



Dear Ones,

December 1st marks the beginning of Advent, which in Latin means “coming.” In the church, the season of Advent is a time of preparation and waiting for the coming of Christ – into our hearts, into our lives, into the world.

But Advent invites Christians not only to look forward to Christmas, but also to awaken in us the seed of hope that longs for God’s redemption of the world. It is a time of expectation, of looking forward to the ultimate triumph of God, when God will redeem all creation and make all things new.

Thank you to all of you who submitted devotions for this Advent devotional. Surely your thoughts and prayers will help each of us prepare for a rich and holy Christmas season. Thank you to Rev. Mary Hagley, who provided a daily Mission focus for us – that we might be prompted to share our riches with those in need.

Let us prepare ourselves with rejoicing, for the Lord is coming!

In Christ’s love,
Rev. Tonya Arnesen

SING WE NOW OF CHRISTMAS

*Sing we now of Christmas, Noel, sing we here!
Hear our grateful praises to the babe so dear.
Sing we Noel, the King is born, Noel!
Sing we now of Christmas, sing we now Noel!*

*Angels called to shepherds, “Leave your flocks at rest,
Journey forth to Bethlehem, find the child so blest.”
Sing we Noel, the King is born, Noel!
Sing we now of Christmas, sing we now Noel!*

*In Bethlehem they found him; Joseph and Mary mild,
Seated by the manger, watching the holy child.
Sing we Noel, the King is born, Noel!
Sing we now of Christmas, sing we now Noel!*

*From the eastern country came the kings afar,
Bearing gifts to Bethlehem, guided by a star.
Sing we Noel, the King is born, Noel!
Sing we now of Christmas, sing we now Noel!*

*Gold and myrrh they took there, gifts of greatest price;
There was never a stable so like paradise.
Sing we Noel, the King is born, Noel!
Sing we now of Christmas, sing we now Noel!*



December 1, 2013 – First Sunday of Advent



SING WE NOEL

From Rev. Tonya Arnesen

There is something about the music of Christmas that is unlike any other time of the year. It blares from loudspeakers in offices and elevators as well as out-of-doors, and fills our hearts and homes and churches with its joyful sound.

In many homes, part of our Christmas preparation involves finding the tapes and CDs (maybe even old phonograph records), and dusting off Caroling books . . . perhaps sitting down at a piano to break out the music of the season.

The Christmas story is filled with music, from the *Magnificat* of Mary (“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,” Luke 1:46-55) the *Benedictus* of Zechariah (“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,” Luke 1:68-79) the *Nunc Dimittis* of Simeon (“Lord, now you let your servant go in peace,” Luke 2:29-32) and the grand *Gloria in Excelsis* of the angels (“Glory to God in the highest,” Luke 2:14).

The songs tell a story; and at the heart of the story is Jesus Christ, the Heart of Christmas. Because of his life and death for us, the songs (and the story) are not merely seasonal; they go on into eternity. As you reflect each day during this Advent season, may these songs bring joy to your preparations and new life to your faith.

Prayer: Gracious God, we thank you for music – the way music creates a universal kinship among all humankind; enable us to express our inexpressible praise, and articulate our inarticulate love for you. Amen.

Mission Focus: Imagine No Malaria is an extraordinary effort of the people of The UMC, putting our faith into action to end preventable deaths by malaria in Africa, especially the death of a child or a mother. Donate today.

December 2, 2013

MORE THAN "A SONG IN THE AIR!"

From Dale R. Leslie, former member of the Dixboro UMC

It's a "John Wesley Moment" during the Christmas Eve service at Dixboro in 1953. My heart felt strangely warmed while singing the Christmas song, "There's a Song in the Air (There's a star in the sky)," text by Josiah G. Holland and music by Karl P. Harrington. I love the verse, "Every hearth is aflame, and the beautiful sing in the homes of the nations that Jesus is King."

Our family tradition was to gather in the warmth of the Christian home of Grandpa and Grandma Leslie after the Christmas Eve service. I recall my aunt patiently remarking when we were teens, "Well, all the boys will be here after they take their girlfriends home!"

Some of my relatives and friends recall number "11" has coincidentally surfaced throughout my life. My oldest son, Drew, was born on September **11**, 1979; his office number in the Appalachian State University Hayes School of Music is "111." (Not his choosing.) Well, it's not surprising that my most inspiring scripture lesson is, Hebrews **11:1** "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*"

There was more than a Song in the Air on Christmas Eve 60-years-ago. And I shall always remember it.



Mission Focus: Thanks to a generous grant from the United Nations Foundation that will pay for all administrative costs of Imagine No Malaria, one hundred percent of contributions to this ministry will go to the fight against malaria. Praise God!

December 3, 2013

WHILE BY MY SHEEP (Echo Carol)

From Amy Knutilla, Administrative Assistant

A favorite carol of mine is one I don't hear very often, but when I do, I always experience a deep, warm joy. It's "*While By My Sheep*" (Echo Carol) – A Traditional German Carol (Als Ich Bei Meinen Schafen Wacht).

Our family was celebrating our second Christmas Eve with Dixboro Church in 2002 and Laura and Bobby, then 8 and 6 years old, sang this carol at the 7:00pm candlelight service, accompanied by Janice Clark on piano. Laura, with diva-like confidence, sang the verses and Bobby, with the voice of an angel, echoed the refrain.

"How great my joy!"

"Great my joy!"

At Christmas we welcome the baby Jesus. We celebrate with family. We love the joy our children bring at Christmas. This song, for me, nicely brings it all together.

"Joy! Joy! Joy!"

"Joy! Joy! Joy!"

My prayer, paraphrasing the fourth verse of the carol: Lord, be near me forever, then my heart will be filled with joy! Amen.

"Praise to the Lord in Heav'n on high!"

"Praise to the Lord in Heav'n on high!"

Although you've never seen him, you love him. Even though you don't see him now, you trust him and so rejoice with a glorious joy that is too much for words. --1 Peter 1:8

Mission Focus: Gifts made online to any project through *The Advance* will be matched today only. So make a donation to Imagine No Malaria or UMCOR today. Go to www.umcmmission.org/give.

December 4, 2013

THE TIME OF HOPE

From Janet Zinn



Advent is the time of hope.

I find hope in the message in the first movement of Handel's Messiah:

"Comfort ye my people."

Isaiah 6:1-3

One of the most comforting Christmas cards I've received said,

Peace:

So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body. ECC 11:10

Prayer: Lord, in this Advent Season, bring Hope, Comfort and Peace, to:

Our World

Our Nation

Our Church

Our Family

Amen

Mission Focus: Malaria is caused by the plasmodium parasite, which is transmitted to humans through the bite of the female anopheles mosquito. This deadly pest flies and feeds at night (which is why bed nets are an effective prevention tool).
\$10=1 Net

December 5, 2013

SILENT NIGHT

From Ben Little and Madeline Leidlein
DUMC Youth

*Silent night, holy night; all is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin, mother and child
Holy infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.*

*Silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing Alleleluia!
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born!*

*Silent night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure light;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.*

The lyrics are very calming, when you listen to them, you feel closer to God. When I sing it every year during the holidays, I get nostalgic of all my past Christmas's.

Whenever I'm sad, singing this song always lifts our spirits up. It reminds us of Christ's birth because it talks about the shepherds in their fields, listening to the Heavenly Host tell them of his birth. It reminds me of Bible verse Luke 2:8, "And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keep watch over their flocks at night."

Prayer: Dear Lord, Help us to be calm during the crazy Christmas season. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Mission Focus: The Imagine No Malaria approach is focused on four key areas: prevention, education, communication and treatment. Nets are good, but more education and training is better.

December 6, 2013

COME, THOU LONG-EXPECTED JESUS

Written by Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)



*Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation
Joy of every longing heart.*

*Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child, and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious Kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all-sufficient merit
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.*

Prayer: (from the United Methodist Book of Worship)

Ever present God, you taught us that the night is far spent and the day is at hand. Grant that we may ever be found watching for the coming of your Son. Save us from undue love of the world, that we may wait with patient hope for the day of the Lord, and so abide in him, that when he shall appear, we may not be ashamed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Mission Focus: A gift to Imagine No Malaria changes lives – your pledge helps provide bed nets, medicine and training to health workers. A small sacrifice that means the difference between life and death in Africa.

December 7, 2013

BORN THY PEOPLE TO DELIVER. . .

From Bishop D. Max Whitfield, New Mexico area

I read an unusual Christmas sermon about a group who tied the baby Jesus into a manger. The Christmas pageant was being presented in a public area. They would set the stage, go to change into their costumes; then discover someone had taken the baby doll from the manger before the pageant began. Their solution was to strap the baby doll into the manger. The preacher reflected on how throughout Jesus' life people had attempted to tie or strap Jesus down.

People tried to tie Jesus down by demanding he ignore pain and suffering until after the Sabbath. They tried to tie Jesus down by demanding he follow Jewish practices. They tried to tie Jesus down when he reached across racial and gender lines to bring hope and healing. They tried to tie Jesus to a cross when he refused to do things their way. However, all of their efforts were futile. Jesus couldn't be tied down, not even by death.

The good news of Christmas is that Jesus not only refused to be tied down; he also frees us from the things that tie us down. Depression, failure, divorce, addiction and bankruptcy cannot tie us down. Hatred, jealousy, poverty and illness lose their power over us. Jesus Christ sets us free. That baby – born in a stable – is God with us. Jesus breaks the forces that places us in bondage and condemn us to death.

No wonder the angels were singing! The whole order of the universe was changed that evening. The world could never be the same again. God became a human being, and we were set free.

Mission Focus: Every 60 seconds, malaria claims a life in Africa. \$10 can provide a net for one family.

December 8, 2013 – 2nd Sunday of Advent

IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER

From Rev. Tony Arnesen



*What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can, I give him: give Him my heart.*

Last Advent season, Bill Sanford approached me with a very special gift. He was going through old books and discovered *Norman Rockwell's Christmas Book*, which he thought might be a useful resource as I plan worship during this holy season. It is!

From its' pages come this poem, which reminds me of a favorite Christmas carol, "*In the Bleak Midwinter.*" On this, Bill Sanford's 80th birthday, I share this gift with you:

A Hymn Sung as by the Shepherds by Richard Crashaw

*Welcome, all wonders in one sight!
Eternity shut in a span!
Summer in winter, day in night!
Heaven in earth, and God in man!
Great little One! Whose all-embracing birth
Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heaven to earth. . .*

*To Thee, meek Majesty! Soft King
Of simple graces and sweet loves:
Each of us his lamb will bring,
Each his pair of silver doves;
Till burnt at last in fire of Thy fair eyes,
Ourselves become our own best sacrifice.*

Mission Focus: Come to the Youth Christmas Program and Motown Mission dinner fundraiser to support our youth as they begin preparing and fundraising for our trip in July.

December 9, 2013

FROM ORDINARY TO EXTRAORDINARY

By Carolyn Harris, retired Local Pastor

Silent Night, Holy Night, REALLY?
You must be kidding me!
Braying cattle, a woman in labor
A baby born in the midst of disorder.

This is not what we think at Christmas.
We are thinking everything was glorious.
Not that the Holy Son of God was less than well received,
Or that there is a question about how he was conceived.

As we celebrate; we remember the Angel visitant.
We see the stars; we remember the Magi from the orient.
But do we think about the parents, Joseph and Mary,
The Son of God entrusted to this couple most ordinary?

There was no great palace, no money, no place to stay;
Just a stable, a few shepherds, and a manger of hay.
This child who entered the world through such a birth,
Destined to bring salvation and peace to all the earth.

How strange are the workings of God.
To mortals this all seems quite odd.
Can we believe that God truly had a plan
To use the ordinary to save mortal man?

Miracles seem so hard to conceive,
But this birth symbolizes what we believe.
God sends the means of peace on earth
In the guise of a child, a simple birth.

There was nothing simple about His life;
It was filled with work, conflict, and strife.
We think that Christ makes everything nice,
And forget that salvation comes at a price.

While you celebrate His birth this year
Amidst all the parties and Holiday cheer;
Remember that without the cross
There would be no joy, just pain and loss.

So raise your glass and drink a toast,
As you join the songs with the Heavenly host;
Drink to the love of God on High,
Who sent His Son to earth to die.

While the night may not have been silent,
It truly was Holy and significant.
This baby boy opened His mouth and yawned
And the earth rejoiced for joy had dawned!

Prayer: Lord, help us during our own time of chaos and disorder to remember this Holy family who went through so much to bring your plan of redemption to us. Help us to remember that you work through ordinary people, like us, to create a place of peace and love in a world of hatred and hostility. Help us to bring new life into old systems, to sing of your peace in the middle of strife, to shine your light into a dark, dreary world. We thank you, Lord, for the birth of your Son. We live in gratitude for his extraordinary life, his grueling death, and his glorious resurrection, that gives each of us hope. Let us be the instruments you use to bring your peace, hope, joy, and love to the world. AMEN.

Mission Focus: Motown Mission - our youth will be working hard in the heat of the summer to rebuild and make Detroit a better place. Please support our youth by your monetary donations and your prayers.

December 10, 2013

JOY TO THE WORLD!

From Samantha Cox, Garron King and Griffin Charnetski
DUMC Youth

Joy to the World speaks to us on how it is so peaceful. It makes everything seem so calm and relaxed. The song tells you that God has come back to life in this community. It also tells you that you shall rejoice in his presence.

This song points to the birth of Christ by telling you to rejoice and to “party” because He has come to save us from our sins. This song reminds us of a nice stroll in the park and to just “be happy.” This song tells us that the world may someday be a better place for everyone!

This song reminds us of the Bible verse, *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice!”* **Philippians 4:4**



Prayer: May the Lord help us bring peace and joy to all men! In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Mission Focus: Motown Mission reaches out to the people of Detroit who live in areas where houses & buildings are falling apart, communities are trying to rebuild, and community gardens are helping to bring fresh foods to everyone. Remember them in your prayers.

December 11, 2013

AWAY IN A MANGER

From Rev. Mary Hagley



“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.” Luke 2:19 NIV

Away in a Manger has always been one of my favorite Christmas songs. I can remember singing it at Christmas programs and Christmas Eve services while growing up. As a young child I remember thinking about the animals and how they must have known some special was happening that beautiful night. I love hearing children sing this song!

Two years ago this song took on a new meaning for me as I held my tiny baby boy. I was thrilled to be a mommy and worried too; as I sang this song to Ethan I thought about Mary, Jesus’ mother. I know the Bible says she wasn’t worried and she pondered everything, but I don’t know how she couldn’t be a little worried about putting her baby in a manger surrounded by smelly animals. However, putting the smells and worries aside, Mary pondered everything in her heart. Help us to ponder on the miracle of Christmas, Jesus.

Singing this song, especially singing it to Ethan as a lullaby, reminds me and tells him of the promise we have through Jesus Christ. The last verse says, “Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay close by me forever, and love me, I pray; bless all the dear children in thy tender care, and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.”

Prayer: Thank you God for sending your Son into our lives as a baby who touched our hearts from the first day and to eternity. Remind us to ponder on Jesus’ life and what he did for each and every one of us, just like Mary did. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Mission Focus: Hands Across the Water is a local adoption and foster agency that helps a child find his or her forever family. Find out how you can help.



December 12, 2013

I HEARD THE BELLS ON CHRISTMAS DAY

From Becky Horvath

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men!*

One of my favorite Christmas Carols is "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." It reminds us that the message of Jesus's birth was the promise of peace on earth. But that promise does not come without struggle, set backs and sometimes what seems like a hopeless situation. *"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep."*

Some of you may remember at the beginning of World War II, it seemed as if Hitler was going to take over the world. After much loss of life, the war ended and with compassion, Europe rebuilt. Now instead of war, disagreements are like sibling squabbles, and after much grumbling, countries are helping each other.

What is our part in bringing peace to the world? It starts with compassion toward the person next to you. It starts with listening to the Voice of God within you. It is sustained by faith in the promise that *"the wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, good will to all."*

*"Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men!"*

Mission Focus: Methodist Children's Home Society. Buy a gift for a child at the Children's Home Society for Christmas.

December 13, 2013

WE THREE KINGS

From Anna Little, Warren Leidlein and Alex Buschhaus
DUMC Youth

*We three kings of Orient are,
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.*

*O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to the perfect light.*

We Three Kings is a cool Christmas carol. The song tells the story of the three kings that travelled great distances following a star. This shows how strong their faith was – that they would travel over *"field and fountain, moor and mountain"* to get to Bethlehem. It only takes me 15 minutes to get to church!

The magi followed a star in the sky, across a great distance. I can barely find the Big Dipper when the skies are clear, let alone follow one for many nights in a row!

They had faith and brought their gifts to Him in Bethlehem. We are called to bring our personal gifts to Him during Christmas.



Mission Focus: The Children's Village offers residential care for 70 children, ages 10-17 who are in need of a highly structured intensive environment. Please pray for these children.



December 14, 2013

AMID THE GLITTER IS A BRIGHTER LIGHT

From Joe Coffey

As we approach Christmas, I face the dread of the holiday pressure; too much traffic, too many obligations, presents to buy, people to see. It's hard to focus on what Christmas is supposed to be and in truth, in our world today, Christmas probably can't be what it's supposed to be. I have selective "Christmas moments" where I tune out the Christmas demands and can reflect back to those brief times where I got caught up in the *Christmas* spirit.

Music is a big part of many of my days and Christmas is no exception. I'm truly annoyed, rather than inspired, by much of the Christmas music. Much of it reminds me of everything that I don't want Christmas to represent to me. That being said, there are certain Christmas songs that can put me in the moment of 2000 years ago. The one that always comes to mind this time of the year, as I approach the holiday with my annual dread and trepidation is

Mission Focus: Michigan Children's Village strives to meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the children in our care, develop personal, family and community relationships which will contribute to healthy opportunities for the children to reach their fullest potential and to advocate on behalf of all children. Be grateful for this home.

"Breath of Heaven" (Mary's Song)

*I have traveled many moonless nights,
cold and weary with a babe inside,
and I wonder what I've done.
Holy father you have come,
and chosen me now to carry your son.*

*I am waiting in a silent prayer.
I am frightened by the load I bear.
In a world as cold as stone, must I walk this path alone?
Be with me now. Be with me now.*

*Breath of heaven, hold me together,
be forever near me, breath of heaven.
Breath of heaven, lighten my darkness,
pour over me your holiness,
For you are holy. Breath of heaven.*

*Do you wonder as you watch my face,
if a wiser one should have had my place,
But I offer all I am, for the mercy of your plan.
Help me be strong. Help me be. Help me.*

*Breath of heaven, hold me together,
be forever near me, breath of heaven.
Breath of heaven, lighten my darkness,
pour over me your holiness,
For you are holy. Breath of heaven.*

The song kind of puts things in perspective doesn't it? We tend to forget the real journey that Mary is talking about – the one that the real Christmas has allowed us to take. Amid the glitter, bright lights, and obligations we find our first stepping stone, the beginning of our path to salvation. My goal this year is not to bah-hubug Christmas but to appreciate its real significance. Difficult task I face but I'm confident that I have all the help I will need.

December 15, 2013 – 3rd Sunday of Advent

GO! TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN

From Rev. Tonya Arnesen



*Go! Tell it on the mountain,
over the hills and everywhere;
Go! Tell it on the mountain
that Jesus Christ is born!*

Without WITNESS, there would be no Christmas. We celebrate in 2013, because the story of Christ's birth has been handed down to us by the generation before us. And the next generation of Christians will depend upon OUR willingness to share the good news!

What better way to share the GOOD NEWS, than in song? And to do it door-to-door; to share the Good News with our neighbors – that's truly the Christmas spirit at work.

The music may not always be on key; harmonies may falter and words may be forgotten or confused . . . but there is a joyful excitement about even the most unrehearsed caroling. That excitement can become truly contagious. The Christmas shepherds were not professionals either. Their telling of the story was certainly unrehearsed, less than polished, absolutely amateur. . . and yet they did it, because they wanted to share what they had heard and seen.

Whether you are caroling or caroled to this day, "*Go Tell it on the Mountain that Jesus Christ is born.*" Join your voice to the happy song, and let the music make known abroad, that Christ is with us.

Prayer: Lord God, we give thanks for the opportunity to sing your song to each new generation.

Mission Focus: The House By the Side of the Road's purpose is to help provide adequate clothing and small household items without charge to children and adults.

December 16, 2013

GOD REST YOU MERRY GENTLEMEN

From Grace Czachorski and Ian Little, DUMC Youth

*God rest you merry, gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
Remember Christ our Savior
Was born on Christmas Day,
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray.
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy;
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

This song makes us think that even if something is bad, that Christ is still there. The beginning line reminds us to stay happy no matter what is going on. "God rest you merry gentlemen."

We like the line, "To save us all from Satan's power" because it shows that He will help us avoid temptation from evil things or thoughts.

We like "And with true love and brotherhood each other now embrace." This reminds us of true love and joy of family at Christmas.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for shielding us from evil, and leading us together. Thank you, Lord, for all you do, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Philippians 4:20 "*To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.*"

Mission Focus: Regardless of race or creed, gender or ethnicity, age or size, residents of Washtenaw County receive referrals from social service agencies or faith communities to "The House." During this Christmas season remember these people in your prayers.



December 17, 2013

IT CAME UPON A MIDNIGHT CLEAR

From Emily Vincent

It's hard to choose only one Christmas carol. Many have memories for me since music was a hobby of both my parents, and I was fortunate enough to grow up in a church that always had a Cherub Choir director even if her charges needed to have their exuberance refocused on the music frequently. She let us have our conversation (sometimes) so we learned tolerance as well as music.

*It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their hearts of gold;
"Peace on the earth, good will to men,
From heaven's all-gracious King";
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing*

I'm going to reflect on the first carol that came to mind, *It came Upon a Midnight Clear*. As I reread the words to remind myself why it came to mind, I enjoy the melody and yes, the words. It's lyrical. The images are traditional. I find other carols are more often chosen for services in recent years. These images are pastoral; our country is largely urban. The story gets told focusing on different details, not Bethlehem, not the wise men. Boring?

No, a welcome respite. In the book the adult Sunday school has been studying this fall, *Zealot* by Reza Aslan, the social and historical context of Jesus' times were treacherous for believers with hardship, heavy taxes/tithes of their crops and political oppression of many. Life had lots of conflict in the Middle East of that era. The hymn's author chose to focus on faith of people

routed in the land to earn their living. We see in this hymn words and a melody that promotes faith and peace.

Fast forward to Jesus' time of teaching to nurture faith and parables much as parents try make a safe, secure environment for their children in an environment they know to be short of both but which parents know children need to experience safety and security for healthy growth and development.

Christmas Eve the sky was clear, so the shepherds could see the star and where it stopped. Where I grew up Christmas Eve sometimes had no stars; sometimes it snowed. When our daughter was in early elementary school we had the opportunity to live in Las Vegas for two years. It's a desert climate much like that of the Bible, the land of cedar and fig trees both.

One Christmas Eve we ended the service by going out to La Posada, a gathering place, next to the sanctuary. We sang the carol and looked up at the stars. It was a midnight clear. For one night it was a moving religious experience for many of the congregation at midnight within the city limits of a place where a person's first associations of it are often anything but holy. The angels can sing over the Babel sounds. Little pieces of the world can give back the song the angels sing. Perhaps we can work on increasing the number of pieces of this world that give back the song the angels sing in the part where we live?

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for beautiful Christmas music and your peace which encourages us to take a few minutes to meditate in a safe, quiet place to meditate on your peace in a noisy, demanding world to remember whose world it is. We thank you for your peace, a peace the world did not give and cannot take away.

Mission Focus: "The House" is responsible for all costs so they need monetary contributions (\$50 takes care of one family per year), clothing donations, small household items, diapers, bedding, and kitchen items.



December 18, 2013

JESUS, THE LIGHT

From Rev. Cathy Freeman,
Minister of Nurture and Outreach

I decided to focus on a hymn I don't actually know. It is from our newest hymnal supplement, Worship and Song and is called "Jesus, the Light of the World" (#3056). I don't know anything about music so I have no idea if the song is fast or slow or easy to sing or memorable. I just know that the words are beautiful and describe the image of Jesus that is most important to me during the Advent Season – Jesus, the Light:

*Walk in the light, beautiful light;
Come where his love and his mercy are bright.
Shine all around us by day and by night,
Jesus, the light of the world.*

I love that we decorate for the season with candles and with lights on our houses and our Christmas trees. Everywhere, the darkness of the season is brightened by these lights. In the same way, Jesus brings light to us by his birth. Where would we be without this shining presence in our lives?

Ted Loder says:

*In the darkness I see the light
and find in it comfort, confidence, cause for celebration,
for the darkness cannot overcome it;
And I rejoice to nourish it in myself, in other people, in the world
for the sake of him in whom it was born
and shines forever, Jesus the Christ.*

Mission Focus: Buy new children's underwear and socks to drop off at church to go to the House By the Side of the Road.

December 19, 2013

THE FIRST NOEL

From Gabby Cox, Breanna Root and
Kelsey Charnetski, DUMC Youth



*The first Noel, the angel did say,
Was to certain poor shepherds in field as they lay.*

As a reference to "The First Noel," we are reminded that the angels are always watching over we, the sheep of God.

As young children, we remember hearing, singing and loving this song. When the holidays roll around, we would always sing this song at the Christmas Eve services.

We like how the song teaching us about the birth of Christ in a fun, theatrical way. Plus it is a catchy tune that sticks in your head.

Luke 2:20: "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."

Prayer: Dear God, help us to remember this tune as we celebrate the birth of Christ. In God's name we pray. Amen.

Mission Focus: The Detroit Annual Conference has a long-standing and deep relationship with the UMC in Liberia. This relationship was formalized as a "Covenant Partnership" during the 1990s, the darkest period of Liberia's civil wars. Our promise is to always remember and support each other with prayers, gifts, and sustained conversation.

December 20, 2013

THE CHRISTMAS SHOES

by Newsong

From Rev. Mary Hagley,
Minister of Children and Youth



*Sir, I want to buy these shoes for my Mama, please
It's Christmas Eve and these shoes are just her size
Could you hurry, sir, Daddy says there's not much time
You see she's been sick for quite a while
And I know these shoes would make her smile
And I want her to look beautiful if Mama meets Jesus tonight*

Promise: Charity and Comfort are love.

Another song that touches my heart and always brings tears to my eyes is “The Christmas Shoes.” You won’t find this song in the hymnal, but it reminds me of our charity during the Christmas season, sorrow and grief during the season, and the many blessings we have when we call Jesus our Lord and Savior.

The song, which is also a Hallmark movie and a book, is about a young boy who wants to buy his dying mother a pair of shoes to wear when she meets Jesus because he wants her to look beautiful for Him. The young boy does not have enough money to buy the shoes, so the person behind him in line pays for the shoes.

Lesson #1 we feel more inclined to give a blessing to someone else during this season. The person who gives the boy the money, sings, “*I knew I'd caught a glimpse of heaven's love, as he thanked me and ran out, I knew that God had sent that little boy to remind me what Christmas is all about.*”

Christmas is one of the times we see charity at its greatest. Let us give to others out of love for Jesus Christ who died on the cross for you and me.

During the Thanksgiving and Christmas Season many people are struggling with the loss of a loved one or knowing a loved one won't make it for another season. If you are dealing with this type of loss or sorrow know God loves you and is taking care of you always.

Lesson #2 reach out to the people you know going through a hard time. The holiday season is one of the loneliest times for people.

Lesson #3 because we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, we can count our blessings when we call Jesus our Lord and Savior. Why? Because he was born to be a sacrifice for our sins. As we celebrate CHRISTmas season remember to spread the love of Jesus through charity and comforting your family and friends.

Prayer: Holy God, you sent your Son for all of us because you love us. Help us to show your love to others we don't know and to comfort those who mourn. In the comfort of the Holy Spirit we pray, Amen.

Mission Focus: Liberian Health Initiative is an organization geared toward helping rural Liberian healthcare by providing them with equipment, medical and nursing supplies, and education/training programs. Our goal is to train, equip and support healthcare workers and healthcare facilities in rural Liberia. Donate & pray to support the efforts.

December 21, 2013

THERE'S A SONG IN THE AIR!

By Josiah G. Holland, 1819-1881

*There's a song in the air! There's a star in the sky!
There's a mother's deep prayer and a baby's low cry!
And the star rains its fire while the beautiful sing,
For the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!*

*There's a tumult of joy o'er the wonderful birth,
For the Virgin's sweet boy is the Lord of the earth.
Ay! The star rains its fire while the beautiful sing,
For the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!*

*In the light of that star lie the ages impearled;
And that song from afar has swept over the world.
Every hearth is aflame and the beautiful sing
In the homes of the nations that Jesus is King!*

*We rejoice in the light, and we echo the song
That comes down through the night from the heavenly throng.
Ay! We shout to the lovely evangel they bring,
And we greet in His cradle our Savior and King!*



Mission Focus: The Ann Arbor District we will be sending a group of people to Liberia in January to lay the foundational work in John Dean Town to partner with them to create a more healthy environment, such as building a well for clean water and making a birthing hut for women to have a better delivery. Please pray for this group of people.

December 22, 2013 – 4th Sunday of Advent

O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL

From Rev. Tonya Arnesen



*Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation;
O sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God, all glory in the highest;
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.*

For many people, it wouldn't be Christmas without at least one "live" concert or program, whether in a church sanctuary, a school auditorium, a symphony hall, or even out-of-doors.

What beautiful things can be done for the Lord when people work together! All the rehearsal and preparations are worth it, when God is glorified in heavenly harmony.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if more people could spend more time working together to the glory of God, instead of striving against one another?

Is there some way that you could help break down barriers of discord, and work for harmony and cooperation with others around you? Let the efforts of the musicians inspire you to do something special this season to demonstrate the love of God in Christ Jesus by the uniting power of the Holy Spirit – perhaps beginning with your own family.

Prayer: O Lord, we pray that all of God's people may be united in their love for one another and in their zeal for the Lord's mission in the world. Amen.

Mission Focus: The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) is providing emergency food, water, and water purification tablets to 7,500 individuals (or 1,500 families) in Tacloban City in Leyte Province. The city was devastated by the typhoon and many there have no access to food, water, or medicine. How can you help?

December 23, 2013

O HOLY NIGHT

From Phylis Brandon

Christmas at Dixboro UM Church

I've said many times that "Christmas just isn't Christmas until Bill Sanford sings 'O Holy Night.'"

After spending at least 98% of the past 56 Christmas Eves at Dixboro UM Church, it was a tradition that I could depend on and was very comforting to me.

However, like many traditions, the years have had a way of changing that special sameness for me. Bill has handed that carol over to a new generation and I've had to move on, too.

Prayer: O Lord, help us to remember that although special traditions are fun and comforting, they usually have little to do with why we celebrate Christmas – make sure we keep the real meaning of Christ's birth FIRST this Advent and Christmas season. Amen.



Mission Focus: Give generously to International Disaster Response, Advance #982450, to support UMCOR Philippines staff and volunteers as they work tirelessly to provide assistance to those in need.

December 24, 2013 – Christmas Eve

CHRISTMAS PRAYER

Submitted by Susan Engle



By Robert Louis Stevenson

*Loving Father,
Help us remember the birth of Jesus,
That we may share in the song of the angels,
The gladness of the shepherds,
And worship of the wise men.*

*Close the door of hate
And open the door of love all over the world.
Let kindness come with every gift
And good desires with every blessing which Christ brings,
And teach us to be merry with clear hearts.*

*May the Christmas morning
Make us happy to be thy children,
And Christmas evening bring us to our beds
With grateful thoughts,
Forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake.
Amen.*

Mission Focus: UMCOR honors cultural differences. We deliver aid to people without regard to race, religion, politics, gender, or sexual orientation. We seek input from local communities in identifying needs and delivering innovative solutions.



December 25, 2013 –
Christmas Day

HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

From Rev. Tonya Arnesen

On this Christmas Day, we reflect on one of Charles Wesley's most famous hymns written for the

Methodist Movement in England. On his trip from England to America in 1736, he had so enjoyed hearing some Moravians singing hymns that he was inspired to make hymn-writing and poetry his life-long call. He wrote his first hymn on the day of his conversion and his last hymn the day he died, March 29, 1788. During the 50 years in-between, he penned about 6500 more, (Including *O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing* and *Christ The Lord is Risen Today*), making him the most prolific as well as the most profound hymn writer in church history.

This hymn was written (at age thirty-two), within a year of Charles' conversion, when he was meditating upon the birth of Christ. The original poem had ten stanzas; three of which are now in our UM Hymnal. George Whitfield, famous preacher and co-worker in the Wesleyan revival, eliminated Charles' awkward word "welkin" and substituted the phrase we know so well: *Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King.* Only in 1856, did William Haymen Cummings set Wesley's poem to Felix Mendelssohn's tune, which we now sing.

The story of the shepherds (Luke 2:8-14) rings joyfully in the first stanza. The second stanza refers us to John 1:14 "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." The third stanza praises the Prince of Peace for bringing healing and being "born that man no more may die." Such a wealth and meaning of the Christmas story can come to us only when we hark to the singing of the angels.

HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

*Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies;
With th'angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*

*Christ, by highest heaven adores; Christ, the everlasting Lord;
Late in time behold him come, offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail th'incarnate Deity,
Please with us in flesh to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!

Hail the Sun of Righteousness!

*Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die,
Born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*

A Joyous Christmas to you!

Mission Focus: On this joyous Christmas day remember the people who have no home to celebrate Christmas in, or have no food eat on this day. Pray for these people.

ADVENT CALENDAR

- Dec 1 *First Sunday of Advent*
10:30 am "Imagine"
12:00 pm Advent Luncheon,
Church Decorating Party and
Advent Wreath Workshop
- Dec 8 *Second Sunday of Advent*
10:30 am "Still Haven't Found What I'm
Looking For"
5:00 pm Christmas Youth Program
"The Surprising Christmas Pageant"
Followed by the Motown Mission
Fundraiser Dinner
- Dec 10 7:00 pm **ALL CHURCH CONFERENCE**
- Dec 15 *Third Sunday of Advent*
10:30 am "Maybe I'm Amazed"
11:45 am Cookie Walk in Fellowship Hall
5:30 pm All Church Family Christmas
Caroling and Party
- Dec 19 7:00 pm Longest Night Service
- Dec 22 *Fourth Sunday of Advent*
10:30am Service of Lessons and Carols
- CHRISTMAS EVE**
- Dec 24 4:30 pm Family Candlelight Service
7:00 pm Traditional Candlelight Service
11:00 pm Candlelight Communion Service



Sing We Noel!
Devotions for Advent 2013

Dixboro United Methodist Church