

Tidings of Peace

DECEMBER

Newsletter of Peace Memorial EPC

From the Pastor...

Dear Friends,

It's Christmas time again! Technically it is not yet at least. According to the Church calendar, we are in the season of Advent. Advent is that time of year when Christians are called to prepare their hearts, minds and bodies for what is to come (Advent literally means "something is coming"). We are called to consider anew the good news that Jesus was born, and all that this wonderful gift means to the world. How will we remember Him? What difference will that remembrance make in us this season? Will we take the time to allow God to shape us and even reform us more toward Christ, or will we let the routines of the season turn what is supposed to be HOLY, into mere FRENZY?

God's people have always had rituals and traditions designed to help us remember the special work of God. From feasts, to special times of worship, the calendar is designed to set aside special times and traditions to help us remember. One of my favorite rituals for proclaiming Christ Jesus emerges this time of year: The decoration of a Christmas Tree! The Eternal Word of God has become a man born of a virgin to take the sins of the world upon Himself and to put those sins to death in His own body on the cross. By doing so He would destroy sin and death's hold over us and give eternal life to those He calls to faith! What better way to commemorate this Salvation than by cutting down a tree and erecting it in our

living rooms, then festooning it with lights, ribbons, silver and gold?...

...Seriously, have any of you really stopped to consider what in the world we are doing? What in

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the name of all that is decent and holy does a severed pine tree have to do with the birth of Jesus, and why in the world would we bother to make such a delicious mess in our own house? Aside from liking the tradition, do any of us know why we are doing this? Does the Christmas tree really have anything at all to do with Jesus?

You might be surprised with the answer.

As I said, I've always loved the Christmas Tree tradition. But as I delved deeper into the faith, I became concerned about that tradition.

From the Pastor... Continued

What If I had fallen in love with an idol? One of my colleagues in seminary overheard me talking about my plans to get a tree, and he rebuked me for idolatry. "a Christmas tree is just a pagan ritual!" according to him, the Bible forbids setting up such decorations at any time. Jeremiah 10:3-4, 3 says, "For the practices of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. 4 They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails, so it will not totter." -GASP! Not only did I do all of those things (I used a saw instead of an ax) but I had always fastened the tree to a wall with nails and wire, so it doesn't totter! Was my beloved tradition condemned by God's Word? By adorning a Christmas tree in my living room was I setting up an idol!?!

Disturbed, I determined to do some research of my own. I wanted all of my life to be of glory to God -especially those times set aside for special remembrance of God's mighty works. What I discovered about the origins of the Christmas tree was shocking and profound. Ultimately it led me to a deeper and more intentional celebration of Christmas.

Like all good spiritual journeys toward truth, I started with God's Word. Was Jeremiah 10:3-4 condemning the setting up and decoration of a Christmas tree? Certainly not directly as Jeremiah was a prophet that lived several hundred years before the birth of Christ. Never-the-less, the similarity between what Jeremiah condemned and our tradition of cutting down a tree, decorating with silver and gold and securing it so it doesn't totter sounded awfully familiar. Quickly, though it became clear that Jeremiah was condemning the creation of idols. Idols in the ancient world were usually blocks of wood crafted into the form of whatever deity and then covered in gold and silver plating and ornamentation. The larger ones were then secured in their place, so they wouldn't fall on anyone. Jeremiah was making that point also to show that idols of various gods are nothing but worthless myth, as those gods don't exist much less inhabit images of them constructed out of dead wood and metal by the hand of a craftsman, they couldn't even keep themselves upright without the help of nails.

So what about the Christmas tree? Did it have pagan roots? A cursory study of the history of the Christmas tree took me back to the mid 1500's. Martin Luther is given wide credit for introducing the practice of decorating a pine tree and festooning it with candles as a celebration of the birth of Jesus. But as I looked for source material, I found very little. The details about Luther's involvement in the Christmas tree tradition seems to be more urban legend than historical fact. Some say that Luther used the decorated tree as a re-enactment of the text from the gospel of Luke. The lights on the tree represented the stars in the sky on that fateful night when angels sang of good news to shepherds in the fields. Some also claimed that Luther invented the "Creche" or nativity scene which he placed under the tree. A crafted star or angel would sit atop the tree heralding the birth of Jesus.

This all sounded fine, except there was nothing to indicate why Luther thought to put a tree up in the first place. Why not just a nativity scene? It all smacked of a deeper, earlier tradition upon which Luther built. But most commentaries on the Christmas tree seemed content with leaving the mystery at the feet of Luther.

Various historical sources give brief glimpses into much older non-Christian practices of recognizing the fir tree as significant during the winter months. Scandinavian cultures and even ancient Rome used evergreens to decorate their homes in defiance of the death of winter. But then I hit on something significant: the earliest reference to a fir tree being used in celebration of the birth of Jesus. In 722 AD Saint Boniface (a Christian missionary in Germania) encountered some pagans who were about to sacrifice a child at the base of a huge oak tree. He cut down the tree to prevent the sacrifice and a Fir tree grew up at the base of the oak.

From the Pastor... Continued

He then told everyone that this lovely evergreen, with its branches pointing to heaven, was a holy tree - the tree of the Christ child, and a symbol of His promise of eternal life... Whether this event actually took place, it was certainly a venerated story that took hold throughout the Church.

Then about two hundred years later, we see records of Christmas celebrations across Europe and the what is now the British Isles featuring what was called the "Paradise Play". This play took place during Advent and part of the community preparation for the Christ Mass (everyone was Catholic back then- the church had not yet even split between the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic yet). The festivities involved much food, dancing and plays of Biblical stories. The festival would take place in the main square of Western European cities and villages and in the heart of those squares, a large tree would be erected and decorated with symbols of the Christian faith. The tree itself was supposed to tell the story of salvation from the garden of Eden to the resurrection of Jesus and hint at the glory to come at His return.

Of course, with almost anything, if humanity as something good, we can find a way to corrupt it. The paradise plays were soon outlawed by the Church due to the plays becoming a little too entertaining. (some old records indicate an over-indulgence in alcohol and Adam and Eve would be depicted as nude to the corruption of the good morals of the citizens.) No more paradise play, no more community Christmas tree. However, the Church had succeeded in starting a beloved tradition with those trees. So instead of stopping the practice, many Christians simply continued the tradition of setting up and decorating a tree in their homes. After the year 1100 AD, records are hard to find referring to Christmas trees, until the time of Luther. So perhaps Martin Luther rekindled that ancient tradition.

I'll share an overview of how the Christmas tree testifies to the Gospel elsewhere in the newsletter and I invite you to use that as a tool to deepen your celebration of Christ this Christmas season!

Happy Advent, and Merry Christmas to you all,
Pastor Aaron

(The earliest "Life" of Boniface was written by a certain Willibald, an Anglo-Saxon priest who came to Mainz after Boniface's death, around 765. Willibald's biography was widely dispersed; in about forty manuscripts.)

NOVEMBER

Birthdays

7TH NOREEN BREEN



Stearns Elementary

COAT Drive 2021/22

Peace Church has adopted Stearns Elementary School again this year.

Since the State of Oregon is providing actual school supplies this year

**WE WILL CONCENTRATE ON
PROVIDING COATS/JACKETS
for the children this year.**

Donations can be dropped off in the box on the table at the entrance to the Sanctuary or in the box in the Fellowship Hall.

Thank You for your continued support to this wonderful outreach to the community!!

LADIES BIBLE STUDY

4TH Thursday of the month @ 12:30 in the Fireside Room

We will finish the study of the book "Hagar", by Mike Kuhn, in January and the Women's Missionary Group has settled on "His Last Words" what Jesus taught and prayed in His last hours, by Kim Erickson. It impacts the importance of Jesus's last words of eternal life, powerful and full of love. If you've been longing for more intimacy in your relationship with God, more meaning in your life and more boldness in your witness, "His Last Words" will draw you into what you need: The Word of God. Ladies, if you are interested, join our Ladies Bible Study on the 4th Thursday of January 2022. See Noreen Rhoades to purchase the book "His Last Words" for \$14.00.

There will be NO Ladies Bible Study in December!!

Ladies, don't forget the *Ladies Christmas Luncheon* on December 11, 2021 at 12:00. We will have entertainment and a guest speaker. Be sure and put that on your calendars.

Noreen Rhoades

Greetings Friends!

It's that time of year again for the Salvation Army Giving Tree! We have the name tags for the children on the tree by the front doors. It's easy to help a child for this Christmas season. Just take a tag, purchase the item listed, and return it to the tree, unwrapped. Don't worry if you don't see your gift under the tree, as we will be taking them as they come in and putting them in a safe place so that we can deliver them to the Salvation Army. This started on November 21st when we decorated the Church, and will end on December 14th, which is a Tuesday. The last day of delivery to the Salvation Army is December 15th.

Thank you for your participation in this program for the children in our area!!

Many Blessings this Christmas season!!

The Missions Team

Look for our own elf under the tree in the picture to the left.



BUCKET BRIGADE on HOLIDAY HIATUS

The Bucket Brigade-that merry band of broom wielders who march through the church to combat clutter and cobwebs- will be on leave for the holiday season. We won't be meeting in November or December as we'll all be busy with Thanksgiving and Christmas activities. Come January we'll be back on the march, but for now we'll take time to give thanks and praise.



Sunday Bible Class

9:00-10:00 AM

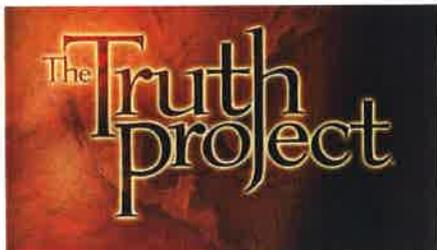
Fireside Room

JUDGES

The Inheritance of Israel



Pastor Aaron Beaty and Deacon Geri Coker continue through the story of the nation of Israel as she comes into her inheritance, the promised land. Now that the tribes of Israel have occupied the land, they face a new challenge- learning to live as the people of God with the Lord as their king, without a human ruler. The book of Judges records Israel's struggles to trust the Lord during times of unique challenge when the surrounding culture is hostile to the ways of God. God delivers even when His people stray. The book of Judges provides a profound lesson to the Church today as we see many parallels between the 21st century and the time when everyone did what was right in their own eyes.



Theology On Tap (TnT)

1st and 3rd Mondays

6-7:30PM

Church Fireside Room

Join Pastor Aaron as we continue the video series,
"The Truth Project" with Dr. Dell Tackett.

Here are a few words about this powerful study from Focus on the Family:

"In a 2003 study, the Barna Research Group revealed a stunning statistic that continues to reverberate throughout the evangelical world – *only nine percent of professing Christians have a biblical worldview.* *The Barna Update*, "A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life," December 1, 2003.

Because of this, today's believers live very similarly to non-believers. A personal sense of significance is rarely experienced, we spend our money and time on things that fail to satisfy, and we begin to wonder what life's ultimate purpose really is. We are, in short, losing our bearings as a people and a nation.

To counter this downward slide within the body of Christ, Focus on the Family has launched one of the most ambitious and powerful projects in the history of our ministry – *Focus on the Family's The Truth Project*®.

The Truth Project is a DVD-based small group curriculum comprised of 12 video lessons taught by Dr. Del Tackett, instructor of Christian Worldview at the Focus Leadership Institute and a former Senior Vice President of our ministry. This study is the starting point for looking at life from a biblical perspective. Each lesson discusses in great detail the relevance and importance of living the Christian worldview in daily life.

We believe this curriculum can be a catalyst for exponential change within the body of Christ, as thousands of people are "transformed by the renewing of [their] mind" (Romans 12:2). As He has throughout history, God continues to call ordinary people to make an eternal difference in our world."

Bring your own dinner and join us together as we re-construct a Biblical world-view by diving into the TRUTH.

Stewardship & Finance Committee

October 2021

Here is our monthly update on finance:

Operating Income:.....	\$10,682.00
Operating Expenses:.....	\$13,475.31
Monthly Net:.....	(\$2,793.31)
YTD Net:.....	\$14,223.97
Checking 10/31/21:.....	\$51,271.44
Money Market 10/31/21:	\$58,175.28

Hi Friends,

Expenses in October beyond regular operations: Continuing education, quarterly taxes, QuickBooks annual fee, building insurance, world missions, Presbytery expenses, music supplies, pulpit supply, hand bell music. All were budgeted expenses. As you can see, our monthly expenses sometimes are in the red, but we are comfortable in the yearly totals.

Budget packets and estimate of giving cards were handed out at the Harvest Dinner, with the remainder being mailed. We need them turned in by December 1st so the Financial Secretary can calculate an estimate of income for 2022. Be assured that your information remains confidential, with only one person seeing the cards. Thank you all for your continued support of Peace Memorial EPC!

Kathy Todd, Treasurer

DEACONS DOINGS

The season of ADVENT began on Sunday, Nov 28th this year. The Worship Committee set Sunday, Nov 21st, as the date for the **"Greening of the Church,"** when we decorate God's house for the Christmas season. The deacons provided a soup and sandwich lunch that Sunday so everyone was fed and energized to help put up the tree, put out the candles and all the rest as we prepare to welcome the birth of our Lord and Savior.

Thank you to all who have been signing up to serve during our Fellowship Hour after church. There is a sign-up sheet right before you get your goodies if you want to help out.



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We're on the web!

www.peaceEPC.com

"like" us on Facebook

*"In all your ways acknowledge
Him, and He will make your
paths straight"
-Prov. 3:6*

III: The Suffering of the Christ Mark 9:2-15:47

12/5 - **The Gospel of Mark:**

Jesus Challenges the Rich (Advent III)

Mark 10:17-31

12/12 - **The Gospel of Mark: :**

Jesus Foretells His Death a 3rd Time;

Rebukes hunger for glory (Advent IV)

Mark 10:32-45

12/19 - **The Gospel of Mark:**

Jesus Identified as Messiah and Heals Bartimaeus

Mark 10:46-52

12/24 - **Christmas Eve:**

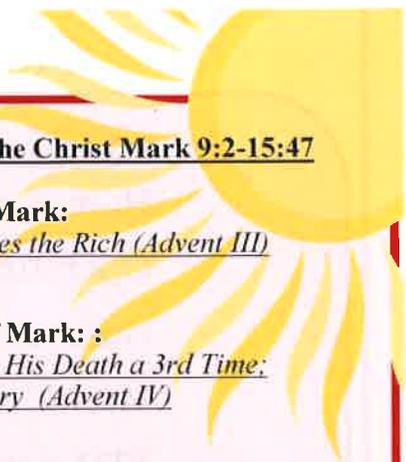
The Word Made Flesh

John 1:1-5, 9-14

12/26 - **The Gospel of Mark:**

The Triumphal Entry

Mark 11:1-11



Your SESSION

Elders

- Pastor Aaron Beaty- Session Moderator
- Noreen Rhoades- Clerk of Session
- Kathy Todd- Finance & Stewardship
- Bob Wincentzen- Christian Education
- Linda Dart- Mission and Outreach
- Jim Zeller- Building and Grounds
- Betty Shaw- Worship

Your DEACONS

Gerri Coker- Chair

Susan Orton

Jocelyn Shellito

Vicki Zeller

Bertra Bratton

*The Deacons meet the third Sunday of each
month following worship.*

Your

TRUSTEES

Harold Heaton

Stephen Goode

Sharron Goode

Sharon Haddock

**Session meets the 2nd Tuesday of each
month from 1-3PM.*

**Please note new Day/Time*



The Gospel according to the

Christmas Tree

The Colors:



Red—symbolizes sin and our fallen nature. It also testified to the blood of Jesus— shed in payment for sin. Red also indicates the holy Spirit. The meaning of the color is often determined by the form it takes (See below).



Green is the color of eternal life. As the “leaf” of the evergreen never turns brown— but stays alive through the death of winter, so all who have faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection have eternal life! Green is also the color of spiritual growth. Red and green together testify to eternal life through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus.



Purple, the color of Advent, symbolizes both the Lordship of Christ and our call to submit to Jesus’ Lordship through faith leading to repentance from sin.

The Ornaments:



Candles symbolize the “light of the world”. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” -John 8:12. The lights also symbolize illumination as the Spirit of God enlivens our hearts and minds to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus.



Wafers were hung on the tree to symbolize the body of Christ (think Communion). As wafers are boring, they soon became gingerbread cookies— and shaped to look like bishops. The earliest gingerbread men had bishop hats. If you have an old gingerbread man cookie cutter, it might just have a strange pointed head— that’s the Bishop’s hat (Miter).



Red apples were hung on the earliest Christmas trees to symbolize the forbidden fruit. As Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, they fell into sin. All of humanity since were plagued by original sin. The Apple represents the curse of humanity and calls us to repent of sin and hope in Christ for salvation.



Red Garland. The form of the red in the garland made of cranberries, or ribbon symbolizes the blood of Jesus shed as payment for sin. Sometimes the garland includes white which indicates purification from sin. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" -Isaiah 1:18.



Silver and Gold decorations echo the gifts of the wisemen to baby Jesus and testify to our call to worship God with all we have. It also symbolizes the great treasure of the Gospel.



The tree topper is traditionally a star or an angel. Obviously these images are from the nativity narrative on Luke. Both images are a call to worship. Both the star and the angel invite the observer to come, see and receive the good news that the savior of the world has been born.



As the Christmas tree became a family home tradition, gifts were often placed in the tree to be opened on Christmas morn. Under the tree (from the mid 1500's) a creche or nativity scene was placed. As gifts became larger, they replaced the nativity scene under the tree.

Now as you look at a tree decorated for Christmas, I hope you will see the testimony of the Gospel. That God so loved the world that He gave His only Son— to shed His blood and die as payment for our sins. He rose from the dead that all who have faith in Him receive eternal life. So let us come, receive Christ and commit our lives to glorify the Lord and enjoy Him forever.

