



Volume 27, Issue #11  
**December, 2023**

# The Connexion



*On the Christian Journey...  
with Pastor Christopher*

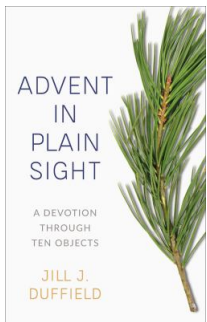
Last Sunday we began the new year on the Christian Calendar which begins with the season of Advent and, as I will each Sunday in this season, I invited us to center ourselves with a breathing exercise as we begin worship. To intentionally take 3 deep breaths, slowly breathing in and out:  
once for the one who Created you,  
once for the Incarnate One who walks beside you,  
and once for the Spirit whose life fills your being.

We live and move and have our being in God. We are never further from God than our next breath. The story of Genesis 2 says that humanity became “living beings” when God breathed into the first person. Yet we are not puppets, we are giving the ability to make choices and sin is, quite simply, those choices that turn us away from God. In Advent we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ – not merely remembering the stories told in Luke and Matthew’s Gospels, but anew in our hearts and minds. We prepare for the return of Christ, not merely on some last day, but anew within our hearts and minds here and now. We live in the time of the Spirit, the comforter and advocate Christ promised as a sign that he is “with us always, even to the end of the age.” Christmas is a celebration not of a one time or once a year event but a living reality of God *with* us. In this season of

Advent there is a challenge to prepare ourselves, to go deeper in our faith and our practice, and there is a promise of comfort and joy.

During our “Advent in Plain Sight” series, we are hearing some challenging texts about Jesus’ 2<sup>nd</sup> coming – one of the things I hope you’ll take from these is that they really are not about fear, they are about encouraging active response that leads to comfort and joy for ourselves and for

those around us. John Wesley got this – it’s about a lived faith, works that overflow from our experience of grace, every growing humility and wonder that leads to, as we put it here at first, knowing, growing in, serving and sharing Christ! I’m honored to walk with you in this season of our faith journey.



**Yard Signs Available.  
Take One Home!**

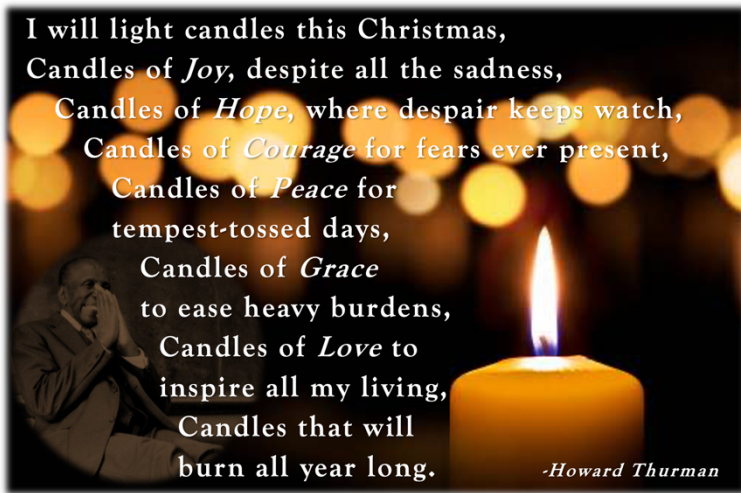
We have a dozen yard signs with an Advent message of Comfort and Joy that you are invited to place in your yard as a way of inviting friends and neighbors to prepare for and celebrate Christmas with us!



As prior sets have been, these signs, as well as the banner that is on the south lawn near the magi, were made available to us at no cost through a partnership between United Methodist Communications and Outreach, Inc.

### What’s Inside This Edition?

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## Real Candles on Christmas Eve Will Bring Comfort and Joy!

I am so looking forward to singing Silent Night as we pass the light with real candles again this Christmas and I thank the Trustees for working to make that once a year exception arrangement with our insurance company to enable us to do so.

Dec. 24<sup>th</sup> falls on a Sunday this year and we will have both our normal Sunday morning worship with a concluding Advent 4 theme at 10:30am and then our traditional Candlelight and Communion Christmas Eve service that night at 7pm.

## Chalking the Doors – Revisiting an Epiphany Tradition

In Deuteronomy 6:9 God tells the people of Israel: “These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house... You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Chalking the door is a tangible way to honor God in our lives and be intentional about living into God’s blessings in the new year. Many of you really appreciated being introduced to this tradition last year and so we will do it again this year as well. The first and last numbers simply refer to the year – so we’ll use 20 and 24. The letters C M B come from the traditional names for the Magi: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. Alternately, they can stand for “Christus Mansionem Benedicat” which in Latin means, “May Christ bless this dwelling!” The actual date of Epiphany is January 6<sup>th</sup>, which is a Saturday next year. Chalk and an instruction sheet will be available on December 24<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> and January 7<sup>th</sup> for you to take home and use whenever it makes the most meaningful experience for you to share.



## Christmas Parade Float

Thanks to Roger Sipe for towing, Ron Sharp for use of the trailer and setting up our Shepherds, along with Brian Foxx. Thanks to Charlene Sipe, Carol Lydic, Dana, Delci and Keith and Kelley Tucker, Robin Eshelman, William, Kristin, Winston and Lindon Bishop for riding along and helping us distribute hundreds of pinwheels and a tub of candy along the rainy route!

Parade Pinwheels are becoming a signature item for our church as we seek to engage new families and our community – in addition to several of the above folks, Randy Nichols and Amy Boyd helped assemble them this year! The Spirit is Moving at First UMC! Next year’s Christmas Parade will be Thursday, December 4<sup>th</sup> to kick off the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Christmas on the Bricks!

## THANK YOU from the Swaims

An overdue note for our family and friends. After five long weeks in the hospital, Larry and I can finally get our thank yous written! It meant so much to receive all the cards, calls, and prayers. There have been too many to count. The visits and treats were also appreciated. Most of all we need to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to Don Tucker, Ronnie Sharp, and all their crew that built the wheel chair ramp in front of our house so that Larry can maneuver in and out safely. We love all of you and thank God for this wonderful church family.

Sincerely  
 Charlotte and Larry Swaim



**Save Best Choice Labels for UWF!**  
you can leave them in the glass jars by each entrance. Thank you!

**LUNCH for FSCC Athletes who can't make it home during the break - Monday, December 11th about Noon** Bonnie Milburn and Linda Leachner are coordinating this. We will have about 21 guests joining us for a meal here after practice.



### CHURCH WI-FI CHANGE

Recently Craw-Kan did some network service that resulted in our router resetting to factory defaults - wiping out the old FirstFUMC network. Pastor (*our in house techy*) reset it when he was back from illness and took the opportunity to simplify the login.

Our public network is now FirstUMC (*no unnecessary 2nd F*) and the password is now Wesley301 (*much simpler to type in on a phone*). Feel free to access that while in the building. This information is in the footer of the bulletin each week and has been updated to reflect this change.



*If your name is missing from these birthday lists that we run each month, it means we don't have your birthday in our membership database – please contact Kristin in the church office to get that updated!*

#### Members and Friends DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS:

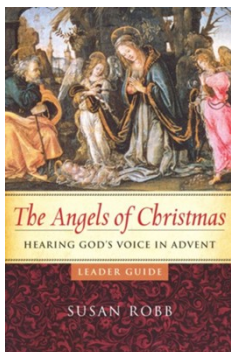
1-Madi Davis, Kyle Perry, 2-Lee Davis, Cheryl Barker, 6- Kip Smilie, 10- Bret Heiser, Eric Popp, 1- Jean Tucker, 13- Kyle Green, 14- Piper Denning, 16- Stephanie Denton, Brennan Popp, Dana Tucker, Delaney Tucker, Delci Tucker, 17-Chase Comstock, 18-Laine Beerbower, 19-Zack Reynolds, Jessica Ballou, 20-

Reed Hartford, 22- Vlad Clark, Kelly Slinkard, 23- Connie Neil, Sue Sayers, 24-Mike Carnes, 25-Jeffrey Blanz, Zack Russell, 26-Donna Davis, Shaun Grant, 27-Marianne Culbertson, 30-Debbie Ford, Nolan Stark, 31-Carolyn West

**DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES:** 17-Ken and Jennifer Engle, 31-Ken and Deb Anderson

#### Faith Builders Class in December

We will be discussing “The Angels of Christmas,” a multimedia study by Susan Robb, an author and recently retired pastor. This Advent program explores the angelic visits surrounding the birth of Jesus with Zechariah, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds. The messages of the angels hold meanings for listeners both then and now. We would like for you to join us in this study.



#### UWF Officers Installation Dec. 14.

We will gather to celebrate a new season of ministry together. Pastor Christopher will lead an installation service for our 2024 officers as we prepare for a new year as United Women in Faith. All women of the congregation and community are invited to join.



United Women in Faith

First UMC Worship Services are streamed on Facebook and then a recording is uploaded to YouTube each week!

#### Upcoming KMDO Radio Schedule:



A recording of our services will run every other week at 1pm on 103.9 (or occasionally

98.3 if there's a Chiefs or Royals game conflict).

**Our upcoming dates are:**  
December 17th & 31<sup>st</sup>  
January 14<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
February 11<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>  
March 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>  
April 7<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>  
May 5<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>  
June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>

**Tell a Friend!**

## OUR FIRST ANNUAL NATIVITY SHOWCASE WAS A GREAT EXPERIENCE!

We had 110 nativities or related items and at least 84 people from the community visited! This exceeded my expectations and plans are already underway to make it bigger and better next year! I have confirmed with the Chamber and steering committee that dates for Christmas on the Bricks 2024 will be December 5th and 6th (First weekend in December). We will plan to have our setup times Thursday morning, Dec. 4th and then have public hours on Friday, Saturday AND Sunday, Dec. 7th after church next year (likely something like 12-3pm) - that was a top request this year and we hear you! Our teardown will be Sunday evening. Between setup and the first public hours, my plan is to offer "closed" private viewing to area retirement homes and assisted living facilities such as MedicalLodge, Credo, and Presbyterian Village to bring their folks to visit in a more controlled environment for any medically fragile folks. We also have lots of other ideas to improve the experience such as Christmas lights and music and, of course, even more tables for display space! We will need lots of volunteers to do it all, so mark your calendar now! Thank you again to everyone from the church and community who brought the beautiful nativities and shared stories and the many, many people who made this year's event so special! I risk missing some folks here, but I especially want to thank Bonnie for taking it upon herself to iron the table clothes, Bob and Ron for figuring out a way to store them that will mean we don't have to iron next year, Jan, Joyce, and Debra for being our core hosts - and I'm sure I've overlooked others who did key things to make it a success. Thank you all! Here are some photos to try and give you a sense of it all!





## Special Service Format Sunday, December 31<sup>st</sup>.

We will meet in Fellowship Hall for worship and draw from two traditions of the early Methodist Movement in John Wesley's time. The Love Feast and Watchnight. For the former, you are invited to bring a favorite breakfast item to share in a potluck format. We will begin the service with a shared meal and some conversation prompts, then conclude with a more formal liturgy that draws on the Wesleyan tradition of greeting the new calendar year with a "watchnight" service and personal reflection done in community.



**Join us at 10:30am this last day of 2023.** We did something similar last year and it was a big hit. If you have not heard of the "Love Feast" or Agape meal tradition, here is some history. For the earliest Christians, gathering for worship and sharing Holy Communion was basically done as a shared meal. Over the years the meal and the worship liturgy, particularly sharing the bread and cup, became separate gatherings.



The modern history of the Love Feast began when Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians in Germany introduced a service of sharing food, prayer, religious conversation, and hymns in 1727. The Love Feast quickly became a feature of the

Evangelical Revival and a regular part of Methodist society meetings in Great Britain and became an important feature of early of Primitive Methodism here in the colonies and later United States. Some rural communities have maintained an annual Love Feast. In recent years churches have revived the Love Feast or Agape meal. Aspects of the Agape, with the sharing of bread after the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy, are still observed in Orthodox Churches, where unconsecrated but blessed bread is shared after the Eucharist. Agape fellowship meals are also celebrated in parts of the Mar Thoma Indian Christian tradition.

***Plan to join us at 10:30am Sunday, December 31<sup>st</sup>, and invite a friend to join in our version of these great Wesleyan traditions!***

First United Methodist Church  
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Fort Scott, KS 66701-1397

Return Service Requested

*Here is your December 2023  
Newsletter from:*



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