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# THE LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS

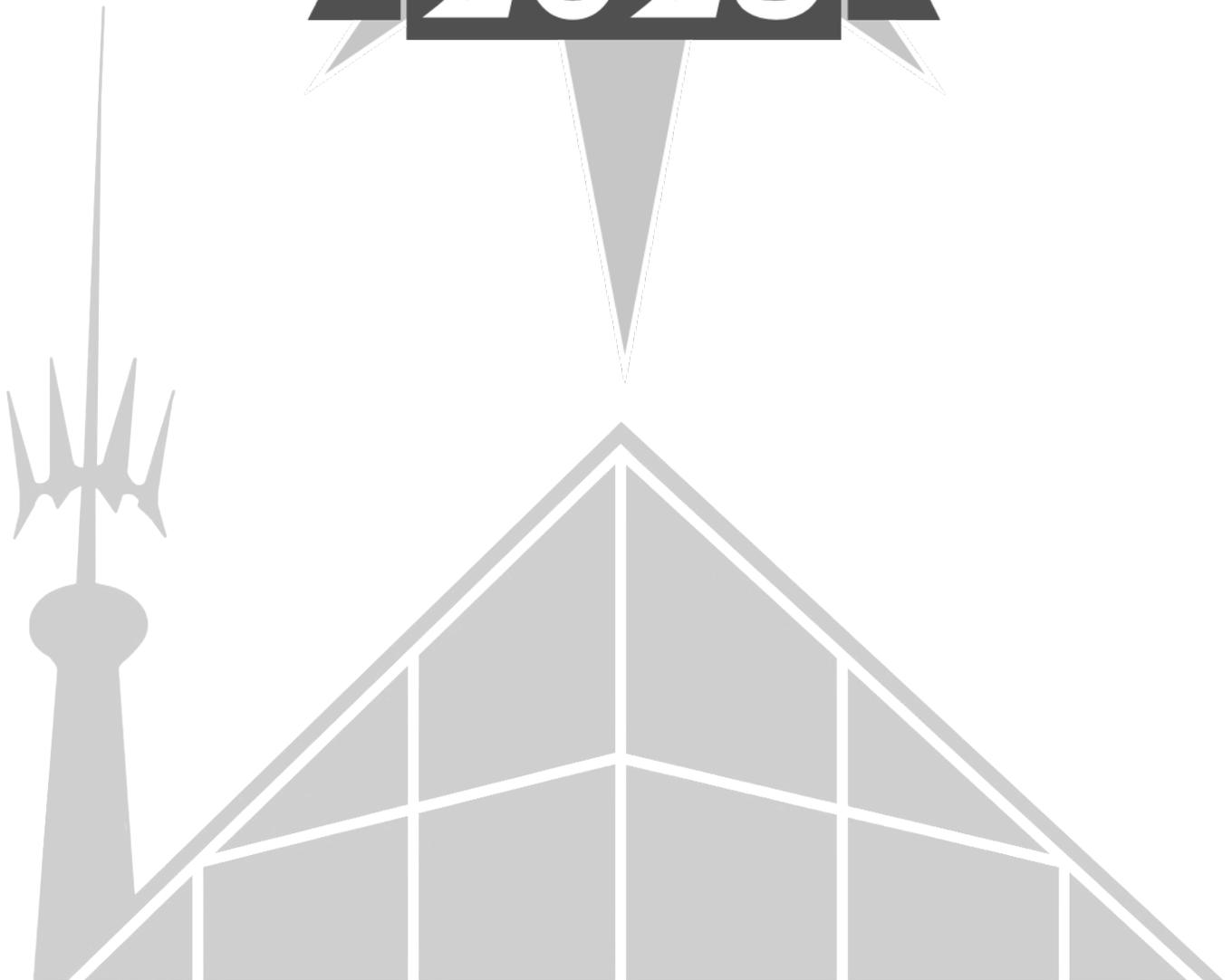
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ADVENT 2025



First United Methodist Church  
— *of Alexandria* —

**ADVENT BOOK**  
**2025**



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## PLUS

Other fun things  
sprinkled between!

# MERRY CHRISTMAS



## FROM THE PICKETT FAMILY

OUR GREATEST GIFT  
THIS SEASON IS **YOU**,  
OUR CHURCH FAMILY

Dear Friends in Christ,

Welcome to the season of Advent at First United Methodist Church of Alexandria—a sacred time when we prepare our hearts and lives to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This year, we journey together in our worship series, *The Light of Christmas*, where each week we explore the radiant gifts the Christ child brings into our world and into our souls: Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and finally, the Light that has come to illuminate every corner of our lives.

Our historic sanctuary will glow with the warm light of cherished traditions and new celebrations. From our nostalgic Hanging of the Greens combined worship and festive potluck lunch on the first Sunday of Advent, to the awe-inspiring Live Nativity blessing our city, to a glorious Christmas Cantata performed by our chancel choir and live orchestra, every moment invites us deeper into the story of God’s unfolding light.

On Christmas Eve, join us for one of two beautiful candlelight and communion services—the Traditional Service at 4 PM or the Family-Friendly Service at 7 PM, where children can join the joyful band in their Christmas pajamas. In the quieter chapel space, our Blue Christmas experience is available throughout the season of Advent, and offers a gentle refuge for anyone carrying grief or longing during the holidays.

We invite you—our beloved congregation and all visitors and ministry partners—to come and be part of this sacred journey. Bring your family, your neighbors, friends, classmates, and coworkers. Let us all shine the light of Christ brightly, as a beacon of hope and love in Central Louisiana this Christmas and beyond.

Please be sure to make a special reservation in advance for The Gathering Christmas Feast on December 17th, our final fellowship meal of the year—a warm occasion for community and celebration.

You’ll find in this book not only the details of our worship experiences, but also Christmas coloring pages, word searches for the young and young at heart, reflections on our Chrismons, treasured holiday recipes, and stories from our staff and leaders—gifts to help you enter more fully into the light, joy, and love of this holy season.

May this Advent be a time of profound blessing, renewal, and radiant light for you and those you hold dear. It is with heartfelt love and anticipation that I welcome you to join us as we follow the Light of Christ together.



**With the Creator’s love,** *Rev. Kennon Pickett*

**SENIOR PASTOR**

First United Methodist Church of Alexandria

# Grace Life Casual Worship

*Service Times: 8:30am unless noted otherwise.*

## **November 30<sup>th</sup> Advent I**

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Celebration Blended Service • 10am (See page 8)

## **December 7<sup>th</sup> Advent II**

- Welcome and Ministry Highlights
- Greeting and Passing Peace
- Reading & Lighting of the Advent Candle

**Opening Set: “In God We Trust” / “Here I am to Worship”**

- Special Youth Presentation

**Prayer Time: “Light of the World”**

- SERMON: “JESUS LIGHTS THE WAY  
TO RECONCILIATION”
- Communion song: “O Come O Come Emmanuel” (UMH 211)

**Closing Song: “Come Lord Jesus”**

- Benediction

## **December 14<sup>th</sup> Advent III**

NO GRACE LIFE SERVICE

**CHRISTMAS CANTATA • 10AM**

(One service. See Page 13)

# December 21<sup>st</sup> Advent IV

## THE LIGHT OF LOVE

- Welcome and Ministry Highlights
- Greeting and Passing Peace
- Reading & Lighting of the Advent Candle

**Opening Set: “My Soul Magnifies the Lord”/ “Come Lord Jesus”**

**Prayer Time: “Noel”**

- SERMON: “TRUE LOVE- SELF-GIVING, WORLD-CHANGING,  
IS THE BRIGHTEST LIGHT OF ALL”
- Sermon reflection in song: “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”
- Communion Song: O Little Town of Bethlehem (UMH 230)
  
- **Closing Song: “What a Glorious Night”**
- Benediction

# December 24<sup>th</sup> Christmas Eve

## “PJS, CAROLS, & CHRISTMAS LIGHTS”

7pm in Fellowship Hall • Inspired by scripture: John 1:1-14

**Prelude Carolss:**

**“Away in a Manger”/ “The First Noel”/ “We Three Kings”**

- Welcome and Ministry Highlights
- Greeting and Passing Peace
- Reading & Lighting of the Advent Candle

**“O Come All Ye Faithful” / “Go Tell it on the Mountain”**

**“Little Drummer Boy” / “Feliz Navidad” / “Noel”**

- Communion

**“Silent Night” / “Joy to the World”**

# December 28<sup>th</sup>

Blended Service • 10am (See page 21)

## “LESSONS & CAROLS” IN THE SANCTUARY

# January 4<sup>th</sup> Epiphany Sunday

### FOLLOW THE LIGHT

- Welcome and Ministry Highlights
- Greeting and Passing Peace
- Reading & Lighting of the Advent Candle

**Opening Set: “Raise a Halleluiah”/ “Love is Here”**

**Prayer Time: “Way Maker”**

- SERMON: “WE ARE TO BE LED  
BY THE LIGHT OF GOD”
- Communion song: “What Child is This?” (UMH 219)

**Closing Song: ‘Let the Light In’**

- Benediction



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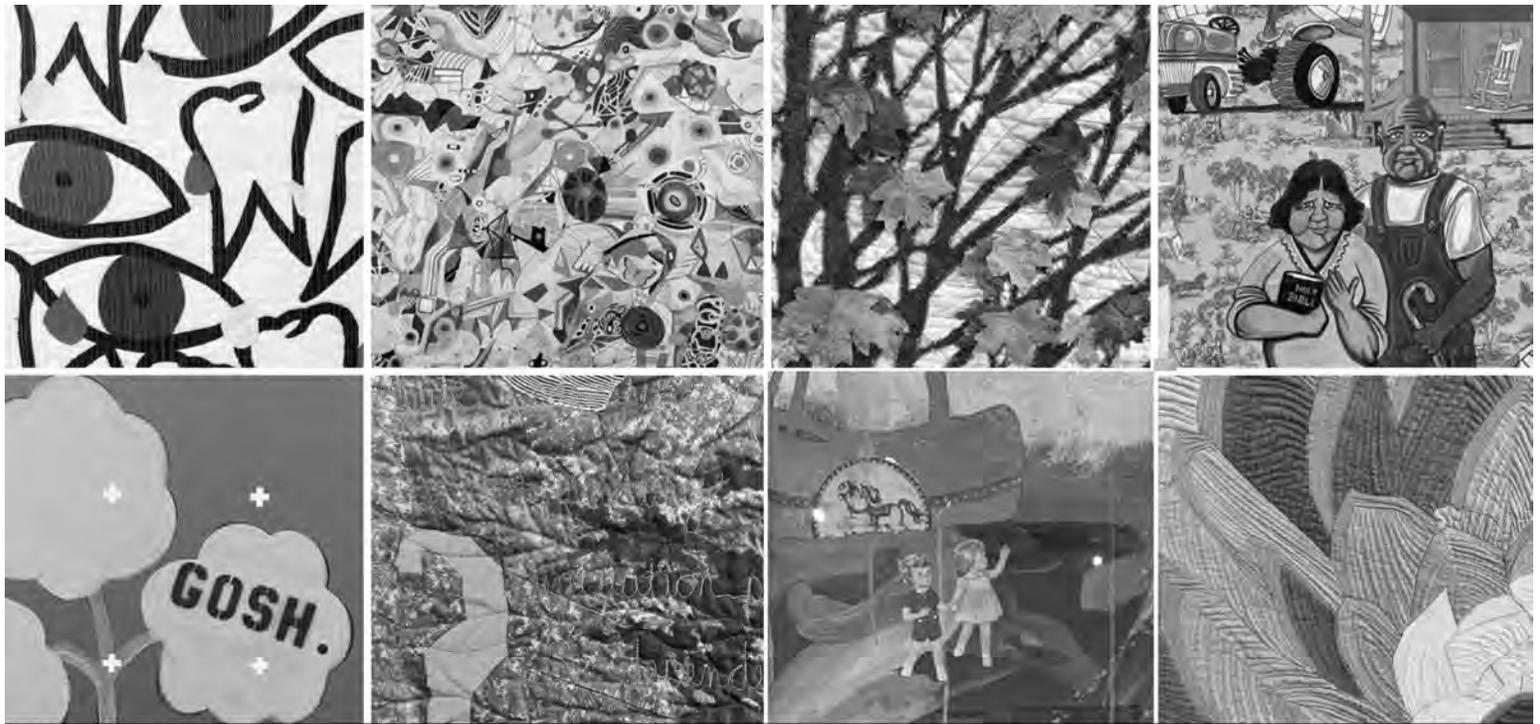
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WITH CINDY BLAIR



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WITH OLIVIA HELMER



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November 1, 2025 - February 14, 2026  
Lipsey Gallery

..... ***Poetry & Protest: Works by Wendy Starn***

November 7, 2025 - January 24, 2026  
Community Gallery

***Rapides Parish School Board Gifted & Talented Competition*** .....

February 6, 2026 - February 28, 2026  
Community Gallery

..... ***Youth Art Month Competition***

March 6, 2026 - March 28, 2026  
Community Gallery

***Now You See Me: Contemporary Portraiture in Louisiana*** .....

March 6, 2026 - June 20, 2026  
Lipsey Gallery



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# Sunday, November 30<sup>th</sup>

*5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Special Order of Worship.*

## Advent I: The Light of Hope

### *Hanging of the Greens*

#### LET US GATHER

• *Prelude*

\* Indicates Please Stand if Able.

\* Procession – “Give Thanks”

***Chorus: Give thanks with a grateful heart, give thanks to the Holy One; Give thanks because He’s given Jesus Christ, His Son.***

***Verse 1: And now let us all prepare our hearts. Let us all prepare our homes, because Emmanuel will come to us.***

***Verse 2: And now we prepare for God a way. Come into our lives and stay. God is with us in Emmanuel.***

Music and Chorus by Henry Smith CCLI License #2640352

\* Welcome and Opening Prayer • Rev. Kennon Pickett

#### Blessing of the Advent Wreath

*Christ came to bring us salvation and has promised to come again. Let us pray that we may always be ready to welcome him.*

#### **Come Lord Jesus.**

*That the keeping of Advent may open our hearts to God’s love, that the light of Christ may penetrate the darkness of our sin, that this wreath may constantly remind us to prepare for the coming of Christ, that the Christmas season may fill us with peace and joy as we strive to follow the example of Jesus,*

**Loving God, your Church joyfully awaits  
the coming of its Savior, who enlightens  
our hearts & dispels the darkness of  
ignorance & sin.  
Pour forth your blessings upon  
us as we light the candles of this wreath.  
May their light reflect the splendor of Christ,  
who is Lord, for ever & ever. Amen.**

- Advent Reading and Lighting of the Advent Candle

## LET US LIFT OUR HEART

\* Opening Hymn: “O Come O Come Emmanuel” (UMH 211)

### Hanging of the Greens

\*Responsive Prayer—Rev. Jean Sanders

*How shall we prepare this house for the coming of the King?*

**With branches of cedar, the tree of royalty.**

*How shall we prepare this house for the coming of the eternal Christ?*

**With garlands of pine and fir, whose leaves are  
ever living, ever green.**

*How shall we prepare this house for the coming of our Savior?*

**With wreaths of holly and ivy,  
telling out his passion, death, & resurrection.**

*How shall we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Son of God?*

**By hearing again the words of the prophets,  
who foretold the saving work of God.**

*For God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,  
but that the world through him might be saved.*

**Glory to God in the highest!**



*May this tree, arrayed in splendor, remind us of the  
life-giving cross of Christ, that we may always  
rejoice in the new life that shines in our hearts.*

*We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

•Family Tree Decorating

**\*Closing Song: “Come Jesus Come”**

*Chorus:*

**Come Jesus come**

**we’ve been waiting so long**

**For the day You return to**

**heal every hurt and right every wrong**

**We need You right now**

**Come and turn this around**

**Deep down I know this world isn’t home**

**Come Jesus come**

CCLI Song # 7154136

Bryan Fowler | Hank Bentley | Stephen McWhirter | Tara McWhirter

\*Benediction

• Postlude

# Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>

## Advent II: The Light of Peace

### GATHERING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

- *Prelude* \* Indicates Please Stand if Able.
- \* Procession: "Emmanuel" (UMH 204)
- \* Welcome and Opening Prayer ~ Rev. Kennon

### PREPARING OUR HEARTS

- Advent Reading and Lighting of the Advent Candle  
*Response: O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.*

*Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

- \* Hymn of Praise: "Once in Royal David's City" (UMH 250)
- \* Affirmation of Faith
- \* Gloria Patri: Glory to God (UMH 70)
- \* Passing the Peace
- Blessing the Children ~ Carly Bratcher
- Special Youth Presentation

### SHARING OUR LIVES

- Ministry Highlights
- Offertory
- \* Doxology: Praise God (UMH 95)
- Song of Centering: In the Bleak Midwinter (UMH 221)
- Call to Prayer / The Lord's Prayer ~ Rev. Jean (SEE PAGE 44)

## John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

## Philippians 4:7

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

## HEARING GOD'S WORD

- Song of Celebration: "I Wonder as I Wander"
- Scripture: John 14:27; Philippians 4:7
- Sermon: "JESUS LIGHTS THE WAY TO RECONCILIATION"
- Sharing the Bread and the Cup

## SENDING FORTH

- \* Hymn of Discipleship: "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing" (UMH 240)
- \* Benediction
- Postlude



**Sunday, December 14<sup>th</sup>**  
**Christmas Cantata**  
*Combined Service at 10am*  
**Advent III: The Light of Joy**

**GATHERING IN GOD'S PRESENCE**

- *Prelude* \* Indicates Please Stand if Able.
- \* Procession: Emmanuel (UMH 204)
- Welcome and Opening Prayer ~ Rev. Kennon

**PREPARING OUR HEARTS**

- Advent Reading and Lighting of the Advent Candle
- \* Hymn of Praise: People Look East (UMH 202)

**SHARING OUR LIVES**

- Ministry Highlights
- Offertory
- \* Doxology: Praise God (UMH 95)

**HEARING GOD'S WORD**

“Light of Faith” *featuring Chancel Choir and special guests.*  
*Cantata arranged by Elizabeth Nix. Narrative by Rev. Kennon Pickett*

“I Wonder as I Wander” –*John Jacob Niles, arr. Kyle Pederson*

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“Breath of Heaven (Mary’s Song)”

–Chris Eaton & Amy Grant, arr. Craig Courtney

“Christmas Welcome” – John Ness Beck

“Mary, Did You Know?”

– Mark Lowry & Buddy Green, arr. Craig Courtney

“Who But the Lord?”

– lyrics by Susan Bentall Boersma, music by Craig Courtney

“This Holy Night, with O Holy Night”

– words by Claire Cloninger, music & arr. Gary Rhodes, orch. Tim Cates

“Christmas Joy!”

– Van Denman Thompson, arr. Lani Smith

## SENDING FORTH

\* Hymn of Discipleship: O Come O Come Emmanuel (UMH 211)

\* Benediction

• Postlude

CANTATA BRUNCH  
TO FOLLOW IN THE  
FELLOWSHIP HALL.

# Sunday, December 21<sup>st</sup>

## Advent IV: The Light of Love

### GATHERING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

- *Prelude* \* Indicates Please Stand if Able.
- \* Procession – “Emmanuel” (UMH 204)
- \* Welcome and Opening Prayer ~ Rev. Kennon

### PREPARING OUR HEARTS

- Advent Reading and Lighting of the Advent Candle

*Response: O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.*

*Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

- Hymn of Praise: “Sing We Now of Christmas” (UMH 237)

### Matthew 1:18–25

The night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

### 1 John 4:7–12

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

- \* Affirmation of Faith
- \* Gloria Patri: Glory to God (UMH 70)
- \* Passing the Peace
- Blessing the Children ~ Carly Bratcher
- Special Youth Presentation

## SHARING OUR LIVES

- Ministry Highlights
- Offertory
- \* Doxology: Praise God (UMH 95)
- Song of Centering: “O Little Town of Bethlehem” (UMH 230)
- Call to Prayer / The Lord’s Prayer  
Rev. Jean (SEE PAGE 44)

## HEARING GOD’S WORD

- Song of Celebration: “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”  
Rev. Kennon & Chancel Choir
- Scripture: 1 John 4:7-12; Matthew 1:18-25
- Sermon: “TRUE LOVE – SELF-GIVING, WORLD-CHANGING,  
IS THE BRIGHTEST LIGHT OF ALL”
- Musical Response to the Word

## SENDING FORTH

- \* Hymn of Discipleship:  
“Angels We Have Heard on High” (UMH 238)
- \* Benediction
- Postlude

# Wednesday, December 24<sup>th</sup>

## Christmas Eve: The Light Has Come

### Traditional Service • 4pm

#### GATHERING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

- *Prelude* \* Indicates Please Stand if Able.
- \* Procession: "O Come All Ye Faithful" (UMH 234)
- \* Welcome and Opening Prayer ~ Rev. Kennon

#### PREPARING OUR HEARTS

- Advent Reading and Lighting of the Advent Candle  
*Response: O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.*

*Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

- \* Hymn of Praise: "Good Christian Friends, Rejoice" (UMH 224)
- \* Affirmation of Faith
- \* Gloria Patri: Glory to God (UMH 70)
- \* Passing the Peace
- Blessing the Children ~ Carly Bratcher
- Special Youth Presentation

#### SHARING OUR LIVES

- Ministry Highlights
- Offertory
- \* Doxology: Praise God (UMH 95)
- Song of Centering: "The First Noel" (UMH 245)

## John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

## Philippians 4:7

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- Call to Prayer / The Lord's Prayer ~  
Rev. Jean (SEE PAGE 44)
- Sacrament of Holy Communion

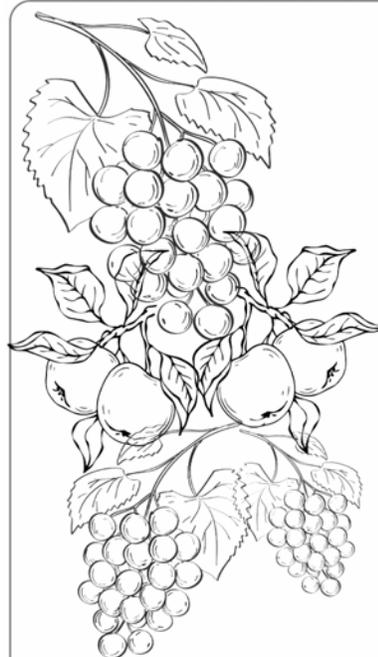
## HEARING GOD'S WORD

Song of Celebration:

- "This Holy Night, with O Holy Night"
- Scripture: John 14:27; Philippians 4:7
- Sermon: "JESUS LIGHTS THE  
WAY TO RECONCILIATION"

## SENDING FORTH WITH THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

- \* Silent Night (see next page)
- \* Joy to the World (see next page)
- \* Benediction
- Postlude



## REV. JEAN'S CHRISTMAS FRUIT SALAD

### Ingredients

1 Granny Smith Apple sliced  
1 red apple any kind, sliced  
1 cup green grapes  
1 cup red grapes  
2 kiwi peeled and sliced  
1 cup raspberries  
Mix up honey, lime juice, and water  
to make the dressing to pour over salad.

2 tablespoons honey  
1 tablespoon lime juice  
1 tablespoon water

## JOY TO THE WORLD

Words: Isaac Watts (1719), based on Psalm 98:4–9  
Music: Arranged from G. F. Handel, 1741, by Lowell Mason, 1848

1.  
Joy to the world, the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare him room,  
And heaven and nature sing,  
And heaven and nature sing,  
And heaven, and heaven, and nature  
sing.
2.  
Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!  
Let all their songs employ;  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills,  
and plains  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.
3.  
No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make his blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found,  
Far as the curse is found,  
Far as, far as, the curse is found.
4.  
He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of his righteousness,  
And wonders of his love,  
And wonders of his love,  
And wonders, wonders, of his love.

## SILENT NIGHT, HOLY NIGHT

Words: Joseph Mohr, 1818; sts. 1, 2, 3 trans. by John F. Young; st. 4 anon. (Luke 2:6–20)  
Music: Franz Gruber, 1818

1.  
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.
2.  
Silent night, holy night,  
Shepherds quake at the sight;  
Glories stream from heaven afar,  
Heavenly hosts sing “Alleluia:  
Christ the Savior is born!  
Christ the Savior is born!”
3.  
Silent night, holy night,  
Son of God, love’s pure light  
Radiant beams from thy holy face,  
With the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.
4.  
Silent night, holy night,  
Wondrous star, lend thy light;  
With the angels let us sing,  
“Alleluia to our King:  
Christ the Savior is born!  
Christ the Savior is born!”

# Sunday, December 28<sup>th</sup>

## Christmas Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols

### GATHERING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

- *Prelude* \* Indicates Please Stand if Able.
- \* Procession: "Once in Royal David's City" (UMH 250)
- \* Welcome & Announcements ~ Rev. Jean Sanders
- \* The Bidding Prayer
- \* The Lord's Prayer (SEE PAGE 44)
- Blessing
- Offertory
- \* Doxology: Praise God (UMH 95)

### HEARING GOD'S WORD

#### FIRST LESSON: GENESIS 3:8-15, 17-19

*God announces in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve's punishment for their rebellion and that the seed of woman shall bruise the serpent's head.*

**Carol: "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"** (UMH 196)

#### SECOND LESSON: GENESIS 22:15-18

*God promises to Abraham that by his descendants all the nations of the earth will obtain blessings.*

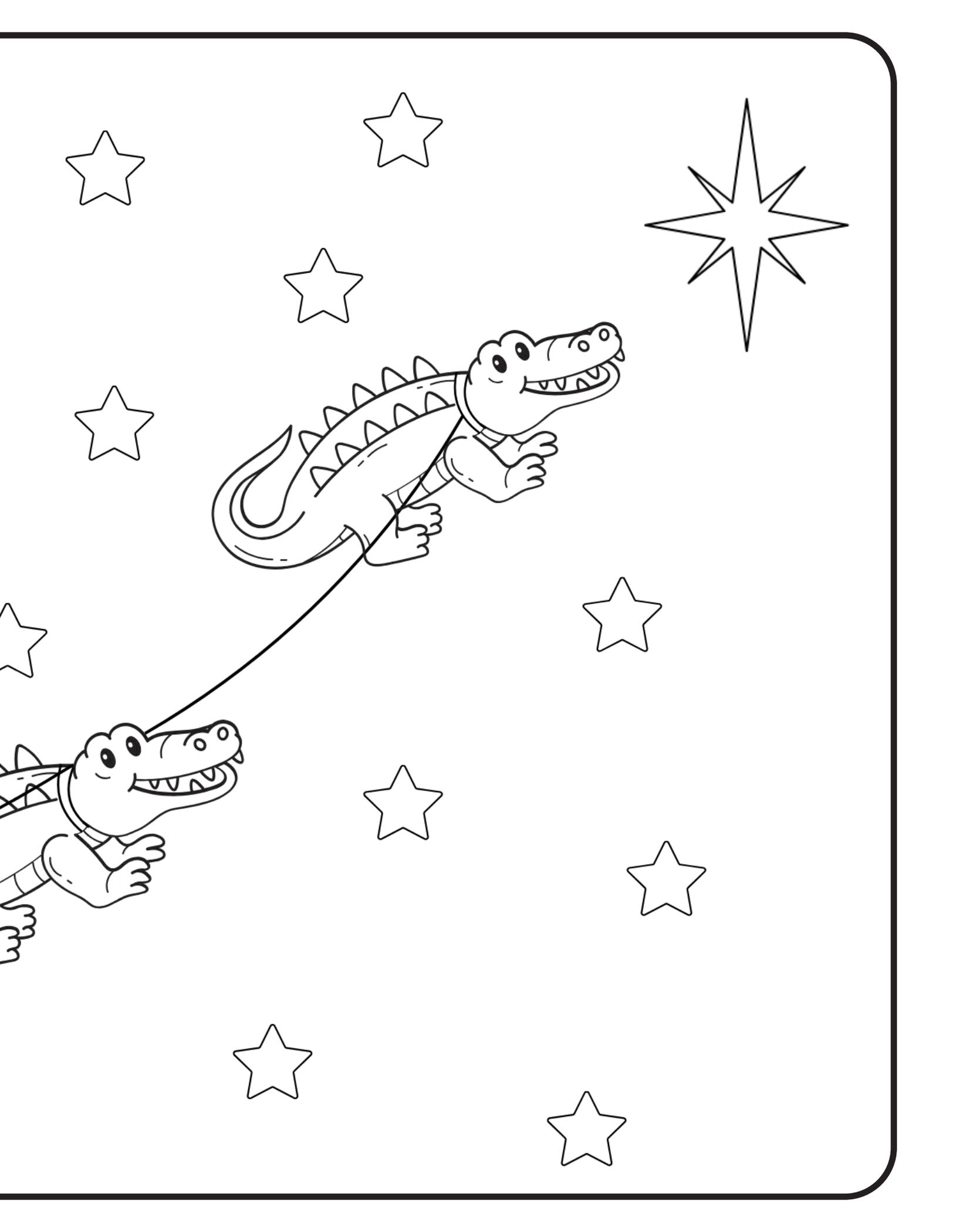
**Carol: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"**  
(UMH 211, vv. 1,2,4,7)

#### THIRD LESSON: ISAIAH 9:2, 6-7

*The prophet announces the birth of a king to a people in darkness.*

**Carol: "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates"**  
(UMH 213, vv. 1,2)





FOURTH LESSON: ISAIAH 11:1-4A, 6-9/MICAH 5:2-5A

*The king is coming and will usher in a reign of justice  
for the poor and peace for all God's creation.*

**Carol: "O Little Town of Bethlehem"** (UMH 230)

FIFTH LESSON: LUKE 1:26-35, 38

*The angel Gabriel announces to the virgin Mary  
that she will give birth to God's promised Son,  
whose kingdom will never end.*

**Carol: "Angels We Have Heard On High"** (UMH 238)

SIXTH LESSON: LUKE 2:1-7

*Against a backdrop of emperors and taxes, Jesus is born.*

**Carol: "The First Noel"**

(UMH 245, stanza 1)

SEVENTH LESSON: LUKE 2:8-16

*The shepherds go to see the Savior  
of the world, lying in a manger.*

**Carol: "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly"**

(UMH 229)

EIGHTH LESSON: MATTHEW 2:1-11

*The wise men follow a star to find  
the child Jesus, the King of the Jews.*

**Carol: "We Three Kings"**

(UMH 254)

NINTH LESSON: JOHN 1:1-14

*John unfolds the great mystery of the Incarnation.*

**Carol: "O Come, All Ye Faithful"**

(UMH 234)

\* **Collect:** *Send, O God, into the darkness of this troubled world, the light of your Son. Let the star of your hope touch the minds of all people with the bright beams of mercy and truth; and so direct our steps that we may ever walk in the way revealed to us, as the shepherds of Bethlehem walked with joy to the manger where he dwelled, who now and ever reigns in our hearts, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.* (John Suter, U.S.A., 20th Cent., alt.)

\* **Dismissal with Blessing:** *May the Christ who by his Incarnation gathered into One- things earthly and heavenly, fill you with the sweetness of inward peace and goodwill; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always. Amen.*

## Rev. Kennon's Christmas Poinsettia



*The perfectly festive,  
all-joy, no-tart mocktail  
for savoring the season!*

### Ingredients

- 3 parts premium pear or apple cider (sweet and crisp)
- 1 part cranberry juice (for that Christmas-red hue)
- Fresh cranberries (a handful for garnish)
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary (for a piney holiday aroma)
- 2 large or 4 small candy canes (crushed for rim garnish)
- Granulated sugar (to mix with crushed candy canes)
- Ice cubes

### To Make Your Christmas Poinsettia

#### **Crush the Candy Cane**

- Place candy canes in a plastic bag and gently crush them with a rolling pin or the bottom of a glass until you have festive red and white bits.
- Mix the crushed pieces with granulated sugar to create a sparkling, sweet rim blend.

#### **Prep the Glass Rim**

- Moisten the rim of your glass with cider or cranberry juice.
- Dip the rim into the candy cane sugar mixture until evenly coated and shimmering.

#### **Build Your Drink**

- Fill the glass generously with ice cubes.
- Pour in 3 parts pear or apple cider, then add 1 part cranberry juice.
- Watch the colors swirl together—sweet, bright, and full of cheer.

#### **Add the Garnish**

- Tuck in a fresh rosemary sprig and drop a few cranberries on top for aroma and festive color.

#### **Raise a Toast!**

- Sip slowly and savor the sweetness of the season—the perfect companion to Advent reflections and Christmas celebration alike.
- May every sip remind you of the sweetness of hope, love, and joy in this blessed season. Cheers to a sparkling Advent

# Sunday, January 4<sup>th</sup>

## Epiphany Sunday: Follow the Light

### GATHERING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

*Prelude*

\* Indicates Please Stand if Able.

\* Procession:

“The First Noel” (UMH 245)

\* Welcome & Opening Prayer

### PREPARING OUR HEARTS

Hymn of Praise: “What Child Is This?” (UMH 219)

\* Affirmation of Faith

\* Gloria Patri: Glory to

God (UMH 70)

\* Passing the Peace

• Blessing the Children

~ Carly Bratcher

### SHARING OUR LIVES

• Ministry Highlights

• Offertory

\* Doxology: Praise God (UMH 95)

• Song of Centering:

“We Three Kings” (UMH 254)

• Call to Prayer / The Lord's Prayer ~ Rev. Jean (SEE PAGE 44)

# HEARING GOD'S WORD

- Song of Celebration: "Star Child" ~ Chancel Choir
- Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12
- Sermon: "WE ARE TO BE LED

BY THE LIGHT OF GOD"

# SENDING FORTH

- \* Hymn of Discipleship: "Go Tell It  
On the Mountain" (UMH 251)
- \* Benediction
- Postlude

## Matthew 1:18–25

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

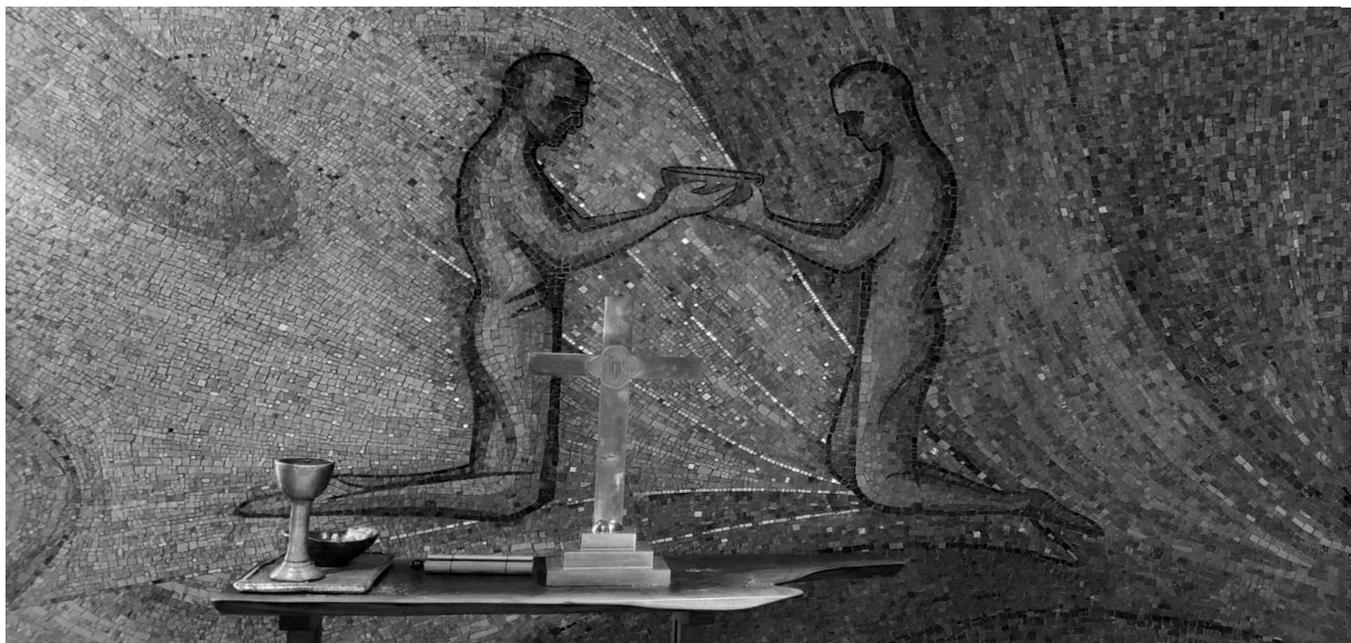
When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage.

Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.



# BLUE CHRISTMAS IN THE CROWELL CHAPEL

*Come and go...anytime during Advent & Christmas*



For many, the holiday season can be a bittersweet time, where moments of joy are shadowed by feelings of grief, loneliness, or distress. These emotions may emerge suddenly or be anticipated as the holidays approach. In a culture that often pressures us to “put on a happy face,” First United Methodist Church, Alexandria is uniquely positioned to offer a sacred, compassionate alternative, where the full range of human emotions, including sorrow, are welcome.

The chapel will be the place for you when it all gets ‘too much’ and you need to step aside to experience your emotions. Blue Christmas in the Chapel offers an opportunity to lean on God’s love, trusting that grace meets us in our vulnerability, guiding us toward healing and wholeness with God, ourselves, our neighbors, and creation.

Go to the Chapel any time the church doors are open to be reminded that even in our darkest hours, God’s light is never fully extinguished. The simple acts of lighting a candle, listening to Scripture, and perhaps reading or writing a prayer are acts of faith in the transforming love of our ever-present God. The Chapel meditations offer a sacred pause amid the holiday bustle, providing space for honest reflection, lament, and the hope of God’s enduring grace.

The meditations in the chapel, which will change each week of the Advent/Christmas season offer a special resource for people to acknowledge their laments, find solace, and experience God’s comforting presence.



# Staff Christmas Stories

**O**ne of my favorite times of year is Christmas, there is a certain level of whimsical feelings that a person gets to experience during this time of year. Having the ability to celebrate with my family makes me very happy, when I was younger and my family were all in the same household living together, we celebrated in a unique way. We would open a family gift, which would typically be a board game that we could all play together that my mom found. The big deal about this was not the gift, but, instead, of who got to open it.

You can imagine the competitive nature of three girls and one boy all wanting to open an extra gift. To combat this, my mom got a special pickle ornament, that was the exact shade of our tree and hid it on the tree and the first one to find it got to open the gift. It is one of our stranger traditions in my household but beloved nonetheless, even with all my siblings living far away and forming their own families, if we get together for Christmas day, we still find the pickle altogether.

-Wendi Bray

**M**y most treasured Christmas memory is from a time when our Christmases were very poor materially but rich in spirit. I was around 23

then, trying to get through college. My wife Kat and I, with our baby son Malachai did not have much, and I worked as I could while going to school full time. I mostly worked as a cook in restaurants, but that year I had the opportunity to pick up extra work over the holiday break, installing new gas plumbing on one of the old buildings on campus. I had never done that kind of work, and it was on the job training underneath the building. It was a cold winter. Prior to the break, the school had its annual Christmas lights celebration for the community, with carols, games, hayrides, and lots of decorations.

We did not have a tree, but when I was leaving the job site a few days before Christmas, I saw that the grounds crew had piled all the nice trees from the festival into a trash pile. I saw a blessing, so I picked out a nice one that was not too large and not too dry. The only problem was that I was in a Honda Accord...with no roof rack. So, I threw the tree on the roof, and as I drove, with my left hand, I held it in place.

Then I made the 15-mile drive home. The window was down, my hand was exposed and freezing, but I never let go though I did have to pull over a few times to readjust things.



I was so proud to deliver this tree to my young family, and they were happy to receive it. Kat laughed when she saw me pull up in the driveway. It was a great little tree to put up and put our presents under. We still smile about it when it comes to mind, and remember that it's ok to let Christmas be simple, and to always be thankful for blessings.

-Gar Pickering

**A**s the whole family gathered at Grandma and Grandpa's that Christmas, Grandma announced she had something to say. I can still hear her voice, "We really didn't have money to spend, but Grandpa and I have found gifts for each of you. We've scoured the closets, the attic, the washhouse, and even the barn, and chose treasures that we really wanted each of you to have. It took weeks of searching, and we've re-lived our whole lives in the process. We only hope you aren't disappointed when you open your gifts. They are given with a lot of love."

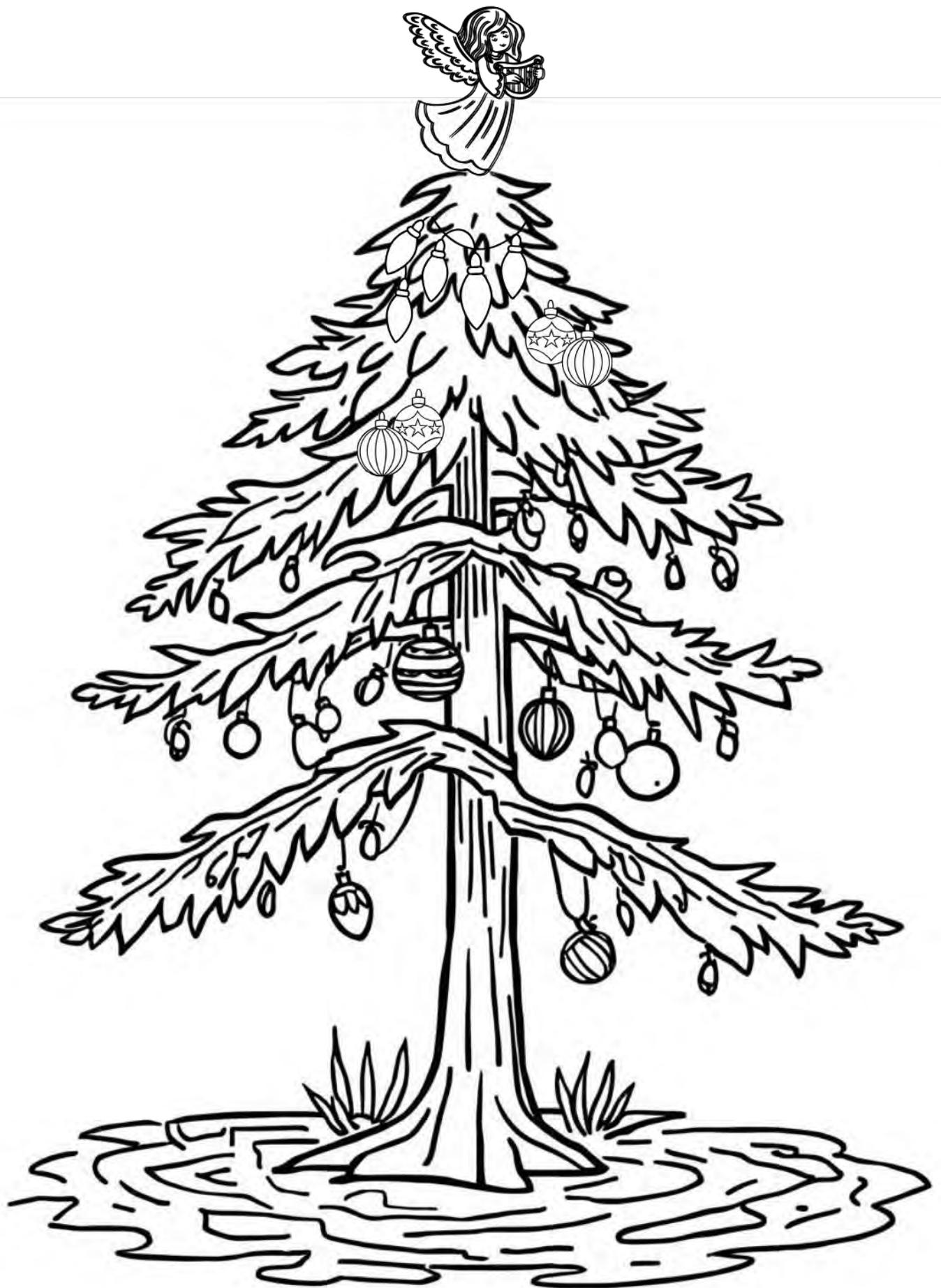
Not knowing what to expect, we all began opening our gifts as they looked on. Within minutes, there wasn't a dry eye in the room. I received three antique plates that came from my great grandmother, after whom I was named. Mother unrolled a promotion certificate for the Methodist Church's

Sunday School. It was signed by a favorite teacher and the minister who had performed her wedding – both now deceased. The nameplate from Grandpa's desk at the store where he had worked all his life before retiring, went to his eldest son, who was a "Junior". The younger son, my Uncle Dickie was reminded of his boyhood chores when he unwrapped the old milking stool.

One granddaughter received Grandma's pearl necklace, one a set of tea cups, one a cream and pitcher set that had been one of Grandma's wedding gifts. The list went on and on. Everyone felt that they had received the best gift ever. Each gift told a story of love and family connection. Every time a new gift was opened we all wanted to hear the story that went with it and why that gift was chosen for that person. Now, so many years after Grandma and Grandpa are gone, I look at my antique plates and feel cherished and love, and very thankful for this Christmas memory.

-Rev. Jean Sanders

*More Staff Christmas  
Stories on page 34.*



# SHARE YOUR LIGHTS WITH US ON FACEBOOK!

*“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness  
doesn’t extinguish the light.”*

– John 1:5

*“The true light that shines on all people  
was coming into the world.”* – John 1:9

We want to see your pics! We would love to include your photos to illustrate our Advent/Christmas theme 2025 in a special art display coming soon to the halls of FUMCA! So start looking for lights!

Lights are a wonderful lens to look at the stories of Advent and Christmas... Candle light flickering, tiny white Christmas lights twinkling, big multicolor lights of old, lantern light, mellow lamp light, strobe lights, disco lights, sweeping search light, light at the end of the tunnel... you get the picture.

Just take the picture, post it using  
**#ShareTheLightFUMCA**,  
and come see your art in lights every  
Sunday of Advent and Christmas.  
You are welcome to post your best  
light picture every week!



**#ShareTheLightFUMCA**

## Staff Christmas Stories continued...



### Reverend Kennon and Mrs. Rachael Pickett

**O**n Christmas Eve, after our candlelight and communion services and the Advent calendar was counted down, there was one of my favorite traditions with Rachael, Caleb, and Olivia Rae. With the sweetness of the season wrapped around us, we tucked the kids into their beds, their eyes shining with wide anticipation, whispers and giggles still lingering in the air.

“Be sure to get some sleep,” we reminded them softly, “so Santa can come visit tonight.”

Then, with a playful sparkle in my eye—and a little mischief—I pulled out my phone. “Now, I have a very special app,” I told Caleb and Olivia Rae, “that can scan your bodies and

your minds to see if you’ve been naughty or nice.”

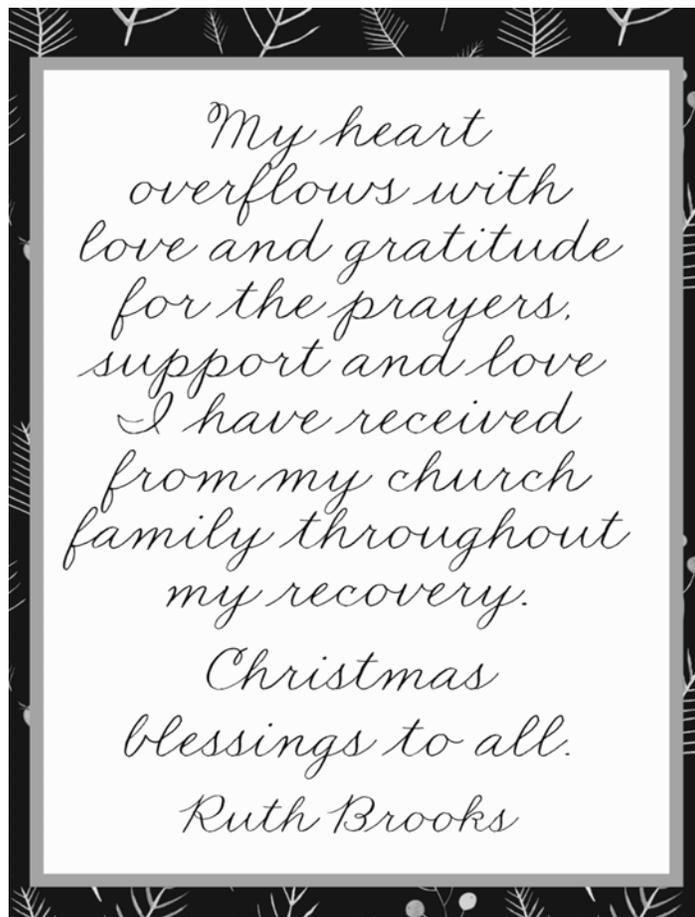
Their eyes widened in a mix of awe and delightful skepticism. The house grew quiet but for the warm hum of the Christmas tree lights. I’d hold up my cell phone and with a tap, the screen glowed, casting a magical light across their sleepy, bed-headed faces.

I’d sweep the phone gently, as if scanning their very spirits. Then, showing them the glowing screen, I revealed the verdict: “Nice.”

Their giggles bubbled up, mixing with sleepy yawns, as they settled back into their covers—hearts assured, joy swelling—knowing Santa will come bearing gifts made just right for them.

Morning at our house is a quiet awakening of wonder. Bed heads tousled, the kids would appear at the foot of our bed, way too early, like little Christmas angels, eyes darting toward the living room fireplace and tree where presents now lived, love wrapped between every box and bow. With bright eyes and hopeful smiles, they would find the half-nibbled cookies and the empty glass of milk left behind by Santa—a whispered proof of the magic that visits only once a year.

The joy of those gifts is palpable, yes—but for me, the true wonder of Christmas lies in the anticipation—the hush before the miracle, the warmth of waiting together in faith and love. That is the heart of Advent itself: a season of watching, hoping, lighting the way with expectant hearts.



Just like on those Christmas Eve nights with Caleb and Olivia Rae, we are invited to lie quietly in the glow of God’s promises, knowing that the greatest gift—the Light that will never dim—is already coming to us.

– Reverend Kennon Pickett

**T**he Christmas holidays for our family centered around traveling since most of our family lived out-of-state. The drive was always something I looked forward to, though. We would listen to Christmas music nearly every minute of the 6-hour drive to my grandmother’s house (literally over the river and through the woods—and even over a mountain or two!). We would bake Christmas snacks—puppy chow, cracker candy, no-bake cookies, chocolate-covered pretzels, hello dollies—to eat along the drive.

I would fall asleep staring out the windows at open, frost-sprinkled fields in Louisiana and wake up to see snow-capped evergreens in Arkansas foothills. We would stop at the river and skip rocks across the frigid rapids while the dogs stretched their legs. The final mountain before arriving to my grandparents’ small Oklahoma town was winding and seemed to stretch on endlessly, but it meant I was only minutes away from seeing the family I’d missed so much. We would finally drive up the little hill to the pink house (these days, it’s blue) perched serenely above the little glistening town. It’s like we left home to come home!

– Carly Bratcher

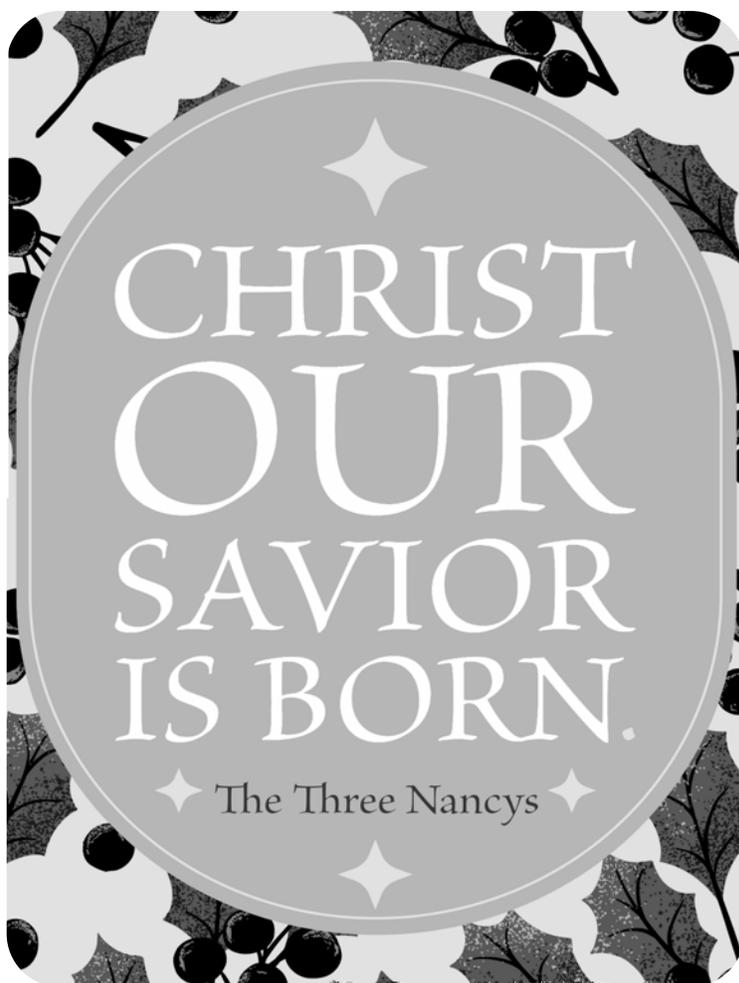
I am from Louisiana and prefer my Christmas season to be on the warmer side. 2010 was my first year living in Virginia Beach, VA and that first winter was a real shock to this Cajun lady. It was also my first winter as a choir director.

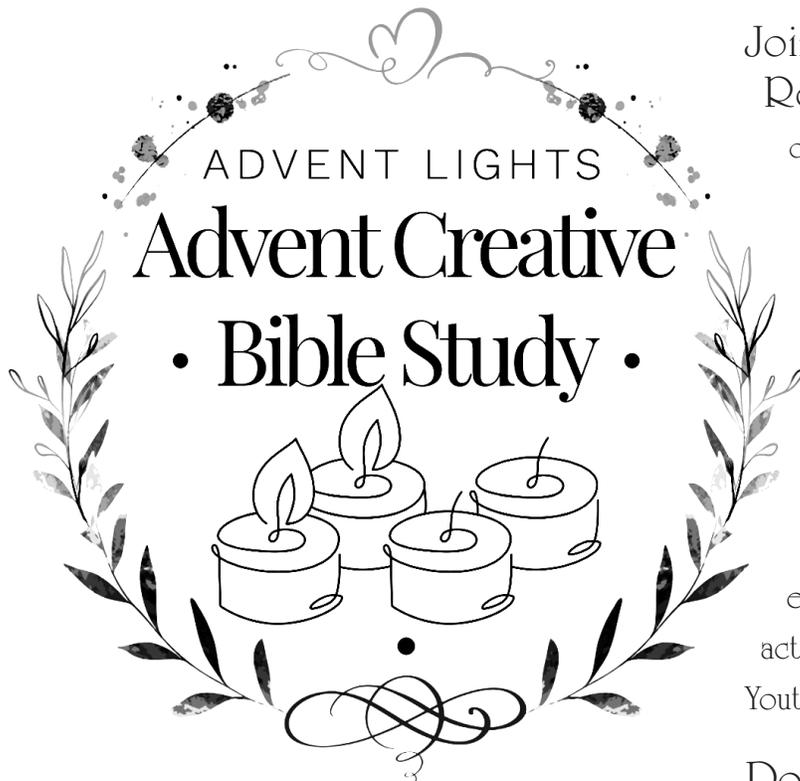
One of the choir members I was particularly fond of was both a creative and a District Attorney. She loved singing, putting bad guys in jail, and FASHION! Owning a winter cape had never really crossed my mind, being from the south, but seeing her in her cape made me want one.

I kept my eyes open for capes all month, until one day I passed a display of festive capes at Marshalls. Most of them looked tacky, but there was ONE white one left...beautiful, warm, and wintery!

I threw it on and had to walk to the other side of the store to find a mirror. I was strutting for sure and since no one knew me in VA, I didn't mind looking a little silly in my child-like excitement. When I realized there was no price tag, I strutted back to the display to find out the price and realized they were all Christmas tree skirts.

– Elizabeth Nix





December 3, 10, & 17 • 6pm

Join Rev. Kennon Picket and Rev. Jean Sanders for a new class offered on Wednesday nights only during Advent.

These three sessions, held on December 3, 10, & 17 at 6pm, will be a deep dive into the Christmas story through the lens of Light: "Prophetic Light", "Guiding Light", and "Radiant Light".

What do you get when you have two pastors who are artists? A chance to explore not only scripture, but also creative activities to respond to the word. Adults and Youth are welcome!

Don't miss the chance to attend, and invite a friend to come with you!



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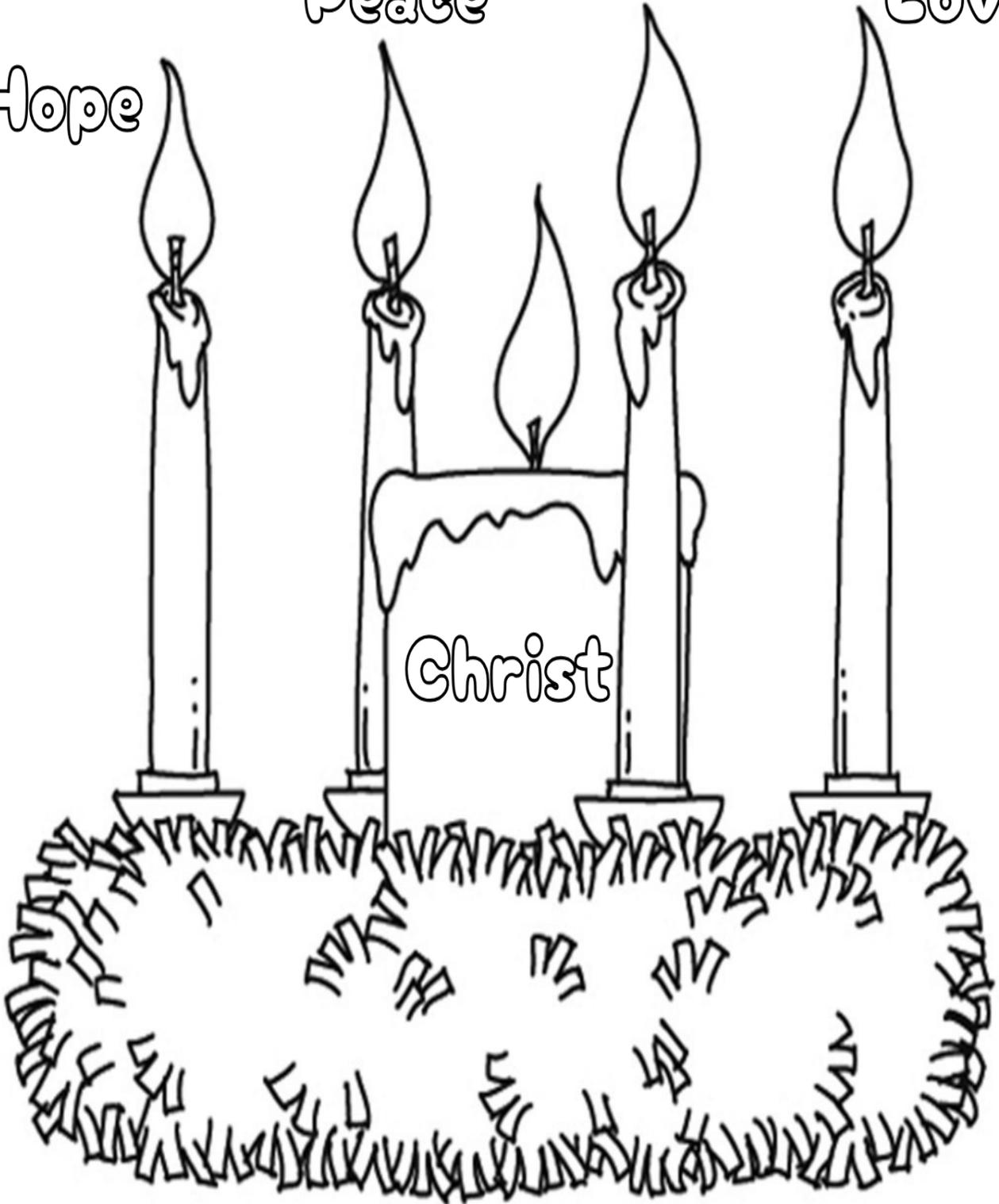
Hope

Peace

Joy

Love

Christ



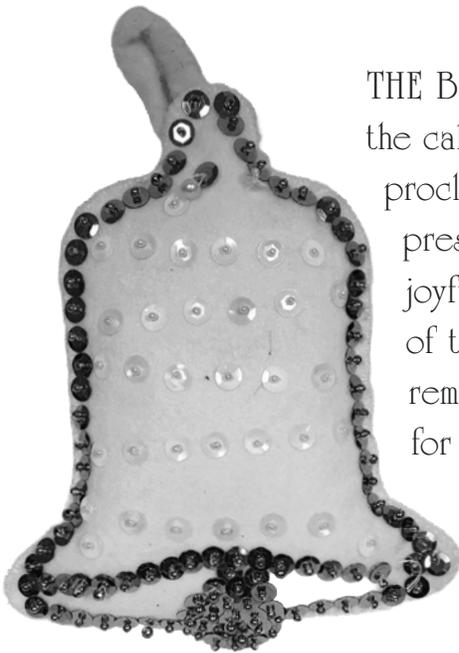
# WHAT IS A CHRISMON?

A Chrismon is a Christian symbol that points to Jesus Christ and the truths of the faith. Each symbol reminds us of God's promises, presence, and love.



FLEUR-DE-LIS is a stylized lily that symbolizes purity & devotion.

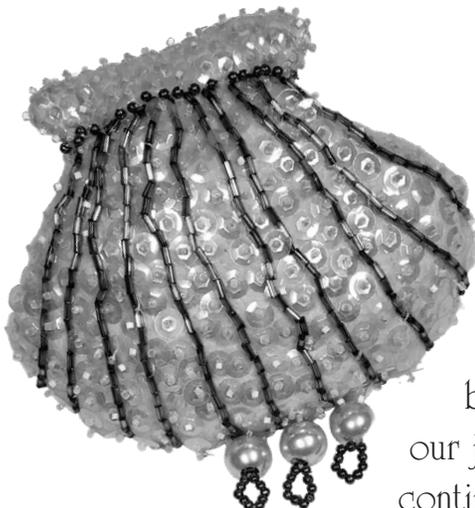
Its three petals recall the Holy Trinity & remind us of Christ's call to live in holiness & reflect divine beauty.



THE BELL symbolizes the call to worship & proclamation of Christ's presence and the joyful announcement of the Gospel and reminds us to listen for God's voice & to share His message with others.



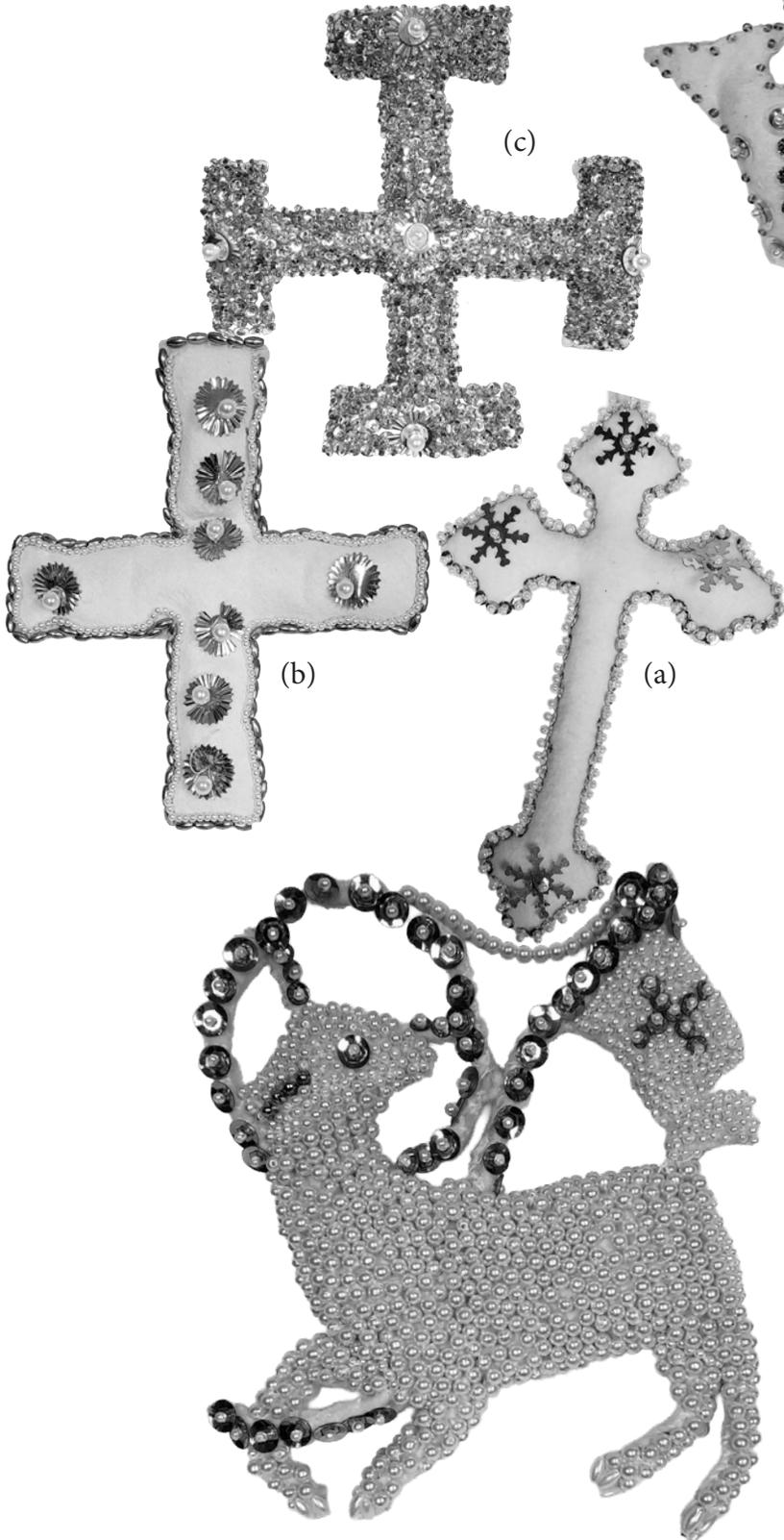
SHAMROCKS symbolize the Holy Trinity. It recalls St. Patrick's teaching of God as Father, Son, & Holy Spirit & reminds us to live in unity, faith, and love.



THE SCALLOP shell symbolizes baptism & pilgrimage.

It recalls the cleansing & rebirth of baptism, reminding us that our journey of faith begins & continues in the grace of God.

THE CROWN symbolizes the call to worship Christ as King, showing that Christians believe Jesus is ruler over Heaven and Earth



CROSSES are symbols of Christ's redeeming love and triumph. Whether Latin (a), equalateral(b), or potent (c) in form, crosses represent the power of salvation & the Gospel's reach to the ends of the earth.

THE LAMB symbolizes Christ as the Lamb of God. It recalls Jesus' sacrifice, reminds us of His innocence, His humility, & the salvation He offers to all who follow Him.

# THE mOvement LAB

Creating

light-bulb moments through movement



## Tap Dance (ages 5-adult):

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## Children's Creative Movement & Ballet

(ages 0-9): Nurturing movement, creativity, and foundational skills in a fun, age-appropriate environment. At Gold Dust Studio & FUMP.

## Inclusive Dance (ages 6-adult):

Inclusive classes designed for individuals with and without disabilities, fostering creativity and confidence through movement. At FUMCA & OLS.



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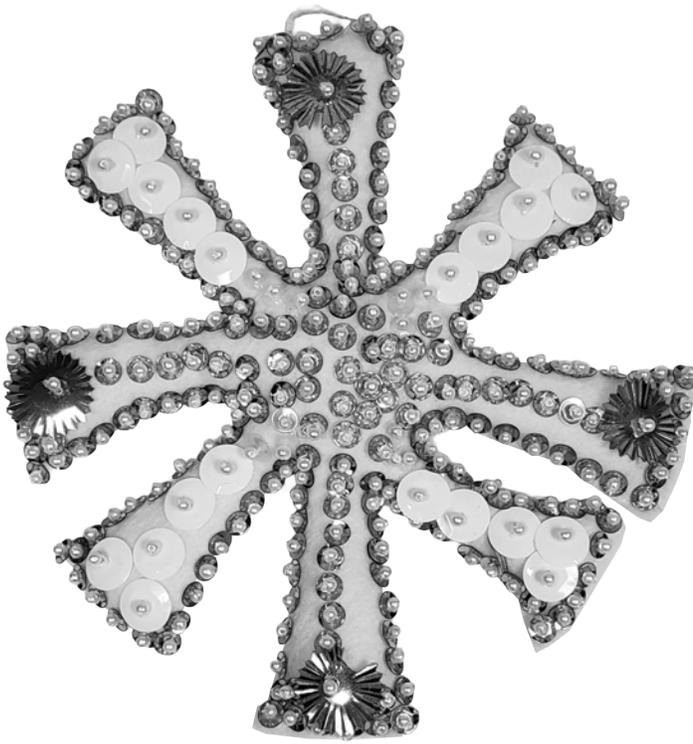


[@move.ment.lab](https://www.instagram.com/move.ment.lab)



318.421.2345

THE STAR symbolizes the light of Christ coming into the world, like the Star of Bethlehem that guided the wise men.

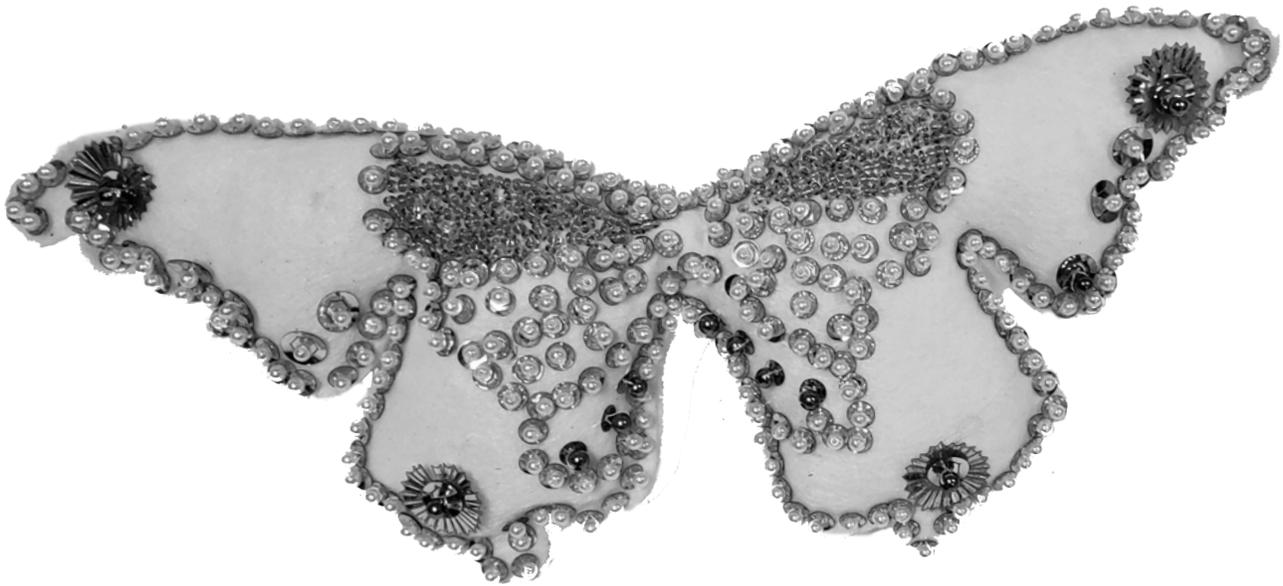


THE CHALICE symbolizes the blood of Christ & the sacrament of Holy Communion.

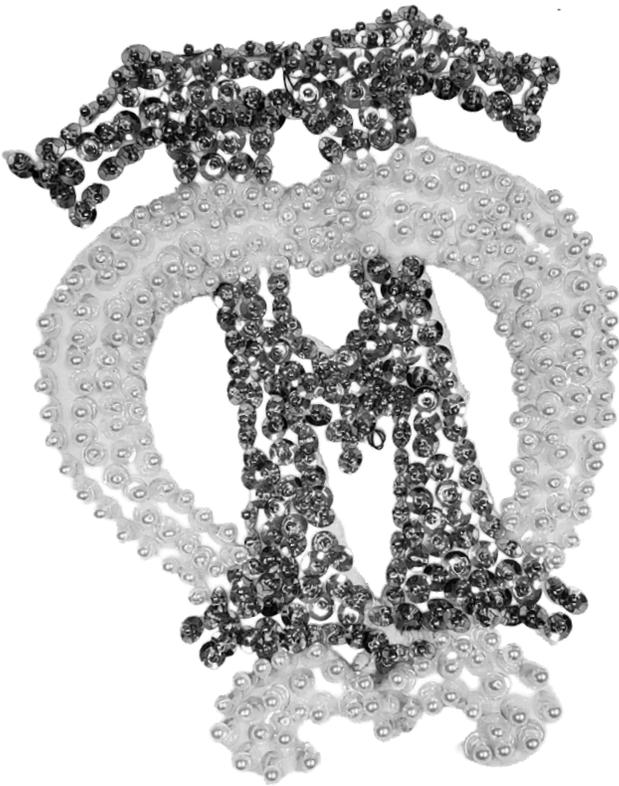
It recalls the Last Supper & reminds us of His sacrifice, the new covenant, & the gift of spiritual nourishment in Him.



THE DOVE represents the Holy Spirit as it appeared at Christ's baptism & reminds us of God's peace and presence in our lives.



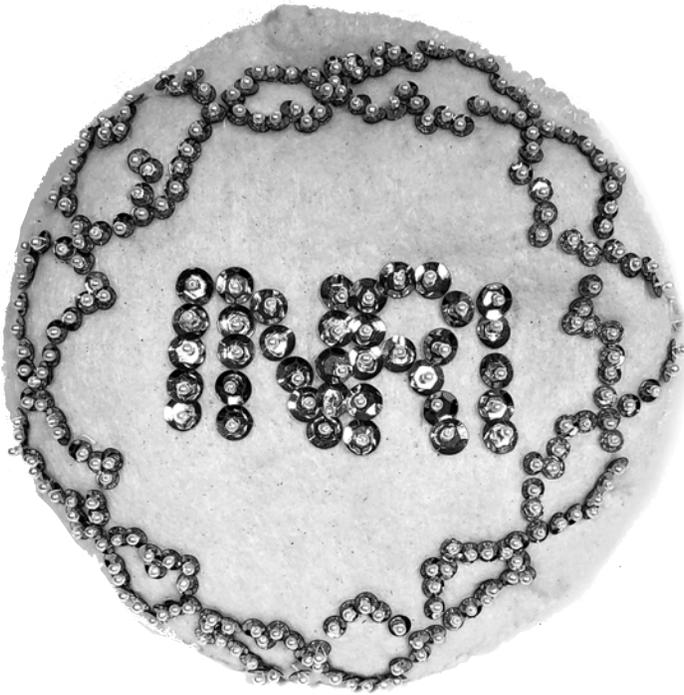
THE BUTTERFLY is a  
symbol for transformation  
& the immortal soul.



ALPHA & OMEGA are the first  
& last letters of the Greek  
alphabet represent God as  
the beginning & the end of all  
things, reminding us that Christ's  
reign encompasses all creation.



THE ICHTHYS / FISH symbolizes  
Christ as Savior. The Greek letters  
stand for (I) Jesus (X) Christ  
(Q) God, (Y) Son, (S) Savior



THE INRI letters stand for Jesus Nazarene Rex Iudaeorum—  
“Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

They were the inscription placed above Christ’s cross.



THE ANCHOR CROSS symbolizes hope, steadfast faith, & that our hope is anchored in Christ.



THE TREFOIL symbolizes the Holy Trinity, reminding us that God is one in essence & three in person—Father, Son, & Holy Spirit.

## THE LORD’S PRAYER

*Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done, on earth  
as it is in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who  
trespass against us.*

*And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, and  
the power, and the glory,  
now and forever.*

*Amen.*



First United Methodist Church  
— *Alexandria* —