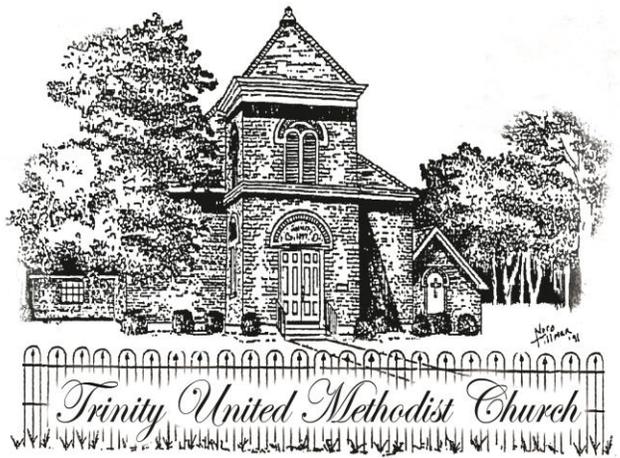




# Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter

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December 17, 2014

## There Was A Gang of Hoodlums Gathered On A Hillside

<sup>8</sup> *In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*  
<sup>10</sup> *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid... Luke 2:8-10 NRSV*

What sorts of things scare you? What makes you afraid? Most of us are afraid of change in our lives. We feel uncomfortable when we are in new situations. The problem is, change is the way of the world. Moreover, change is the way of God as well. God changes things.

Shepherds were an unlikely group to get the message of Jesus' birth. We have a positive view of Shepherds from Old Testament stories of David. We see shepherds sitting on a hillside, watching over their flocks, keeping them safe from predators. We like these guys. They seem simple and dependable. However, what is described in Luke is a group of nomadic shepherds. Nomadic shepherds were the motorcycle gangs of their days. At the time Jesus was born, shepherds were considered riff raff. They were lazy. Caring for sheep was not an honorable occupation. If your son took it up, you didn't tell the neighbors. Shepherds were among those whose testimony couldn't be trusted. People were cautioned against buying wool and meat from shepherds because they might be buying stolen property. Respectable people raised sheep as part of farming operations, not as nomadic tribes. If a shepherd came near, people put a hand on their purses. If shepherds came to your home, your first thought would be to hide the family silver. Those who first heard the gospel stories were shocked and scandalized that God's angels should appear to these hoodlums. Yet that is the way the gospel describes it. Another way to hear this story is that a gang of hoodlums was on a hillside, and an angel of God appeared to them.

Given that background, one can understand why these shepherds in particular, might be afraid of God. The gospel tells us that they were frightened as the Glory of God shown around them. I suspect that part of the problem was that, in that moment, they saw their lives for what they were. See them standing on that hillside, literally in the presence of God. God's presence shown all around them, lighting up the landscape and lighting up the lives of these shepherds. Standing before God they knew that they had led lives which did not glorify God. In fact, they had led lives that hurt those around them. They had preyed on the weak and abused the blessings God had given them.

The angel brings news of an invasion. An invasion from God. The world has changed. Something new has happened. "Do not be afraid," says the angel. This is not a judgment from God for the sins of these shepherds. This is the Gospel. This is "The Good News." The Messiah of God has been born. The world has changed. God has invaded the world.

Christmas is about God invading the world. We sometimes forget that. We get caught up in images of the manger, of the newborn baby, angels and all the rest. Think of the message of these angels as a report from the front lines, a dispatch from the beaches of Normandy. This is D-Day, or maybe more appropriately, God's Day. God has done something new. Our Lord has been born.

Was this a quiet invasion? Yes. God didn't come into the world with heavenly armies. God came into the world with the cry of a newly born baby. And the news of that birth did not go out to the rulers of the world, the rich and powerful. The Good News went first to those who were despised by others. The Good news of Jesus Christ was first proclaimed to shepherds, people we would hesitate to invite into our homes.

The Good News of Jesus Christ's birth changed the lives of these shepherds. The shepherds heard the angels and listened to the heavenly chorus. When the angels had gone, the shepherds looked at one another in astonishment and said, "Let's go!" And off they went to Bethlehem to see the thing which had happened, which the Lord had told them about.

They found Mary and Joseph and the baby, lying in the manger, just as the angels had said. We have no idea what transpired during their visit other than relating their story. The scripture leaps directly to the moment afterward. What we do know is that what the shepherds saw moved them. It changed them. What the shepherds saw changed their lives. The shepherds left the manger and went around town, telling everyone what they had heard and seen.

It's like the experience of the young girl whose parents took her out west. One of their stops was the Grand Canyon. The girl stood open-mouthed before the great chasm—a mile deep, eighteen miles across, a hundred miles long! Then she exclaimed, "Something must have happened here!"

That was the reaction of the Shepherds. Something happened here. The Shepherds saw that something had happened, and it changed their lives. Luke says, "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." Glorifying God does not simply mean that these shepherds were singing songs of praise and praying. What Luke is describing is a complete change in their lives. Glorifying God means that they had placed God back at the center of their lives. These Shepherds had turned their lives around. They had repented. They turned their lives toward God.

We are called to be changed as well. The way of God is change. Change is built into the world like the engine of a car. Without change, the world does not go anywhere. With change, the possibilities are endless. With change, there is hope.

The Christmas Gospel, the Christmas Good News, is that God has changed the world. Something new was added. God has come to earth as a human being. Because of Jesus Christ, God knows what it is to be human. We worship a God who knows everything we experience, everything we feel, as a human knows it. And God stands before us as Jesus Christ and tells us that change is possible. With God, all things are possible.

Take to heart the message of the angels. Do not be afraid. The world has changed, but it is a good change. This is a change that creates possibilities for new life and new hope. Open your heart to that change. Like the shepherds, glorify God. Put God at the center of your life and see the possibilities for the world. Dare to start your life over. That is the Christmas Gospel.

Unto you a Child is born, who is your Savior, Christ the Lord. Praise be to God.

## **Blue Christmas**

The Fourth Sunday in Advent we will celebrate with a Service of Lessons and Carols. Through music and the scriptures we will recall God's act of salvation through bringing Jesus Christ into the world. But we will also recognize what some characterize as a Blue Christmas observance.

The Christmas Season is not a time of joy for all people, especially those who have lost a loved one. For many such people the coming of the holidays only emphasizes the loss in their lives and the grief that they feel. Also, for the many people dealing with sickness and chronic disease and for those suffering depression, the coming of the holidays and the unfulfilled desire to feel Joy can be quite painful. Along with communion on the fourth Sunday in Advent we will also offer an anointing for healing. The anointing is merely making the sign of the cross on your forehead with olive oil, coupled with a prayer for healing in body and spirit. Anointing is one of the oldest liturgies in the Church and one recommended by scripture. James 5:13-15. Consider making this simple act of devotion a part of your observance of Advent.

## **Christmas Concert**

Please plan on being here in the Sanctuary at 4:00P.M. this Sunday, December 21<sup>st</sup>. The Choir, under the direction of Lynn McGill, will perform a concert of Christmas music. There will be a reception immediately following the concert. Bring a friend.

## **Request for Volunteers from Sixty First Ave UMC Last Minute Toy Store December 18-21**

(Received from 61<sup>st</sup> Avenue UMC)

Could you give a few hours of your time to make this Christmas a more joyful one for Davidson County children from low-income families? Sixty-First Avenue UMC in West Nashville is in need of help with its annual "Last Minute" Christmas Toy Store.

Volunteers are needed for a variety of tasks Thursday the 18<sup>th</sup> through Saturday the 20<sup>th</sup> from 11:30 – 5:30 and Sunday the 21<sup>st</sup> from 12:30 to 6:30. We are urging people to arrange their schedules so they can stay for a complete shift if possible. We have a special need for bi-lingual (English-Spanish) volunteers.

Also, we have a special need for gifts or gift cards for teenagers since most of our donations are for younger children. Last year 4,973 children from close to 1600 families received toys, books, candy canes and oranges through this program.

If you can help out with this ministry, please contact Sixty-First Avenue UMC at 292-7184 or e-mail [61avenueumc@bellsouth.net](mailto:61avenueumc@bellsouth.net). Information is also available at [www.lastminutetoystore.com](http://www.lastminutetoystore.com).

*[Trinity UMC will provide lunch for volunteers at the Toy Store on December 19<sup>th</sup>. We will begin serving lunch at 11:00 A.M. If you would like to help with that please contact Charles Wilson or Rev. Meaker.]*

## The Poverty and Justice Bible

*The Poverty & Justice Bible* is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to [www.Justicebible.org](http://www.Justicebible.org).

<sup>6</sup> *For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*  
<sup>7</sup> *His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.*

*The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Isaiah 9:6-7 CEV*

Justice and Righteousness. That is the emphasis in Isaiah's famous prophesy of a new leader; a God Given leader. A Messiah. We often speak of God in terms of God being a loving God and there are many references in the Old Testament to *Hesed*, the steadfast love of God. But there are also many references to *Mispat* and *Sdaqa*, the Justice and Righteousness of God. Indeed, the Prophet Malachi promises:

<sup>2</sup> *But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. Malachi 4:2 CEV.*

<sup>17</sup> *This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah:*

<sup>18</sup> *“Here is my servant, whom I have chosen,  
my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased.  
I will put my Spirit upon him,  
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.*

<sup>19</sup> *He will not wrangle or cry aloud,  
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.*

<sup>20</sup> *He will not break a bruised reed  
or quench a smoldering wick  
until he brings justice to victory.*

<sup>21</sup> *And in his name the Gentiles will hope.” Matt 12:17-21*

The Gospel of Matthew picks up the theme declared by Isaiah and attaches it to Christ. Christ will bring Justice to the Jews and Gentiles alike; i.e. all the world.

## Prayer Ministry

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Sarah Jordan	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Mac McAfee	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

## Up-Coming Sermons

**December 21<sup>st</sup>: A Service of Lessons and Carols:** Through Scripture and song the story of Christmas is told. As well as communion, anointing for healing will also be offered.

**December 28<sup>th</sup>: When God Tore Open the Heavens: We Must Not Be Silent:** We have been given the Gospel. The Good News of Jesus Christ. We must not be silent. My texts are Galatians 4:4–7 and Isaiah 61:10–62:3.

## Worship Leader's Schedule

### December 21

Jason Aldred, **Liturgist**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Greeters**

Julia & Tom Moore, **Ushers**

**December 28**

Elaine Rohrig, **Liturgist**

Cherry & Rodger Klein, **Greeters**

Tommy Cotton & Mike Rohrig, **Ushers**

## **Announcements**

The **UMW Christmas gathering and ornament exchange** will take place **Thursday, December 18 at 6:00 PM**. This festive event will take place at Elaine Rohrig's home at 1552 Timber Ridge Drive, Brentwood. Please call her at **615-810-9923** or send her an email at: [eannchat@aol.com](mailto:eannchat@aol.com) if you plan to attend. All ladies of the church are welcome.

Please plan to attend our **Christmas Eve service December 24 at 4:30 PM**. Friends and family members are most welcome.

### **December Birthdays**

**Jake Fetting, Pam Jones, Dorise LeCates, Hal Newman, Lindsey Aldred, Rachel Newman,**

**Wayne Harper**

**Happy Birthday to each of you!**