

The Monthly Message



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Greetings, friends, in the name of of the new-born King!

It's January. A new year has dawned. We've flipped the calendar from 2020 to 2021. But, as we know, Christmas isn't over—not just yet.

Rev. Jason W. Jones
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The last story we tell in this season—the last image we see—is that of travelers from the east who make a long journey to pay homage to the Christ-Child. We're aware of the basics of the story. There's an encounter with a tyrannical ruler seized with fear at the thought of his power being upended. There are treasure chests opened, and gifts lavished upon the babe: gold and frankincense and myrrh. And of course, and I believe most significantly, there's a star: an unusual celestial occurrence that alerts these persons to the fact that something significant has happened in Bethlehem—and guides them to the place where they can find the One “born king of the Jews.”



Over the years, scholars and theologians have theorized as to what this occurrence was, and why it might've mattered to these “wise men.” For the ancients, astronomical anomalies were often read as signifying a divine communication or an indicator of monumental events—like the birth of royalty. But what did the magi see? Some have suggested the star was a comet, but this seems unlikely as comets were typically perceived as bad omens. Others have posited a supernova or a heliacal rising. A great many, however, have landed on the idea of a planetary conjunction—often between Jupiter (considered the regal “star” that conferred kingships) and Venus or Saturn. Johannes Kepler was among the first to contend for this, offering calculations in the early 17th century which determined that three conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn had occurred in 7 BC.

By now, I'm sure that many of you are aware of—and some of you may have seen—the conjunction between these two planets which took place on December 21. It was the first time in nearly 400 years that the planets had been so close together, and the first time in almost 800 years that they'd been observable so close together at night. Surely, it was a marvel to behold.

But to me, the conjunction's timing feels even more significant as it fell on the winter solstice. It fell on the “longest night” of the year, with less than ten hours of daylight. It fell, as it were, during the deepest dark. What's believed by some to be the Star of Bethlehem—the same luminary which alerted observers to the birth of Jesus; the same body which heralded the coming of the One who is God with us—shone brightly in the sky that evening, in the midst of that long, cold darkness. But why does this matter?

We began several weeks ago the season of Advent by being reminded that “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” Which I think, as we consider the year just passed with all of its confusion and illness, despair and hurt, challenges and loss, is a truth that was and is needful for us to hear; needful for us to ground our hope.

And there *is* hope, because light shines in the darkness. In the darkness, which means the darkness remained; it didn't disappear, or go away entirely. But still, in the darkness, there's light: one which the darkness did not, and cannot, overcome. And so, while some darkness lingers, there's hope.

Here, as we enter a new year and prepare to conclude the Christmas season, we have this message before us once again as we come to Epiphany: as we're reminded of a star shining—a light in the darkness—to point those who'd see it to the birth of hope. As our next journey begins, may we turn our eyes toward the heavens—toward the light that still shines—that we too may find, hold to, and live out the promise of hope.

With Christian love and prayers of peace and blessing,

Pastor Jason



CHILDREN'S MUSIC MINISTRY



*Karen Strawhecker
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It was wonderful to see our children leading worship during the Children's Christmas Program! I am always so pleased at the dedication of our children to participate in worship with dignity. I told the children that to participate in worship reading scripture and singing the songs, and hopefully help to bring someone closer to Christ, is one of the most important things that we can do.

As we were only meeting every other week, the children did a great job learning much of the music and readings on their own with practice recordings and working with their parents! So, special thanks go to the parents for their help at home, and also for bringing the children to choir rehearsal, and the occasional recording session!! We also give thanks to our volunteers who come to each rehearsal. We could not offer our programming without the help of Wanda Cheatham, Rachel Hasty, Jennifer Proseus, and Laura Engbretson. Please let them know how much they are appreciated. I hope you enjoy these pictures of our program.

Please watch for an email from me regarding the start date for rehearsals. Younger Children's Bells (children with no bell experience) will begin at 5pm in the music suite, Campanella Ringers (3rd -6th grades with bell experience) will meet at 5:30 pm in the Sanctuary, and Kingdom Chorale/Wesley Choir (K-5th grades) will meet in the Sanctuary from 6 to 6:30pm. Our schedule will be every week for all groups. Masks will be worn and distancing will be observed.

If your children are not involved in the Children's Music program, now is a great time to join as we are starting on new projects. However, children are always welcome to join at any time. It is never too late!

If you have any questions about the Children's Music Program, or would like for your child to join, please contact me through the church office 386-4563, or by email karens@bartlettumc.org



The baby blanket team meets at 10:00 am every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the week, at the Art Gallery, 2945 Shelby St., Bartlett (right behind the Church).

Yarn donations are always welcome or come join us to make baby blankets. The hospitals are always so happy to receive them.

Contact Morris at 901-409-8705 if you have questions. All are welcome!





Notes from Rachel

Rachel Hasty
Senior Accountant
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Most people are creatures of habit. We get used to doing something the same way at the same time and that becomes the “right” way for us. If there’s anything that the COVID pandemic has shown us it’s that sometimes we have to move away from what we’ve traditionally done and try something new. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t but we at least have to try.

Already I have received numerous emails and phone calls about Commitment Sunday: “did I miss it? Were commitment cards mailed out?” No, you haven’t missed it. The past couple of years we’ve seen a decrease in the number of commitments we have received during our stewardship campaign which usually happens in November. While a little disconcerting, this certainly makes sense as many people are unsure of what the following year is going to look like as early as November—raises, bonuses, expense increases often aren’t known until the very end of the year or early in the new year. One thing I do know is that for many the new year brings new promise and new hope for things to come. We have continued to do

great things during this pandemic, things that have helped not only our congregation but our community. My hope is that this year not only will you give of your time and your talents and yes, even your finances to continue our ministry, but that you will recognize our church’s efforts and make that commitment to support it. Commitment Sunday is January 24th--be ready for it!

Year-end Odds and Ends

- Contribution statements will be emailed to those for whom we have email addresses on or before Tuesday, January 12 (barring any technical difficulties). Please make sure you and/or your spouse check your inbox around that time. Those who do not receive their statements electronically will have them mailed by January 22. If you have not received your statement by the end of January, please contact me.
- I will be submitting our personalized offering envelope list to the printer on February 1. If you would like personalized offering envelopes, please indicate that on your 2021 Commitment card when you turn it in or call me to let me know. As a reminder, if you typically donate by check, envelopes are not a necessity but a personal preference for some.
- If you’re not able to make it to in-person service and would like to save some money on postage, BUMC does offer a secure online giving service. You can set up a recurring payment and then let technology take care of the rest. Please visit our website at www.bartlettumc.org/give for more information. Not tech savvy? Call me in the church office and I will be happy to walk you through.

I can’t wait to see what 2021 has in store for Bartlett UMC and I look forward to working with you to make it happen!

God bless,

Rachel

Joys and Concerns

Welcome to our new members Nate Murray, Danielle Gregory, and their children, Ariaya and Evan and Mike Bittner.

Sympathy is expressed to Nathan Hasty upon the death of his father, Leonard R. Hasty; to Catherine Graddy upon the death of her son, Dan Graddy; to James Sheehy upon the death of his wife, Phyllis Sheehy; to Mary Ellen Walker upon the death of her mother, Dorothy Dooley; to Julie Estes upon the death of her grandmother; to Carla Baker upon the death of her father, Jim Smith; to the family of Elaine Stavely; to the family of Randy Dinwiddie; to the family of Anne Kirchoff; to Warren Haggard upon the death of his mother.

Our Gifts

Operating Budget Weekly Need: \$27,387.00

November 22-\$19,637.50 December 6-\$17,422.50

November 29-\$8,404.50 December 13-\$25,435.50

Building Fund Weekly Need: \$5,623.00

November 22-\$3,216.50 December 6-\$3,218.50

November 29-\$1,651.50 December 13-\$6,669.50



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY



*Shari Russenberger
Director of Children's Ministries
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Well, that was crazy. 2020 was nothing short of a roller coaster ride, and I am so glad to be entering 2021. While there were a lot of things that COVID-19 changed about our lives in 2020, it also provided me with time to reflect, give thanks and slow down. Last year was a difficult year in ministry, as we weren't together, and it's hard to do ministry without being in the same spaces. The inability to have events the "way we always have", allowed me the opportunity to pour out my creativity in creating new and safe alternatives. Through it all - the prayers, words of appreciation and affirmation, and the outpouring of love and support from the congregation filled my cup, allowing me to fill the cups of others. For those things, I am eternally grateful.

The final Children's event of 2020 was "Walking through a Winter Wonderland". We had over 60 families safely travel through our wonderland, visiting stations where they received mugs with hot cocoa packets, Christmas masks, crafts, gingerbread houses/icing/candy, and reindeer food. They had the opportunity to visit with Santa at a safe distance, and had plenty of opportunities for cute pictures with a variety of backdrops. It was an amazing day and I loved seeing the faces of children filled with wonder and joy as they saw the transformed space. The event would not have been possible without the amazing volunteers- a huge THANK YOU is offered to those who put together candy bags, separated crafts, scooped icing, put together gingerbread houses, hung decorations, setup, took down, or worked the event.

As Children's Sunday School resumes January 10th, I am looking for a volunteer to help teach 1st-3rd grade. If you are interested in teaching those grades, or serving as a much needed substitute, please let me know!

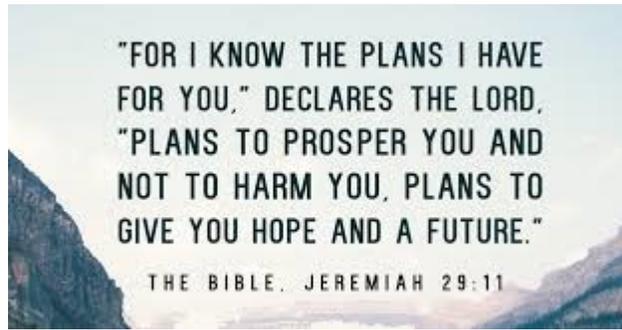
I pray that the New Year finds you healthy and happy. I look forward to opportunities to be in ministry with you and your family in both new and existing ways!!

In Christ,
Shari





YOUTH MINISTRY



Lynn Thompson
Director of Youth Ministries
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Jeremiah 29:11 “ For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

It’s a new year can you believe it! Well it is a new year 2021 and many of us have said good riddance to the past year of frustrating and challenging times and also a pandemic that has literally rocked our world. I think that it is true to say that we would love for this new year to bring a fresh start – a new beginning.

But let me tell you a story about my Grandma Murry. One day I went to visit her for lunch when Sam was a little one. We would spend Sundays together since we lived in Brownsville at the time and she didn’t want me traveling so much. That week had been a frustrating one for her. Now let me make sure you understand that she lived alone and was in her mid 90’s when she told me “Lynn – this week my refrigerator went out and now my air conditioning won’t work” she said that it seemed like she was a good Christian woman, went to church and tithed each week, didn’t talk about others (she said she kept that to herself) and she considered herself a good person. She said “Lynn – you would think God would cut me a break!” -Ha! I just died laughing and she just chuckled. And then I will never forget what she said, “Lynn – it will ALWAYS be something!” She taught me that just because we get through one thing we won’t be faced with another. Then she said – “and you can’t outlive the trying times...it’s just like that all your life”. Well – first off - that was a tough pill to swallow considering I would think if I made it that far in life it WOULD get better. It made me think that in my mind I always thought that if I tried really hard – did my best – then frustrating times wouldn’t be so frequent in my life. But I have learned through my grandmother that the sooner you understand that – that is just life then you can direct your understanding and trust in a God that can get you through anything – and the beauty is that He never fails you! Sure this year may not have been the best and we think oh! this new year will be better....well....I hate to be the bearer of unpleasant news but I think it’s still going to frustrating and trying for a while with this pandemic... so let’s just lean on God – let Him lift you up in the midst of the trials and you will see how He is working through your faith to keep you keeping on! Remember He never promised everything would be picture perfect...He promised He would never leave you! That is the promise I LOVE! At the end of difficult year to the beginning of one that we wish was not the same we can count on this –“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” Hebrews 13:8 SOOOOOO YES! it IS going to be a good year – will it be what you expect? – it can be...it will be amazing how you will discover your endurance, faith and perseverance when you trust and lean on God.

I pray that you stay safe and well and that you see that God has GOT YOU!

In Christ,

Lynn Thompson



Dear BUMC Friends,

Thank you so much for your prayers, calls, cards, and memorials in honor of my wife, Frances. She loved BUMC and her friendships were a true blessing. Thank you for your love and thoughtfulness.

Larry Perry



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Happy New Year!! Good riddance 2020.....with exceptions!

The Year 2020 in Review

We lost a whole lot of opportunities. Major reading programs were canceled at a time when elementary schools kids needed the summer programs. We did get to participate in limited Project Transformation, but without the interaction of students and interns it hurt. Without our in house program with UT, we missed the visitors and fellowship of people who otherwise would not be in our building.

- We held to our support of St. John's soup kitchen, but without the sit down dinner to which we are accustomed.
- Room in the Inn was canceled in the Spring and again in the Winter, 1 day before our host event. We have still moved needed hygiene supplies and food to our homeless community.
- Our downsized holiday programs still found support for a big family in need and 35 kids from Perea Preschool. We did not participate in Perea Chapel for the first time in years.
- Thanksgiving still rocked 97 boxes to families in need.
- The John Light Food Pantry finished with over 700 families. This was a 40% increase over our highest year ever. We could not imagine where we would be if the Mid-South Food Bank had not upped their game with constant service in the zip codes we serve.

The biggest exception to 2020 was this congregation and the support for Outreach. The John Light Food Pantry took in more monetary donations from you than any time in our history. We received food from Troop 459 at Ellendale UMC, Cordova Presbyterian and of course from Fredrick Morris and the Naval Support Activity Mid-South. We received food from numerous individuals outside our congregation. Our pantry worked because people saw a need and contributed above the call. Shout-out to Rick Stillwell for taking the time and effort to make the pantry operation smooth and to Helen Stillwell for developing a new system to serve our clients without having to leave their cars.

Outreach would also like to thank Shari and the Children's Ministry and Lynn and the BUMC Youth for continuing to participate in the hands on approach to service. And a big thank you to our congregation!