

The Messenger

N. Ft. Myers Church of the Nazarene

A loving, caring, serving community of believers in Jesus

December 2021 ~ Volume 12, Issue 7

The Wonder of Christmas

It has arrived once again. We are all facing the same challenge we face every year at this time. We know it is coming. We have learned to anticipate it. Yet the challenge seems to still be present year after year. The more Christmases we celebrate, it seems the more difficult it can become to maintain a sense of excitement and engagement in the season. It's like the little boy who told his mother he didn't want to go to church for Easter, because he "hates wearing a tie and the story always ends the same way." We approach the season each year promising ourselves that we will "keep Christ in Christmas" and remember the "reason for the season." However, it can still present a struggle to actually achieve the goal.

We often straddle two equally unattractive options as the clock counts down to Christmas. First is the temptation to fight a sense of boredom in having to do the same thing again ... and again in the name of tradition. The second is the pressure to maintain some profound spiritual insight on the coming of Christ into the world, as if His coming alone isn't enough to excite us. (Shouldn't the truth of the Christ child arriving as light in the darkness stand on its own?) So, on our bad days we can bounce between joy-sucking cynicism and anxiety-generating insecurity.

We can find some help in considering the story in John 8 about the adulterous woman whose accusers Jesus challenged to: "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." Verse 9 says, "At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first ..." Why do you think the older ones dropped their stones first? Could it be that the older we get, the deeper our spiritual journey becomes, and the more aware we become of our own brokenness? If we forget how badly we needed redemption, we can easily miss the real heart of Christmas. On the other hand, it's only when we acknowledge that we have been rescued from hopelessness and the darkness that we can truly and most adequately appreciate the light that came from the advent of Jesus.

Could it be that wonder isn't just a gift we should seek? It's a practice we must cultivate. For many, the quest begins with silence and solitude. It's just too easy to let the family dynamics, the gift planning/purchasing/wrapping, travel plans, busyness, and social gatherings, consume our mental energy. Beginning the day in the quiet often gives us the best opportunity to give us the focus required to maintain a sense of wonder for the great gift of Jesus.

But this can also present a challenge. We can't microwave wonder. It's a slow cooker type of dish, reaching its best flavor only after simmering for hours at low heat. You don't stumble over wonder on the way to the mall, you fight for it in times of silence. We can create goals of maintaining a sense of wonder, but it can become more like a tip of Bob Cratchit's top hat than the shepherd's adoration. Sometimes a taste of wonder leads to worship, but in other moments it takes a steady diet of reflection, repentance, and worship. And all of these can be required in order to have that desired sense of wonder.

There is no magic formula that is going to ensure that we overwhelmed, anxiety-prone, stressed-out, sometimes jaded, wonder-seeking people, to reclaim that elusive sense of wonder. Most of us are definitely aware, however, that when we don't have it, we can't fake it. We cannot open our book of Christmas goodie recipes and put some ingredients together and expect the outcome to be a warm, Christ-filled sense of adoration and awe. What we do know, though, is that in a world drowning in advertisements guaranteeing happiness in our spending habits, or Hallmark movies that offer joy in a two-hour ribbon-wrapped flick, people are hungry for the real thing. So let's keep fighting for wonder. There is nothing in all the world from its beginning to now that should hold more wonder for us than the incredible gift of God loving us so much that He would create a way to be with us forever. That's the wonder of Christmas. **BG**

December Birthdays & Anniversaries

01 – James Boye
 05 – Jean Monroe
 11 – Jay Adams
 17 – Paul Bolling
 Brenda Loubier
 18 – Tim & Carole Dillehay
 19 – Doug Haiflich
 Jerry Parker
 31 – Nancy Bastin



December Calendar

6 – District Pastor's Christmas Dinner
 10 – Church Board Christmas Dinner
 12 – All-Church Christmas Dinner
 15 – Youth Christmas Party
 17 – Creative Ministries Christmas Party
 22 – Blue Christmas Service
 24 – Candlelight Communion Service
 25 – Christmas Day



Prayer Needs

Irvin Family	Moore/Denney Family	Tammy Joslin	Van Ski/ver Family
Perry Souzis	Wendy & Emily Horvath	Patrick Lindsey	Darlene Roach
Jeff Clark	Mitchell Irvin	Jeffrey Hailey	Dave Smith
June Carsey	Drew Baker	Greg Atkins	Anna Marie Anderson
Shelby Pickett	Elis Lodge	Lisa Koch	Cindy Jones' son
Rev. Greg Story, D.S.	Eileen Massett	Ernie Rybold	Misty Burris
Paul Jones	Tom Blakeman	Joseph Groves	Regina Williams & Fam
Dorothy & Laurel Chapman	Paul & Grace Boling	Lorraine Jungles	Youth & Children Min.
Louis Perez	The Monroe Family	The Garner Family	Our District Family
Kenny & Gail Goodman	Eileen Jennings	Doug Keuther	The Church Roof
Unsaved Loved Ones	Those affected negatively by Covid		Tom & Marjean Cunningham

