



The Steeple



December 2019

The Cross and the Creche

Among the Christians we know, Christmas is more popular than Easter. Why is that? Let me approach it by making a comparison.

There are some other places where Christians make more of a big deal out of Good Friday than Easter. They re-enact the suffering of Jesus in elaborate public events before many spectators. This happens in Mexico and in New Mexico; in the Philippines; in the town of Oberammergau in Germany; and in the North End of Springfield. In the Philippines, they even nail a man to a cross. What do Christmas and Good Friday have in common?

In both stories, Jesus is helpless. In one he is a tiny baby. In the other he is an innocent victim being executed by crucifixion. By contrast, the Jesus of the Easter story is strong and victorious, in charge of what's happening.

Why do we prefer the helpless, vulnerable Jesus? Is there something about the Jesus of Easter that we find less spiritually helpful?

Could it be that someone who is vulnerable matches our experience of human life better than someone who has beaten death? Could it be that someone who suffers is a more satisfying representation of God for us than a man who is in control of everything?

Do we crave the assurance that God is with us on the difficult journey of life, our ally in our struggle against hostile powers? Do we embrace an unspoken conviction that a God who shares our suffering is somehow more real than the God who runs everything? Is the Jesus of Christmas and Good Friday perhaps more important for us than someone who has become the king of the world?

There have been many Christian leaders who deplore the fact that Christmas seems more important than Easter in many of our Protestant churches. In the Catholic areas where the Good Friday processions occur, clergy express discomfort about the Holy Week emphasis being all on the suffering of Jesus, while the victorious conclusion on Easter Sunday is an afterthought, an anticlimax.

And those leaders have the New Testament on their side. The Resurrection was the big deal for the earliest Christians, it seems. Yes, the gospels told the story of Jesus' way to the cross in great detail, but that was in service to two larger points: 1) Jesus really died, and many witnessed it, so his resurrection really was a great miracle; and 2) his death happened not merely because of Roman malice but because of the collusion of Jewish leaders with Roman officials. But as we probe more deeply into what the resurrection meant for the writers of our New Testament, it turns out that it had a lot to do with Christians turning the tables on their foes and assuming positions of power, with Jesus at the pinnacle of a new world order. No wonder so many of them were ready to collude with the Emperor Constantine when he promoted the Christian Church to a position of great prominence in imperial affairs.

There may be something in our spirits which just doesn't resonate with that desire for power, that urge to see our Jesus as defeating his enemies and ruling over everyone. Perhaps we perceive the vulnerable Jesus of Christmas and Good Friday as more authentically divine.

Maybe there's a reason why Methodist churches have more pictures of "the agony in the garden" than of Jesus bursting forth from the tomb. Maybe a deep spiritual hunger is satisfied by setting up a crèche and waiting for the arrival of an infant.

What does Advent mean in the Bible?

Advent is a season of preparation and waiting for the celebration of Jesus' birth at Christmas. The term advent is from the Latin translation of "coming." God's prophecies in the Old Testament prepared the way for His promise.

TAKE A BREAK AND TREAT YOURSELF

**Advent is a time of expectant waiting and preparation
for the celebration of
the birth of Jesus at Christmas**

**Bring your friends and family as we gather
during this Holy Season
to prepare for the coming of Jesus.**

Help decorate the Sanctuary November 30 Join the festivities at noon.

Join us for Worship each Sunday at 10:00. We will light the Advent candles, sing, pray and prepare for the coming of Jesus. Afterward, enjoy coffee hour. Sunday School begins at 8:55

Advent workshop & Lunch December 1 Join in the- 9:00 a.m.-12:30
Make cookies, cards, crafts - some for our shut-ins some for you
Stay for lunch.
Sing some Christmas carols.

Christmas Sunday Music & Nativity December 22

Some Adults & Youth will lead the service with music and a skit,
Room at The Inn, and afterward enjoy cookies, cocoa including a birthday cake for Jesus.

Christmas Caroling At noon, we will join with folks from the Morning Star Church to go **Christmas Caroling**.

December 24 CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE at 7:00

Bring the whole family and find some sanity in a frantic season. This service brings a peaceful joy to our souls. The Christ candle is lit.

**December 25 Have a great Christmas and share the
real meaning of Christmas.**

WHITE CHRISTMAS BAGS A tradition continues - the Methodist Women will prepare gift bags to be delivered to our shut-ins & semi-shut-ins during the week of December 22. The bags will include a card, a Christmas craft, & cookies. We **need volunteers to deliver these gifts** and to enjoy the opportunity to visit our shut-in parishioners during this special holiday season. Please call Ann 695-1212 or call the church if you will help.



SCARF, HAT & MITTENS This year we will put the hats & mittens under the Secret Santa Wish Tree. We will deliver them to those in need & many will be used for Secret Santa gifts.

New are best but slightly used are welcome. All sizes are needed. This small mission project has been going on in our church for what seems like forever and the children and adults who are cold appreciate the hats and mittens.

SECRET SANTA For too many local children this Christmas, stockings hung by the chimney with care will be empty. Too many local parents will be heartsick that they can't give their children a Christmas with the pleasant surprises and good food the rest of us enjoy. You can help. Be A Secret Santa – We have children who will need gifts, & that means we need people to help. You can help by:

- picking one or more names from the Wish Tree to buy gifts for
- shopping
- wrapping on December 9, 9:30 a.m. to noon
- donating



Some want toys, some want clothes or pajamas. Your help is welcome. If you have question or would like to help, talk to Ann 413-695-1212. Someone is always asking you to give, but what better reason than for a child? Thank you.

CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS PLANTS ORDER FORM



We will be ordering our Christmas Poinsettia plants. Your cost is \$8.50 per plant. It is necessary that you enclose your payment with your order. To have the best selection of plants, your order must be in by Sunday, December 15th.

Kindly mail or give your order and payment to Ann (checks should be made out to The South Hadley Methodist Church), or drop it in the offering plate.

I wish the church to order _____ plants. Paid: _____

Given in memory/honor of _____

By/from/love (please circle): _____

I will pick up my plant after church _____ I wish it delivered to a shut-in _____

I will deliver it to: _____

I want it given to: _____

*******FORMS DUE SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15th*******

CELEBRATIONS & CONCERNS



PRAYER LIST Carol Brunelle, Carol Szulc, Prescott Grout, Eunice Mittler, Harry Thomas, Barbara Ryan, Doris Gagnon, Beth Dietz, Pauline Kiakis, Samantha Snopek, Adele Reynolds, Frank Northup, Bev Pead & Family, Doug & Dee Brooksbank, Frank Hudgik, Viola Mortimer, Dave Fanaras, Mary Lou Guarnera, Tom Deren, Tim O'Donnell, Cochran Family

STEEPLE LIGHTING

The Steeple is lit during the month of December:



- †In loving memory of my mother, Harriet Crooker, who is gone 5 years now. Her memories live on, by her Family.
- †In memory of Stewart Reynolds by Joe & Okkum Danish.
- †In loving memory of my wife, Judy, by Bill Beyer.

If you would like the steeple lit for one month, the fee is \$25.00.



CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS

Make a donation to one of the mission projects of our church

- †Secret Santa
- †Casseroles for Kate's Kitchen
- †Food For Friends
- †White Christmas bags for shut-ins
- †Neighbors Helping Neighbors Food Pantry
- †Light the Steeple in honor of someone.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

December 1: Coffee and lunch after worship.

Everyone is invited. Advent workshop 9-12:30

December 9: Women's Group 9:30 a.m. – wrap Secret Santa gifts.

December 14: 2nd Saturday Fun 4:00-6:00 p.m.

December 15: Lessons & Carols at St. Theresa Church 3:00 p.m.

December 22:- Christmas program 10:00 a.m.
- Christmas Caroling with Morning Star Church 12ish

December 24: Candle light service 7:00 p.m.

December 29: Casseroles for Kate's Kitchen due.

January 6: Trustees 6:30 p.m.

January 7: Church Council 6:30 p.m.

March 13-22: Mission trip to So. Carolina

NHN FOOD PANTRY

The food pantry was begun by our church and now serves South Hadley and Granby. Even though it has grown to be a separate non-profit, it is housed in our church and many of our members continue to devote endless hours to this ministry. NHN is always in need of non-perishable food, monetary donations and volunteers. The pantry serves clients on Wednesdays from 12:30 - 3:30 and 6:00 - 7:30 as well as Saturdays from 10:00 - noon. For information on how you can help, please call 437-759



FROM OUR LAY LEADER

I have heard a number of people remark that Thanksgiving is their favorite holiday. They go on to explain this is because in addition to loving the food, there is no obligation buy gifts.

Do you buy gifts out of obligation? Are you one who wrecks your budget because you 'have' to get presents for certain people? Do you dread the holiday season?

We have done this to ourselves. We have ruined a beautiful holiday by imposing requirements on ourselves to spend money we may not be able to afford, by needing to live up to expectations that may be unrealistic, by continuing traditions we might not even enjoy. Then we complain about it all. Every year the news reports on surveys that tell us how many people are glad when Christmas is over.

Now we are stuck; we seem to be in a hole we can't climb out of. But I dare say we can, if we want to. Think about what you are nostalgic about from years past and let those memories guide you as you travel through Advent. Make cookies, sing Christmas songs and carols, enjoy the special activities and worship offered by the church. It is very likely that your friends and family would not feel blessed because you put yourself on the road to the poor house.

Consider the ultimate gift given to us, the gift we supposedly celebrate at Christmas. We can't outdo God's gift to the world, so why try? Let's give ourselves a gift and dial back the craziness, end the spending orgy, allow ourselves to enjoy the season and focus on the birth of Jesus.

Yours in the dance,

Mary Lou



THANK YOU

Thank you to Jim Anspach for leading worship when Pastor Peter was in California.

Jim made a quick change during his sermon to emphasize his point about peace and giving.



All are welcome! Join us for worship or join in one of our missions.

South Hadley Methodist Church
30 Carew Street
South Hadley MA 01075



Rev. Peter Milloy: 413-310-5027

Worship Sunday 10:00 a.m.

Sunday School 9:00 a.m.

Church office: 413-532-0500

e-mail: churchoffice@thesteepinthefalls.org

web site: www.thesteepinthefalls.org

Dr. Heather Reichgott, Minister of Music

Ann Felsentreger, Secretary

Neighbors Helping Neighbors: 413-437-7593

TAKE A BREAK AND TREAT YOURSELF

December 22 Christmas Sunday Music & Nativity 10:00 a.m.

December 24 CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE 7:00

December 25 Have a great Christmas Share the real meaning of Christmas



SOUTH HADLEY METHODIST CHURCH

30 Carew Street

South Hadley, Massachusetts 01075-2705

Return address service requested.