



The First Presbyterian

Volume 61 No. 5

December 2006

Join us as we journey toward Bethlehem during Advent, and as we celebrate the birth of our Saviour at Christmas

First Sunday of Advent – December 3 – Worship at 8:30 and 10:45

The Sacrament of Holy Communion will be celebrated at both services.

Lighting of the First Advent Candle

Parsons' Tree

11:45 Children's Musical, "Where Love Is, God Is."

Second Sunday of Advent – December 10 – Worship at 8:30 and 10:45

The sacrament of Holy Communion will be celebrated at the 8:30 service.

Lighting of the Second Advent Candle

7:30 p.m. Advent Vespers Service:

Vesperae Solemnes de Dominica: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Deaz Symphonies de Noël: Michel Richard De Lalande

Choral Prelude: *Schmücke dic, O Liebe Seele:* J. S. Bach

Third Sunday of Advent – December 17 – Worship at 8:30 and 10:45

The sacrament of Holy Communion will be celebrated at both services

Lighting of the Third Advent Candle

11:45 a.m. Youth Play, "A Mid-Winter's Night Dream"

7:30 p.m. "Amahl and The Night Visitors"

Opera Excelsior and Union Presbyterian Church of Schenectady

Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 24 – Christmas Eve

9:30 a.m. "Christmas at the Stable", very child-friendly worship experience.

Christmas Joy Offering is received.

Lighting of the Fourth Advent Candle

10:00 p.m. "Christmas in the Cathedral," a candlelight worship service of Lessons and Carols.

Christmas Day – December 25 – Worship at 11:00

Come and celebrate Christ's birth! Communion will be celebrated.

A birthday party for Jesus follows worship.

The Sixth Day of Christmas – December 31 – Worship Service at 9:30

The sacrament of Holy Communion will be celebrated at the service

Baptism of the Lord – January 7 – Worship at 8:30 and 10:45

The sacrament of Holy Communion will be celebrated at both services

Ordination and installation of officers at 10:45 service

11:45 Winter Picnic

Christmas Eve Services

The 9:30 a.m. service, "Christmas at the Stable," will be a child-centered, family-friendly service. Children (of all ages) are urged to come dressed as a character from the Christmas story. We'll also need some animals, so children can bring along a camel or a stuffed donkey as well. As the Christmas story is told, those children wishing to come forward will be invited to do so. We'll sing carols, hear the Christmas story in a new way, share prayers and rejoice in the coming of Christ as the light of the world.

The 10 p.m. service, "Christmas in the Cathedral," will be the traditional Lessons and Carols service. Join us on the eve of our Savior's birth as we hear the prophecy of Micah and Isaiah and the story of Christ's birth from Luke and Matthew. We'll join in singing favorite carols and listen as the choir sings carols as well. The service will culminate with the gospel reading from John where Christ is declared the light of the world, and we will share this light with one another.

Chapel Choir Performance Dec 3

On Sunday, December 3rd, immediately following the 10:45 service, the Chapel Choir will present a play with music based on the Leo Tolstoy story: "Where Love is, God is". The play is the story of one woman's faith journey as she confronts her grief and despair over the loss of her small family and turns to the bible for comfort. The musical elements offer our young musicians an opportunity to share their budding talents while beautifully illuminating this simple yet powerful story.

Mission Committee

Submitted by Alice Schrade

The FOCUS breakfast program resumed on November 6 and will continue through April 7. This much needed program is available to people who are not usually able to have a hot breakfast; many are homeless or live on the edge of poverty. As always, volunteers are needed and much appreciated. There are several "jobs" that need to be filled. Volunteers may work from 6:30 to 9:30 a.m. or any time during those hours, leaving for your own work whenever necessary.

First Pres is again offering hot cooked meals twice a month for the Overflow Shelter at the First Lutheran Church on Western Ave. We are again splitting the Monday nights with the Unitarian Society. Please speak to Stephanie Kite or Alice Schrade and let us know when you will be cooking. In the past we found that it's more fun if a family or a group prepare supper together. The men at the shelter greatly appreciate our warm food and fellowship.

The Parsons' Tree



Submitted by Amy Robinson

For many children, the holidays can be a very difficult time on many different levels. For the past few years, First Pres has worked in partnership with Parsons Child and Family Center to help provide gifts for parents to give their children; gifts they otherwise would be unable to purchase. Parsons Child and Family Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping families and their children. Through this special gift-giving program, Parsons and the community reach out to hundreds of families each year, assisting parents so that they themselves can provide a more joyful holiday experience for their children. Parsons has forwarded

to First Pres the names and gift lists for five children of various ages.

On the first Sunday in Advent, December 3, there will be a tree in the Assembly Hall with paper ornaments. On each ornament you will find a child's name and a gift from their wish list. Please consider taking a paper ornament from the tree, replacing it with a "real" ornament and returning an unwrapped gift with the paper ornament taped onto it. The unwrapped gift should be put in the box marked Parsons Christmas Project that will be in Assembly Hall near the tree. The gifts are not given from Parsons' staff but from the child's parents/guardians. They do accept wrapping paper so the families may wrap the donated gifts.

Helping to make this a meaningful Christmas for a needy family does something remarkable: It makes your Christmas more meaningful too.

We are in need of someone to assist with the recording of the Sunday morning worship service. If you are interested or know of someone who is interested in doing this, please contact the church office at 449-7732

info@firstpresalbany.org or Irving Smith at 459-8521
IRVINGSMITHJR1@nycap.rr.com

Deacon's Doings

Submitted by Rachel Smith

The October workshop on pastoral care with the Reverend Jeff Palmer attracted many members of the congregation. We learned about the best ways to listen and respond as we call on folks in hospitals, nursing homes, other facilities, and those confined to their homes. And we will put this to good use in our daily interactions with family, co-workers and friends. A VCR copy of the presentation is available for loan in the church Library, so feel free to use this excellent resource.

Poinsettias in the Sanctuary for Christmas -- what joy we have in

their dense beauty and the reminder of those honored or memorialized! The visual delight in seeing those plants at Christmas time enhances our worship. The green sheets used to order plants are found in the bulletin or stop by the Church Office to place your order. We're happy to note that so many have already been ordered and encourage your participation. It really is "the more the merrier," even with plants.



Submitted by Victor Klimash

Plans are under way to present two very special programs of music in December. The first will be the annual Advent Vespers Service on Sunday, December 10th at 7:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary. The Chancel Choir will be joined by the First Presbyterian Orchestra for *Vesperae de Dominica* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) in celebration of the 250th year of the composer's birth. The six movement work will feature Deborah Rocco, *soprano*, Fiona McKinney, *alto*, Allan Kirk, *bass*, and *guest tenor* Paul D'Arcy. In addition, the Orchestra will play two *Symphonies de Noël* by the French Baroque composer, Michel-Richard de Lalande (1657-1726).

Also on December 10th at 10:30 a.m., the Second Sunday Prelude Recital will feature Fiona McKinney, *alto*, accompanied by Albert Wood and joined by Margaret Schalit on *viola*.

An added treat in December will be a performance of Gian-Carlo Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* on Sunday December 17th at 7:30pm in the Fellowship Hall. The performance is a joint production of Opera Excelsior and Union Presbyterian Church in Schenectady. Originally written as the first opera for television, *Amahl* has become for

children a perennial favorite of the Christmas Season. It tells the story of a lame shepherd boy and his mother who are visited by three kings on their way to Bethlehem in search of the Christ child. Through his unselfish wish to worship the newborn King, the boy is miraculously cured of his lameness and leaves to accompany the three kings on their journey. Allan Kirk will sing the part of King Balthazar, and the production is conducted by Victor Klimash. You and your family won't want to miss this special event.



The BGs Retreat to Hebron
Submitted by Dwight Smith

Eight Bible Guys -- Mike Attwell; Bruce Brynolfson; Wally Donnelly; Brian Fuss; Dick Gascoyne; Lee Helsby; Dwight Smith; and Irving Smith -- spent Halloween weekend, October 27-29, at Hebron Center. We stayed cozy and warm in the Lamar Lodge, even though the weather outside featured high winds and rain.

Our theme for the retreat: "A Personal Statement of Faith." We talked together at length about what a personal statement of faith might cover, what it would mean to each of us individually and how it might be viewed by others. As the weekend progressed, and our conversations continued (a total of about eight hours of focused and sustained discussion), a number of us did generate written statements. Those who did agreed that the process of "writing it down" had been a helpful exercise in self-understanding.

We concluded our retreat by sharing our thoughts about what we had learned from our time together. We agreed:

- that the process of talking together helped us understand

how different faith journeys could come together in a shared sense of faith;

- that none of us had certain knowledge of what faith is beyond a yearning and search for understanding in the face of uncertainty and the unknown;
- that through writing out a statement, however tentative it might be, each of us had a deeper understanding of what we believe;
- that writing and talking together about our faith helped us get away from labels that so easily become barriers to communication;
- and, perhaps most importantly, that our time together in a retreat setting gave us a freedom and openness for sharing intimate thoughts of personal faith.

In summary, it was well worth the time and effort to be there. And besides, we had some great conversations on the side and wonderful food -- thanks especially to chef Attwell!



Pick up an Advent devotional booklet at church! Created by the Presbyterian Church (USA) Peacemaking Program, this will make for meaningful seasonal study. You can also pick up a brochure of Advent events and give them to a friend in need of a church home.



Waiting for God

By Henri Nouwen

Waiting is not a very popular attitude. In fact, most people consider waiting a waste of time. Perhaps this is because the culture in which we live is basically saying, "Get going! Do something! Don't just sit there and wait!" For many people, waiting is an awful desert between where they are and where they want to go.

In our particular historical situation, waiting is even more difficult because we are so fearful. People are afraid – afraid of inner feelings, afraid of other people, and also afraid of the future. Fearful people have a hard time waiting, because when we are afraid we want to get away from where we are. People who live in a world of fear are more likely to make aggressive, hostile, destructive responses than people who are not so frightened. The more afraid we are, the harder waiting becomes.

It impresses me, therefore, that all the figures who appear on the first pages of Luke's Gospel are waiting. Zechariah and Elizabeth are waiting. Mary is waiting. Simeon and Anna, who were there at the temple when Jesus was brought in, are waiting. The whole opening scene of the good news is filled with waiting people. And right at the beginning all those people in some way or another hear the words, "Do not be afraid. I have something good to say to you." These words set the tone and the context. Now Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary, Simeon and Anna are waiting for something new and good to happen to them.

Who are these figures? They are representatives of the waiting Israel. The psalms are full of this attitude. "My soul is waiting for the Lord. I count on his word. My soul is longing for the Lord more than a watchman for daybreak. Because with the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption" (Psalm 129:5-7). "My soul is waiting for the Lord" – that is the song that reverberates all through

the Hebrew scriptures.

But not all who dwell in Israel are waiting. In fact we might say that the prophets criticized the people (at least in part) for giving up their attentiveness to what was coming. Waiting finally became the attitude of the remnant of Israel, of that small group of Israelites that remained faithful. It is the purified remnant of faithful people who are waiting. Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Simeon are representatives of that remnant. They have been able to wait, to be attentive, to live expectantly.

But what is the nature of waiting? What is the practice of waiting? How are they waiting, and how are we called to wait with them?

Waiting, as we see it in the people on the first pages of the Gospel, is waiting with a sense of promise. "Zechariah,...your wife Elizabeth is to bear you a son." "Mary,...Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son" (Luke 1:13, 31). People who wait have received a promise that allows them to wait. They have received something that is at work in them, like a seed that has started to grow. We can only really wait if what we are waiting for has already begun for us. So waiting is never a movement from nothing to something. It is always a movement from something to something more. Zechariah, Mary, and Elizabeth were living with a promise that nurtured them, that fed them, and that made them able to stay where they were. And the promise itself could grow in them and for them.

Second, waiting is active. Most of us think of waiting as something very passive, a hopeless state determined by events totally out of our hands. The bus is late! You cannot do anything about it, so you have to sit there and just wait. It is not difficult to understand the irritation people feel when somebody says, "Just wait." Words like that seem to push us into passivity.

But there is none of this passivity in scripture. Those who are waiting are waiting very actively. They know that what they are waiting for is growing from the ground on which they are standing. The secret of waiting is the faith that the seed has been planted, that something has begun. Active waiting means to be present fully to the moment, in the conviction that something is happening where you are and that you want to be present to it. A waiting person is someone who is present to the moment, who believes that this moment is *the* moment.

A waiting person is a patient person. The word *patience* means the willingness to stay where we are and live the situation out to the full in the belief that something hidden there will manifest itself to us. Impatient people are always expecting the real thing to happen somewhere else and therefore want to go elsewhere. The moment is empty. But patient people dare to stay where they are. Patient living means to live actively in the present and wait there. Waiting, then, is not passive. It involves nurturing the moment. Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Mary were very present to the moment. That is why they could hear the angel. They were alert, attentive to the voice that said, "Don't be afraid. Something is happening to you. Pay attention."



Submitted by Katie and Ray Henrikson

Join us on December 15 at 6 p.m. in the Rose Room for our monthly potluck supper and program. Join us as we come together in fellowship and to sing holiday Carols.

Please contact the church office by December 13 (449-7332 or info@firstpresalbany.org) for reservations and to tell us what you will bring to the dinner. Fellowship at 6 p.m., followed by dinner at 6:30.

2006 Christmas Joy Offering

Go tell it on the mountain! Don't forget to include the Presbyterian Church (USA) Christmas Joy Offering in your holiday giving. The Joy Offering supports Presbyterian Racial/Ethnic Schools as well as retired missionaries and church leaders. You can use the Christmas Joy Offering envelope in the pews and add a note to your check - "Christmas Joy Offering."

The history of the Christmas Joy Offering dates back to 1952 when the former Presbyterian Church in the U.S. began the Joy Gift Offering to supplement inadequate retirement income and supplemental medical insurance for former missionaries, ministers, church workers and their spouses. In 1974 minority education was added as a recipient.

The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace - so "prepare the way" this year by being generous, as God has been generous with all of us.

Women's Bible Study

Submitted by Margaret Zettle

The women's Bible Study group will resume meeting on Wednesday January 15 at noon in the church Library. All women of the church are invited. The group is using the lectionary readings as the basis for study. For information, contact Sheryl Sheraw at 438-1642 sherylsheraw@earthlink.net or Margaret Zettle at 439-1431 mrz56@verizon.net.

Did You Know???

- that Advent is a season of preparation and repentance? The church year begins with the season of Advent, which includes the four Sundays prior to Christmas. Advent ends on Christmas Eve. The Christmas Season starts December 25

and extends for 12 days until Epiphany.

. . .that every youth and children's Sunday class begins with everyone gathering for songs in the Nursery?

. . .that the newsletter called "The Presbyterian Layman" is not a publication of our denomination? To keep up with what's happening in our church, start with Presbyterians Today and the Presbyterian Outlook. Both are available in our Library.

. . .that FOCUS is doing Christmas baskets for needy families? Want to help? Call Deb Jameson for more information at 443-0460.



December 3
Downtown, North Albany Area:
Tim O'Toole, Sarah Sperry, Kathy Eastman

December 10
Guilderland, South Colonie Area:
Kristen Majkut, Bruce Brynolfson
December 17
Latham Area and North Area:
Heidi Iyok-Elad, Roseline Takor

December 24
Menands, Loudonville Area:
Rachel Smith, Linda Stevens

December 31
Rensselaer and East Area:
Gloria Wood, Sue Holmes

Worship Notes

In January we will begin using a variety of Closing Responses at the 10:45 worship service. We will continue to use the "Song of Hope", but we will add some others as well. So check your bulletin carefully so you can sing along!

On Sunday, January 7, during the 10:45 service we will have the Ordination and Installation of Officers. At the Congregational Meeting on November 12, the following people were elected to the **Deacon Class of 2009** Rita Austin, Keith Barber, Marc Boucher, Yousef Mathias, Albert Wood and Margaret Zettle.

Those elected to the **Elder Class of 2009** were Lee Helsby, Judith Mark, Irving Smith, William Storrs.

Ushers & Greeters



December 3

8:30 a.m.: Ellen Eisenbraun

10:45 a.m. – Team 6: Esther Yomoah, J. Melvin Bostic, John Scott, Alice Schrade, Gail Scott

December 10

8:30 a.m.: Eric Eisenbraun

10:45 a.m. – Team 7: Marc Scarlett, Amy Scarlett, Carolyn Garvin, Marc Boucher

7:30 p.m. – Team 8: Elly Rice, Bill Storrs, Irving Smith, Heidi Elad, Margaret Zettle, Sherry Hall

December 17

8:30 a.m.: John Myers

10:45 a.m. – Team 1: Phillip Riddle, Marilyn Riddle, Brian Fuss, Harriet Seeley

December 24

9:30 a.m.: **Team 2:** Lee Helsby, Joanne Gascoyne, Richard Gascoyne, Margaret Hannay, Catherine Fletcher

10:00 p.m. – Team 3: Bob Stevens, Linda Stevens, Bob Jackson, Lois Cameron, Ted Cameron

December 25

11:00 a.m. – Team 4: Bob Kamp, Fran Kamp, Ray Henrikson, Rachel Smith, Roseline Takor

December 31

9:30 a.m.: **Team 5:** Bob Seelye, Virginia Seelye, Don Mark, Adam Sperry, Sarah Sperry

Special Advent



Join your FOCUS friends for an Advent mid-week study of the book, *Losing Moses on the Freeway: 10 Commandments in America* by Chris Hedges. Dinner will be shared at 6:00 p.m. with discussion from 6:30 – 7:30 on Wednesday, November 29, December 6, December 13 and December 20 at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 85 Chestnut Street. Clergy from the FOCUS churches will lead these discussions.

Session Highlights for the Fall

- Administration Committee reported that Staff evaluations will be happening in December.
- Finance Committee met with chairs of committees and is putting together a budget for 2007.
- Worship Committee recommended and Session approved that worship times for 12/24 and 12/31 be as follows: 12/24 9:30 a.m. and 10 p.m. and 12/31 9:30 a.m.
- Mission Committee reported on a successful Lamar Lecture weekend with Phyllis Tribble.
- Property Committee reported on some emergency roof work in October. Session approved that money for that work be taken from the Rally Fund.
- Administration Committee recommended and Session approved that Derrick Jones be hired as custodian with a 6-month probationary period.

Adult Education in December

On Sunday December 3, 10 and 17 we will learn what is really in the Bible about the Christmas story and look at the accounts in Matthew and Luke. You'll be surprised! These classes will be led by Glenn Leupold. On December 24 and 31 there will be no education classes offered (all ages.)

Lectionary

Dec 3: Jer. 33:14-16; Ps. 25:1-10; 1 Thess. 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

Dec 10: Mal. 3:1-4; Luke 1:68-79; Phil. 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6

Dec 17: Zeph. 3:14-20; Isa. 12:2-6; Phil. 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

Dec 24: Mic. 5:2-5a; Luke 1:47-55 or Ps. 80:1-7; Heb. 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45 (46-55); Isa. 9:2-7; Ps. 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

Dec 31: 1 Sam. 2:18-20, 26; Ps. 148; Col. 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

Thank You

Dear Church Family:

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for your strong support. You have given me much love and helped me financially to attend college. I am graduating this month with a Bachelor's degree in English from the State University at Albany. During my college experience I have gone from Biology major to English major. I think I have found my niche. In January I will be working as substitute teacher while attending the graduate school at the State University of Albany. I will receive my master's degree in secondary education in science.

Over the past twenty years, many of you have seen me grow from a little girl in Mr. DeGraff's Christmas plays to a young woman who reads scriptures in church. I am thankful to the church and every one of you that have helped me to grow spiritually. There is no doubt in my mind that wherever my teaching career takes me, I will carry all the love, faith and support you have given me over the years.

Sincerely,

Jessica Mathias