Stafford Springs. Knights of Columbus will be serving a free pancake breakfast starting at 9:00. From 9:30 to 10:00 you can have a photo taken with Santa. From 10:00 to 10:30 the Homeschool children will be presenting a Christmas concert for your enjoyment. Ladies Guild will be selling their homemade pierogi's and Christmas cookies. There will also be tag sale items, a few crafts, and raffles.

December 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 - Hope Worship Service 9:30 AM	2	3	4	5	6	7
8 - Peace Worship Service 9:30 AM	9	10	11	12	13	14
15 - Joy Worship Service 9:30 AM	16	17 Church Council 6:30 PM	18	19	20	21
22 - Love Worship Service 9:30 AM Food Bank Sunday	23	24 CHRISTMAS EVE	25 CHRISTMAS DAY	26	27	28
29 Worship Service 9:30 AM Safe Net Sunday	30	31 NEW YEARS EVE				