

Upcoming Notes & News –

- **Sunday School Christmas Program: Dec. 20th, 9:30am.** Children, youths and adults are invited to an interactive celebration of the Christmas story.
- **Alameda County Food Drive!** This will be our last week for collecting food for the Alameda County Food Bank, so bring your donations NOW!
- **AHS (Asian Health Services) Toy Drive:** Thanks to those of you who brought toys, and volunteered time to help wrap!
- **Caroling TODAY and Tomorrow!** See article!
- **Alternative Market** brought in more than \$360.00 which will be donated to the Alameda County Food Bank.

Ecumenical Prayer Cycle for 20 December—26 December 2009

This week we pray for Ghana, Nigeria

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

Christians and Muslims who take risks to work for dialogue and reconciliation between the two faith communities.

The councils of churches in these countries and their common witness.

Missionaries who brought the gospel, and growing independent churches which have found their own ways of being Christian.

Talking drums and rattles.

Ama Atta Aidoo, Wole Soyinka, Ken Saro-Wiwa and others who tell good stories from an African context.

Fufu, yams, cassava and peanuts.

PRAYER

We offer you, O Ruler of men and women and of heavenly beings, the gold of our costly service. Take the labour of our hands, the skill of our minds, the power of our organization. Purge us of pride, and stir us from sloth, that we, being refined by your grace, may become better servants of your kingdom, now and hereafter.

Amen.

We offer to you, our Lord and our God, the incense of our worship and our prayer. By the gift of your Holy Spirit, you have hung forth a star in the lowly heaven of every Christian soul; grant us eager feet to follow wherever it leads, until our searching souls are blessed with the vision of yourself, who are our heaven and our home, forever.

Amen.

We offer to you, O Man of sorrows, the myrrh of your church's sufferings. When we have nothing else to give, this offering remains. Where you are on the cross, there also may your servants be. May your perfect sacrifice avail to make our light affliction redemptive in the world, that sharing the fellowship of your sufferings we may rejoice in the power of your resurrection, now and forever.

Amen.



THE MESSENGER

Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.

The people of The United Methodist Church®

December 20, 2009

Advent 4 ~ Christmas Sunday

“Pregnant with Joy!”

Pastor Emily Lin

Luke 1: 39-55



**We Invite you to be in your seats by 10:55am to begin a time of scripture meditation*

Usher/Greeter: Al & Steve

Prayer: Burt

Scripture: Peggy

Sound Techs: Abbey

Refreshments: Candlelight

Altar Flowers: Poinsettias

The lovely poinsettia plants were donated by many congregants in honor and in memory of their loved ones. The list of donors will be printed in next Sunday's bulletin.

Worship with Us Next Week: December 27, 2009

Speaker: Derek Lang, Certified Lay Speaker

Text: Luke 2: 41-52

Usher/Greeter: Frances and Gloria

Prayer: Becky

Scriptures: Rich

Sound Tech: Kelvin

Refreshments: Gloria and Frances

Altar Flowers: Judie Thach, Ada Fung, Donna Louie, and David Wong



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View from the EMC Chair

By Derek Lang

I just heard on the radio about A Colbert Christmas – pop culture comedian Steven Colbert’s parodies on Christmas. It includes Willie Nelson’s song “Little Dealer Boy” and Toby Keith signing “Have I Got a Present for You” [referring to a shotgun blast at those who are anti-Christmas]. While I admit to a few chuckles, I also wondered what it says of Christmas time, or actually any religious moment, when we start making fun of it. I have nothing against good humor mind you, but a subtle shift has taken place over the years. Somewhere along the line this holy moment became an empty tradition, and at that point it became easy for popular culture to make fun of it. Somehow the meaning of Christmas was lost.



Although I have read this week’s passage many times, this year a new meaning of Christmas revealed itself. It has its roots from several months ago when Pastor Emily introduced to us in Bible Study the new phrase “being authentic.” We are encourage to be authentic, i.e, to talk from our own experiences and who we are. The stories of Elizabeth and Mary in the Book of Luke illustrate these messages about being authentic. Elizabeth, old and barren, had to hide for five months after conceiving John the Baptist to avoid the scorn of others. Mary was perplexed that she could conceive as a virgin and would eventually have to confess her pregnancy to her future husband. These were not just inconveniences; rather they were life-changing experiences fraught with uncertainty and fear. But they also show that God does not pick and choose according to our standings in life. God accepts us as who we are – no matter who we are. Look at the entrance of Jesus into the world. He came as a baby, not as a mighty king. He was born out of wedlock and into homelessness. God does not reserve love for only the privileged and that love is not given only when times are good. God accepts us and is willing to be with us in those difficult of times.

The other significant message from this passage is that while God loves and accepts us for who we are, God also call us to something greater. God does not just love us and leave us wherever we are. For Elizabeth, this calling was to raise John the Baptist. For Mary, it was to raise Jesus Christ. What an honor, but also what a responsibility and commitment. Likewise, we may think it is just not the right time for us or we do not have the skills or capability. Yet God calls us to something that is greater than ourselves. We may or may not be called to invite hundreds of Ugandans to Christ. We may or may not be called to lead worship at Grace Cathedral. We may or may not be called to evangelize like Billy Graham. But perhaps God calls us to take time to ask the person at our front door if he would like to sit in the pews for a little while. Or perhaps God calls us to pick up an extra can of food to put in the Alameda County Food Bank food drive barrel. Whatever it is, we know that when we respond to the call, God offers us hope and reassurance just as God did for Elizabeth and Mary so long ago.

May the Seasons of Advent and Christmas continue to speak to you in new and exciting ways!



*Merry
Christmas*

As a child, I loved giving my mother gifts. Perhaps it was the way she received them. Her face would light up and she would express such a sense of delight that whatever childlike object I had created (be it a 5 foot long beaded necklace I had worked days to complete or a journal I had designed and bound myself) was transformed into an object of perfection. I, in turn, experienced a bubbling up of joy as the gift-giver. I was delighted that my mother was delighted.

As we mark our final Sunday of Advent and count down the five days to Christmas, I wonder some times if God is squealing with excitement as She eagerly anticipates our faces and reactions to the opening of Her great gift to us – Jesus, the Christ, our Healer and Redeemer. Surely, God gave some serious thought to what the perfect gift for us could be. And will we, like my mother, express an utter sense of delight at encountering this gift anew? Will we, like my mother, unwrap the gift carefully and meaningfully then do all in our power to honor and celebrate the gift? Will we delight God with our own delight such that joy bubbles up in Her all-loving heart? I hope so for wouldn’t it be amazing to see God’s eyes light up and an enormous smile spread across Her face?

May delight fill your heart and joy bubble over as you celebrate Christmas once again. Merry, merry Christmas!

Peace & Grace,
Emily

Caroling Opportunities!

Today, Sunday, December 20th, 1:30pm: Meet at the Moon Gate and join Carolers as they serenade passersby in front of the church. The group will then make their way around 8th Street in Chinatown. Copies of the songs will be available in English and Chinese, so feel free to join them as they share the spirit of Christmas with the community!



Monday, December 21st, 1pm: Our annual visitation caroling will meet at church at 1pm before heading off to visit the homebound and a few senior residential homes. Please connect with Becky to sign up if you are planning to come, and if

Alternative Market Results



Thanks to all of you who participated in the Alternative Market!
Special thanks to those who donated goods that brought in more than \$360.00 which will be given to the Alameda County Food bank to brighten the lives of those in need!