



***From Pastor Mike***

My Sunday School class was having its annual Christmas party when I was in the Fourth grade. One boy did not want to go but his mother insisted. As she dropped her son, we could hear her say to him, "Don't ruin Christmas for everyone."

I was familiar with that admonishment – "Don't ruin Christmas for everyone." Usually, it was said when either I or one of my siblings was bored at some Christmas gathering.

Maybe you remember someone saying it to you. Perhaps you have said it to your own children or grandchildren.

Some people put a lot of pressure on themselves (and their families) to have a "perfect" Christmas – whatever that means. I suppose a perfect Christmas for many folks is one where everyone gets that gift he or she wants, all family and friends are together, old grudges and disagreements are gone or set aside, and the Christmas dinner table looks like a picture out of *Martha Stewart Living*.

Notice very little thought is given to Jesus whose birthday is being celebrated.

What do you have left when you take away the packages, the food, the decorations and expectations, and every other thing society says you have to have at Christmas?

You have what John 1:14 tells you: "The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us." The God who became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh to rescue us from sin and death is what you have.

The culture wants to celebrate the "spirit of Christmas" which is all about happy feelings. But feelings come and go. Our troubles do not take a holiday because the calendar says they should. A celebration focused on happy feelings can be ruined. Pursuing this type of "perfect" Christmas overwhelmingly ends in disappointment.

Christians celebrate the Flesh of Christmas – God in the Flesh who dwelt among us. So, we know nothing can ruin Christmas. Not sticks, not stones, not broken bones. Not drunkenness, nor neglect. Not old grudges, or fresh wounds. Not bad news from doctors, or bosses.

The Lord will not be stopped. Not even the lack of room at the inn could stop Him. Not even the lack of room in our hearts, not the years of our refusal to forgive has stopped Him. God as man – as a baby – has placed Himself into the manger, a feeding trough. And that is appropriate because the Lord has given Himself as food for selfish people who, at times, behave worse than animals.

The Word became Flesh that could be nailed down so that our weak flesh could escape corruption. His light shines from the Cross through the empty tomb to drive away sins like the summer sun burns the fog off.

Don't get me wrong. I am not telling you that you have no reason to be sad. Other people might demand, "It's Christmas, so you can't be upset, you can only be holly and jolly." But we still live this side of Heaven at Christmas. Try to sweep conflict under the rug, and you will trip over it. Our hearts still feel the touch of anger, frustration, and grief.

Yet Jesus is still Immanuel – God's Flesh in our midst. That is the reason even for joy during sadness, life amid death, and hope in times of despair. Still, He forgives those who desire His mercy. Still, He shepherds His flock through death and into life. Until we receive Christ's reward in Paradise, we wait in peace with God. For Christ is our peace, the only stable thing, the only thing that does not age, wither or break in all of Creation, and nothing can ruin that – therefore, nothing can ruin Christmas. Not even a little boy who doesn't want to go to his Sunday School Christmas party.

The Word became Flesh. We have a Savior. There lies our only chance at perfection. Thanks be to God.

Yours in Christ, *Pastor Mike*



## **Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Worship**

### **A Christmas Classic Celebration**

**Saturday, December 24 at 4:00 p.m.**

A Service of Lessons, Carols, and Other Songs of the Season

### **Christmas Day Worship – Instant Christmas Pageant**

**Sunday, December 25 at 10:30 a.m.**

(No Sunday School)

Carol Sing

Blessing of the Toys - Bring a Toy from Christmas Morning

Spontaneous Nativity Play

Brief Message

## **December 2022**

**Thursday, Dec 1, 6:30P**

**Tuesday, Dec 6, 11A/7P**

**Sunday, Dec 11, 10:30A**

**Tuesday, Dec 13, 11A/7P**

**Sunday, Dec 18, After Worship**

**Tuesday, Dec 20, 11A/7P**

**Saturday, Dec 24, 4:00P**

Church Council Meeting

Advent Study Week 2

Youth Advent Service

Advent Study Week 3

New Hope UMC Christmas Lunch (Covered Dish)

Advent Study Week 4

A Classic Christmas Celebration



## An Invitation to Private Holy Conversation with the Pastor

In January, we will enter a time of prayerful discernment regarding the future of New Hope UMC.

There is a lot of information out there about disaffiliation and it can be confusing. Should New Hope remain a United Methodist Church? Or should New Hope disaffiliate over disagreements about human sexuality?

What do you need to know? What do you need to say?

I am committing to meet personally with anyone who would like to enter a time of holy conversation over the future of New Hope UMC in December and January. This is your opportunity to ask questions and share your thoughts in a more intimate and confidential environment. No crowded rooms. Just you and your family. No agenda, just a time to talk and pray for those who find that helpful.

If you would like me to come to your home for this conversation, then send a text message (757-653-8537) or an email ([michaelreaves@vaumc.org](mailto:michaelreaves@vaumc.org)). In the text or email, give me three days and times you are available, then I will schedule and confirm our time together.

I will gladly meet with anyone, but you must request a meeting.



# Collections for December

*We need your help!*



**WHAT:** Donations of peanut butter and disinfecting wipes and sprays.

**WHEN:** The entire month of December!

**WHERE:** Place donations in the marked tubs in the Narthex.

**WHO:** Helping people in our local communities, through local agencies, such as: the Verona Food Pantry, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, and the Valley Mission.

**WHY:** To help others in need in New Hope, and the surrounding areas.

**QUESTIONS:** Contact Cheryl and Nathan Kutz.



[RealLifeHeavenlyHands@gmail.com](mailto:RealLifeHeavenlyHands@gmail.com) (202) 495-1346





The following are the minutes from the **DECEMBER** meeting of the Church Council. The minutes are available for you to help the entire church family *Stay In The Know* about how this group is caring for New Hope UMC!

### **Church Council Meeting Minutes – December 1, 2022**

Present: Bianca Brensinger, Samantha Brensinger, Kevin Armstrong, Alicia Copeland, Pastor Mike, Wanda Harding, Jennifer Strother, Dallas VanLear, Karen Whitmer, Cindy Deavers, Robin Craun, and Bruce Rogers.

The meeting was called to order by chairperson, Dallas VanLear. Wanda Harding shared devotions from James 1:17 and Romans 12:6 on good and perfect gifts.

The minutes from October meeting were accepted as distributed with two corrections (page 1 apportionments for 2022 and page 2 charge conference was held at Randolph Macon Academy).

Dallas, chairperson, noted all are welcome at church council meetings; however respect is to be shown to the person speaking and to avoid side comments that are not pertinent to the agenda. Also reminder only those who are chairpersons of committees have voting privileges.

#### **Finance Report** (Kevin Armstrong reported)

92% of year completed; 77% of budget received; 15% behind (about \$7200 short in paying conference apportionments. Will pay apportionments as planned for November/December and if additional funds are received will pay toward conference apportionments. Will fund mission giving of \$4016 for WRE, Food Bank, and District Mission asking, etc as budgeted).

Two appeals have been made to our congregation with budget needs.

#### **Treasurer's Report** (Cindy Deavers reported)

Received \$500 designated for landscaping in middle circle in cemetery. Referred to Trustees.

#### **Financial Secretary** (Robin Craun reported)

Giving envelopes for 2023 are available in the Narthex. If you can help with delivery of these to anyone who is not present regularly, it would be appreciated.

#### **Pastor's Report** (Pastor Mike reported)

Addition to the Nomination's Report is Jim Strother as Trustee.

Complete Officers 2023 and Budget 2023 will be available at end of December.

December newsletter article will offer pastor visiting individual homes upon request to discuss disaffiliation questions, etc.

## **Worship** (Pastor Mike reported)

12/4 10:30 Holy Communion

12/11 10:30 Youth Sunday

12/18 10:30 Music Celebration followed by Covered Dish Lunch

12/24 4:00 Christmas Eve Service

12:25 10:30 Informal Worship (instant Christmas pageant, blessing of toys); no Sunday School

## **Spiritual Nurture** (Samantha Brensinger reported)

Successful Trunk/Treat and Harvey Festival. Requesting ideas for children's ministry for 2023.

## **Evangelism**

Successful coat and canned goods for month of November.

## **United Methodist Men** (Bruce Rogers reported)

UMM met with speaker from VFW on history and plans for Christmas dinner

## **United Methodist Women** (Wanda Harding reported)

Will coordinate with UMM on Christmas Dinner following Worship on 12/18/22. Meat will be provided by UMM.

## **Staff/Parish**

Meeting will be held later this month to complete preference forms due in January.

## **Membership** (Karen Whitmer reported)

2022 – 3 deaths, 1 baptism and 7 new members

## **Lay Leader** (Jennifer Strother reported)

Working on prayer calendar to begin in January for discernment.

## **Youth** (Bianca Brensinger reported)

Youth Sunday on December 11, 2022. Full practice on Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> at 5:30 pm

**Unfinished Business:** None

**New Business:** None

New Hope Christmas parade is Saturday, December 10, 2022 at 5:30 pm with line-up at 5:00 pm  
Plan to borrow trailer and have nativity display using previous materials.

Prayer Concerns reviewed and Pastor Mike closed with prayer.

Meeting adjourned at 7:00 pm

Next meeting: January 26, 2023 at 6:30 pm

Wanda Harding  
Recording Secretary



(See Luke 2:1-16)

12-19-2014

IT HAD A STAR ON TOP SO I FIGURED IT SHOULD HAVE A MANGER AT THE BOTTOM

## Just for Laughs (Christmas Edition)

What does Santa suffer from if he gets stuck in a chimney?

*Claus-trophobia!*

What do you call Santa when he stops moving?

*Santa Pause.*

What do snowmen eat for dessert?

*Ice crispies.*

How do you help someone who has lost their Christmas spirit?

*Nurse them back to elf.*

What do you call an elf that runs away from Santa's workshop?

*A rebel without a Claus!*

What do you call a reindeer ghost?

*Cari-boo!*

What is it called when a snowman has a temper tantrum?

*A meltdown.*

What did Santa say when he stepped into a big puddle?

*It must have reindeer.*





# Just A Smile

This time of year we feel the spirit of Christmas all around us or that's what we are supposed to feel. However, sometimes it's not that easy.

Sometimes the hustle and bustle of the season are overwhelming for those dealing with stress and anxiety and they don't feel the spirit of Christmas. Sometimes those that have someone missing in a chair at the table or around the tree don't feel the spirit of Christmas. Sometimes those who have lost a job, less hours at work, or can't make ends meet don't feel the spirit of Christmas. Sometimes those dealing with disrespectful people day in and day out don't feel the spirit of Christmas. And sometimes the complete lack of wanting to do anything, but stay in bed for those with depression don't feel the spirit of Christmas.

But what is the spirit of Christmas? Christmas spirit looks different to us all. To me Christmas spirit is in all the things money can't buy. Things you don't always see, but instead experience. It's in the gratitude from a boss or coworker of a job well done at work during the extra hours of the holiday season. It's in the thank you when you do a good deed for someone. It's in the laughter of children. It's in the just because smile from a stranger. It's in a kind customer service representative when you call a company with a question. It's the sound of coins dropping in the kettle collection. It's in the donations given to those who are in need. It's in a kind word or compliment. It's in loving others despite their opinions that may differ from yours. It's learning to respect others' political views that are the opposite of what you view. It's self love when you doubt yourself. It's finding peace in a chaotic world. It's everywhere, in every day, all around us.

We never truly know what someone else is going through, what's on their mind, or in their heart. In fact, I'm someone who tends to put a mask on and hide what I'm truly going through. I don't ever want to seem weak or like I can't handle something I'm facing. Maybe you're the same way. Maybe you're the opposite and show your emotions. Someone may be hurting and no one even knows. Someone may have used all their effort and energy to crawl out of bed to face a new day. Someone may have just cried for 20 minutes over the loved one they lost. Someone may have just worked their hands to the bone to put food on the table or pay the rent. Every day may be a struggle for someone and they may be completely shattered on the inside. Someone may be needing and seeking Christ, but so lost they don't even know it.

In 1 John 3:17, we are told, "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need, but no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?"

I challenge you this season to do four things. 1. Take at least 5 minutes a day to reflect on the positives of your day. Sometimes they may be very small during a tough day, but they are there. 2. Do a good deed for someone else at least once a week. It can be as small as holding the door for someone else or letting them into traffic from a parking lot. 3. Every day take time to smile at someone. You never know how that one smile may brighten someone else's day or turn it around for the better or give them hope in humanity. 4. Check in on someone...it can be someone who you haven't spoken to or seen in awhile. It could be a new face at work or church. It could be a family member who has distanced themselves. Send them a text, give them a call, or even better yet send them a note.

God teaches us to live a Christ-like life. Jesus showed us how to do it. Now it is our turn to be Christ like daily, not only during this holiday season, but always. Not for our own happiness, but for God's. Living a Christ like life and leading in a Christ like way shows others he is still here, he is all around us every day and to me that is the spirit of Christmas. Spread Christmas spirit, feel Christmas spirit, give the gift of Jesus to others even if it's just in a smile.

"Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you." (2nd Corinthians 13:11)

*Thank you and we pray that all of you are blessed, Cheryl & Nathan ~ Real Life Heavenly Hands*



**1** - Steve Broyles  
- Robert Corbin  
- Diane Miller

**2** - Robin Craun  
- Leslie Shaver

**4** - Matt Carr

**5** - Susan Baldwin  
- Charles Darrah  
- Michele Taylor


**6** - Clarissa Booth  
- Karen Whitmer

**7** - Betty Gruber  
- Beth Rosen

**8** - Peggy Corbin


**9** - Josh Dively

**10** - Bernie Powers

**13** - Jennifer Bottenmiller  
-  Jake & Julie Botkin

**14** - Brenda Price  
- Dawn White

**16** - B.F. Caricofe III  
- Dwight Craig  
- Shelvie Critzer  
- Wyatt Markow  
- Carrie Reed  
- Paul Whitmer

**17** - Kim Maugans  
-  Tim & Suzanne Lank

**20** - Amye Bergman

**21** - Emily Howdysshell


**22** - Keith Chittum

**23** - Julia Botkin  
- Cheryl Howell

**25** - B.F. Caricofe, Jr  
- Wally Smith

**26** - Carl Caricofe, Sr  
- Jesse Hartman

**27** - Jeffrey Shipe

**28** - Logan Kraisser  
-  Mathew & Tanya Keys

**29** - Christopher Dively

**30** -  Kim & Karen Maugans

**31** -  Andy & Dana Breeding  
-  Gary & Kathy Lewis

# The Story of Baby Jesus

*by Sharla Guenther*





A long time ago, in the town of Nazareth, lived a young woman named Mary. Mary did her chores, was kind to others, and loved God very much. She was engaged to be married to Joseph, who was a carpenter.

One day, while Mary was at home cleaning her room, an angel suddenly appeared. Before Mary could say anything the angel told Mary that she was favored by God, and that God was with her.

Mary was surprised. She was trying not to be afraid, but she had never seen an angel before. After all, Mary was just a regular lady like you or I. Why was this angel visiting her? What did the angel want?

The angel quickly tried to reassure Mary. "Do not be afraid!" the angel said. "God has found favor with you. You will have a baby boy, and are to give him the name Jesus."

Mary was confused; she was not yet married to Joseph, so how could she have a baby? The angel thought that this might concern Mary so he said, "The Holy Spirit will perform a miracle, and because of this your baby will be called the Son of God."

To Mary's surprise, the angel had more exciting news: "Even your cousin Elizabeth is going to have a son in her old age. Many thought that she couldn't have children, but she is already pregnant. Nothing is impossible with God."

Mary couldn't believe what she was hearing; she didn't know what to say. She realized that she was trembling, and knelt down. When she was finally able to speak she said, "I am the Lord's servant, and I hope everything you have said will come true."

Then the angel disappeared, and Mary was left alone.

Soon after, Joseph found out that Mary was going to have a baby. Joseph was confused and upset by this, but an angel came to him in a dream and said, "Joseph do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The child Mary is going to have is God's son, and you are to give him the name Jesus."

When Joseph woke up he remembered what the angel had said. He knew that everything was okay, and he wasn't upset anymore.

In those days, the government decided that they should count everyone that lived in that area of the world. So Joseph had to take Mary to his town of Bethlehem to register.

It took Mary and Joseph a long time to get to Bethlehem. They didn't have cars back then, so it probably took them a lot longer to get there. This was very tiring for Mary because she was soon going to have a baby.

When they reached the town, all the hotels were full and there was nowhere that they could stay. Finally, someone felt bad for them and offered them a place to stay.

The Bible doesn't say for sure where they stayed but most people think that they stayed in a small barn where animals were kept. In any case, doesn't it seem strange that Jesus, the King of the Jews wasn't born in a fancy palace or even a hospital?

Mary and Joseph were thankful that they at least had a place to lie down. It was warm, and there was plenty of straw to lay on.

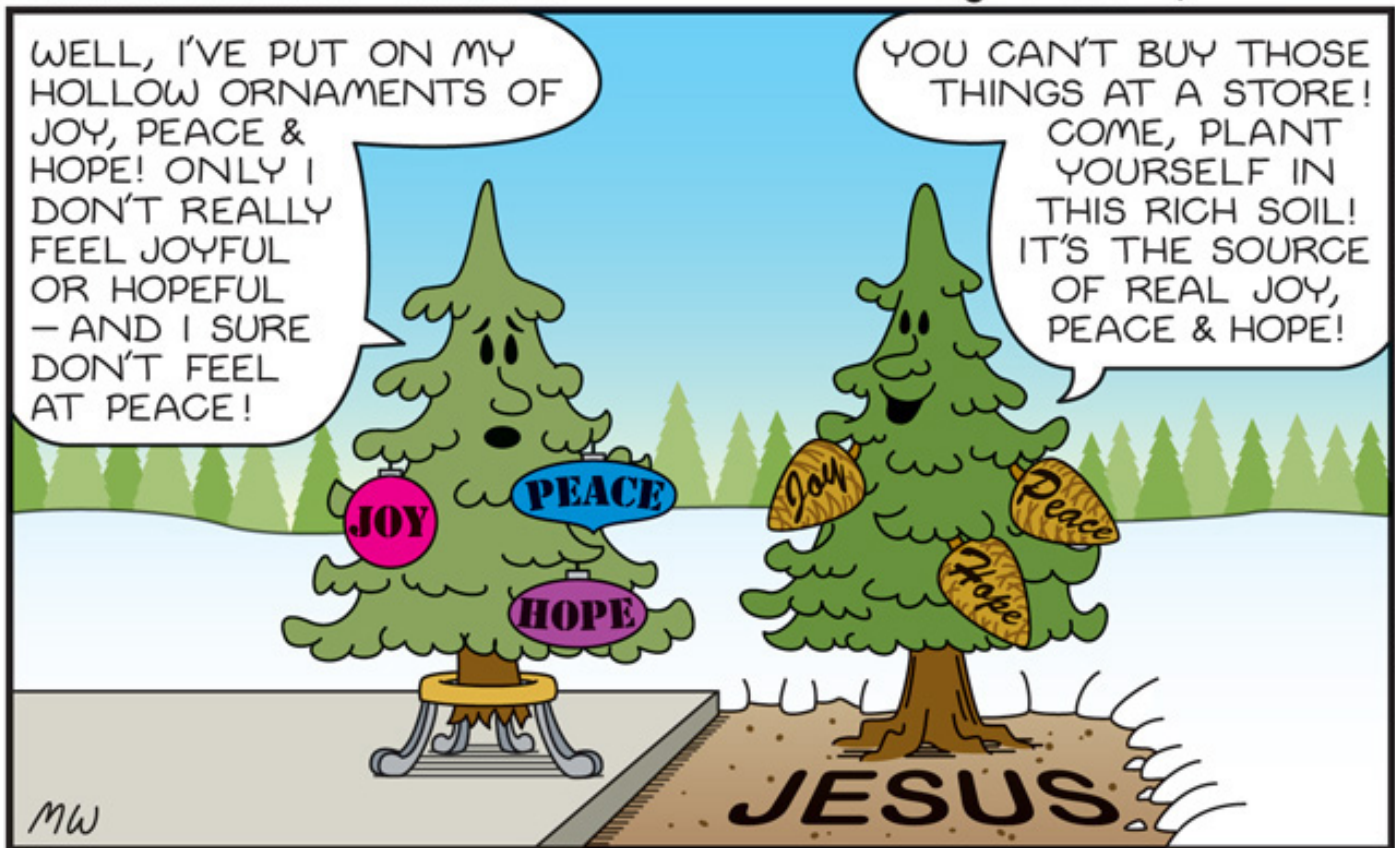
That night an exciting, wonderful thing happened: Mary and Joseph had a baby! But this wasn't just any baby, he was Baby Jesus! The creator of the whole world, the King of Kings, and the one who would save the world.

The little baby boy fell asleep in Mary's arms. She wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger on some clean straw.

Mary and Joseph soon fell asleep; they were so glad to have this special baby join their family.

# CHRISTMAS TREES

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

— ROMANS 15:13 NIV

***If you would like to add an article or announcement to the Hilltopper, please contact us! Call/Text: (540) 280-1860 or [NewHopeUMC.Virginia@gmail.com](mailto:NewHopeUMC.Virginia@gmail.com)***

New Hope United Methodist Church - Pastor Mike Reaves

55 Round Hill School Road; Fort Defiance, VA 24437

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 86, New Hope, VA 24469

Church Phone: (540) 363-5940 / Parsonage Phone: (540) 363-5612

Pastor Mike Reaves' Phone: (757) 653-8537 / Pastor Email: [michaelreaves@vaumc.org](mailto:michaelreaves@vaumc.org)

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