

December 2008
Edition
Eva Marie Wolfe,
Pastor

T H E M E S S E N G E R

Wes Baker,
Editor



CROTON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Our Purpose: *Lifting Up Jesus for the Glory of God*
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Our theme for Advent this year is "anticipation." You will see this theme expressed in our Advent devotionals, our Advent Bible study, and in the lighting of the Advent candles.

During the Christmas season, we anticipate many things. These include visits with friends and family, concerts, school programs, special holiday foods, parades, seasonal events, and, of course, presents. There's so much to look forward to that it's hard to list them all!

Anticipation is something that most people enjoy very much. We tend to like to savor the moments of waiting. Unfortunately, some people focus so much on anticipation that they experience a let-down when the thing anticipated actually arrives. This may be because they have built up the event or item so much in their mind that it can't possibly meet their expectations. They have the feeling that something is missing. They find that their anticipation has not been fully satisfied.

There is, however, one thing we anticipate that can never disappoint. In fact, it will be even bigger and better than we can possibly imagine. Isaiah prophesied that there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. Through Isaiah's words, God has given us a glimmer of what lies before us: "the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." This light will continue to grow bigger and brighter until the day arrives that is the source of that light, and the source our anticipation, the time Paul calls "the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us."

This is what we celebrate at Christmastime. We celebrate not just the past—though we rightfully rejoice in the wonderful day that the Messiah was born—but also the future. We anticipate the day when our Lord will come back to us in the fullness of his glory. At that time all of our longings will be fulfilled. Our hearts and souls will be fully satisfied. There won't be anything left to wait for!

Let us savor these days of anticipation, knowing that there is no chance that we will be left wanting. Anticipation is a wonderful thing when we are assured of its total fulfillment! "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." May you all have a blessed Christmas!

Shalom, Pastor Em

Worship for Advent, Christmas, and the Epiphany

During this Christmas season, we will explore the Imperatives of Christmas. The word "imperative" is derived from the term "emperor". Emperors gave commands, thus imperative sentences are commands. The word imperative also means "urgently important." In God's self-revelation through the incarnation of the Messiah, God gives us several urgently important commands. Throughout the Advent and Christmas season, we will explore some of these imperatives: "Keep Awake!" "Prepare!" "Tell!" "Conceive!" and "Shine!"

November 30: Communion: 1st Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Mark 13:24-27

Message: The First Imperative of Christmas: Keep Awake!

Description: No matter what our trials may be, or how long they seem to last, God will deliver us from them. God urgently commands us to keep awake, for we cannot anticipate when He will come.

December 7: 2nd Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Mark 1:1-8

Message: The Second Imperative of Christmas: Prepare!

Description: Large crowds of people came to hear John the Baptist speak his message of the coming kingdom. God urgently commands us to prepare ourselves to be ready to receive the king our hearts so desperately desire.

December 14: 3rd Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Psalm 145:1-12

Message: The Third Imperative of Christmas: Tell!

Description: God urgently commands us to tell others about the birth of his son. In addition to Pastor Eva Marie's message to "tell," our children, youth, and other members of the congregation will "tell" the Christmas story to us in a special message this morning through Scripture, song, and visual representations.

December 21: 4th Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38

Message: The Fourth Imperative of Christmas: Conceive!

Description: Conception is the beginning of something new. God urgently commands us to conceive of a new thought and a new way of living, in which the old, sinful life is a faint memory and we live in the new creation.

December 24: Christmas Eve

We will celebrate Christmas with a Festival of Lessons and Carols

December 28

Wes Baker will be preaching on this day

January 4: Epiphany

Scripture: Isaiah 60:1-6, Matthew 2:1-12

Message: The Final Imperative of Christmas: Shine!

Description: God announced the birth of Jesus with a star, symbolic of God's light in the darkness of a broken world, a light that we are now reflective of. God urgently commands us to shine in a dark world as a reflection of His glorious light.



Our Christmas Eve service will be a traditional Festival of Lessons and Carols. Readers, singers, and musicians are needed for this service as we celebrate the coming of the Messiah with many carols and Scripture readings. Please let Judy Baker or Pastor Em know if you can contribute to this service. It will be held on December 24 at 7:30 p.m.

The 22nd Croton Christmas celebration is coming up quickly! Please sign up in the Welcome Center to bring sandwiches or dessert. Tour booklets are available in the Welcome Center, for \$3.00 each (children may tour for free). The schedule for Croton Christmas is as follows:

- 1:30 – 5:00 pm Tour of Homes
- 2:00 – 3:00 pm Santa on the Square
- 2:00 – 3:00 pm Christmas Tree Decorating on the Town Square (with Cub Scout Pack 423)
- 2:00 – 4:00 pm Horse-Drawn Wagon Rides on the Town Square (\$1 per person)
- 4:00 – 6:30 pm Dinner at the Croton United Methodist Church
- 7:30 pm Candlelight Service at the Croton Church of Christ



You are invited to an Advent Bible Study, "Expect," which is being offered on Monday nights at 6:30 p.m. We will explore prophetic Advent themes from the book of Isaiah that invite us to expect God's presence among us in surprising and transforming ways! Sessions will be held (in the upstairs classroom due to Girl Scouts meeting downstairs) on Dec 1, 8, 15, and 22, with a special Epiphany session on Jan 5.



Our Christmas program, "The Friendly Beasts," will be held on December 14 during the morning worship service. Our children and youth will be presenting this traditional Christmas program, telling the story of Jesus' birth through the eyes of the animals involved in the nativity. Our children are working hard on preparations for this year's program. Children are

practicing in Sunday school and Junior Church. We will have one final rehearsal with all parts together on December 13 from 1:00 – 3:00 pm. We're looking forward to presenting you with the story of "The Friendly Beasts!"

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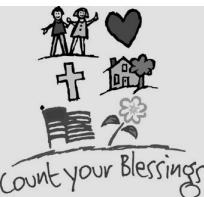
Please note that December order and delivery dates are earlier than usual because of the Christmas holiday! There is a Christmas box available this month, and a special for the holiday season that consists of summer sausages and cheeses. One other exciting new development – orders will now be delivered on the Saturday following the last order date, which means that the wait between the time payment is made and the food is received has been greatly reduced!

Orders for December may be placed at the church on Wednesday, December 3 from 10 am – 12 pm and Thursday, December 4 from 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm. Orders placed at the church must be paid for by cash, money order, cashier's check, or EBT card (food stamps). If you place orders online on our church's website or at www.angelfoodministries.com (choose our church as the host site) you may pay by credit/debit card. All orders must be placed by Sunday, December 7. Pick-up date for December is Saturday, **December 13** from 9 am – 11 am.



Our Youth took their December mystery trip on November 29. Ask them where they have been going on our trips, and why! You'll find that we have been learning a variety of Scriptures and lessons while going to some very different, and somewhat unusual, places to study God's Word. This month, we are not having regular meetings of the children and youth groups so that they may participate in the special Christmas festivities.

Get into the Christmas spirit with carol singing! Our all-church event this month is Christmas caroling, which is scheduled for Thursday, December 18. Bundle up and join us at church at 6:30 p.m. We will go around the neighborhood caroling, and then return to church for some hot drinks and delicious cookies! If you don't want to go out in the cold, come over around 7:30 for the food and hot drinks, and we can sing more carols together!



Counting our Blessings! At our Thanksgiving worship service, we broke up into small groups and counted our blessings. We thought we'd share some of the blessings we named:

1. Spiritual – God, Jesus, salvation, our souls, angels, God's Word, free will
2. Family and friends – moms, dads, children—even teenagers!, grand-

- parents, siblings, neighbors, church family, old friends, pets
3. Volunteers – firefighters, church volunteers, school volunteers
 4. Creation and the natural world – starry nights, rain, sunsets, mountains, catching fish, trees, wheat and corn fields, moon, farms, butterflies
 5. Technology – cars, video games, medicine, furnaces, air conditioning, movies, roads, computers, cell phones, bicycles, indoor plumbing
 6. Professionals – doctors, nurses, mechanics, farmers, police officers
 7. Other – music, food, shelter, shoes, love, books, noses, democracy, pictures, laughter, memories, art, coffee, bedtime



Thank you, Lord!

Seventy-seven shoeboxes have been wrapped, filled, blessed, and delivered to Operation Christmas Child! We can't remember ever having so many! When we delivered them to the collection point, they were amazed at how many boxes we had, and even asked us how we had encouraged the congregation to fill so many. Of course, the answer to that question is that the Spirit filled our hearts and led us to do this in response to the specific needs of the individual children who will receive them. Thanks be to God for His provisions for each of these little ones, and for allowing us to be part of His plan for them.



On December 11 at 9 a.m., we will meet in our church fellowship hall to arrange fruit, cookies, mini-breads and candy on Good Cheer Plates for "Special Friends" to enjoy. If you would like to help in any way, please contact Doris Willison, Elnora Roberts, or Marie Rhodeback, or call the church at 893-2181. We prepare, and plan to deliver, these items all on the same day. Your help is greatly appreciated. Also, if you know of someone who could use a Good Cheer basket, please contact Doris at 892-3444.



The Outreach Team delivered ten Thanksgiving baskets to local families this year. *Thank you* for responding so generously to the need in our community. We also have been delivering Angel Food boxes to families in the community. When we started participating in Angel Food Ministries, Administrative Council voted to purchase 10 boxes to give to local families to introduce them to Angel Food. So far, we have delivered six, and will deliver the final four in December.

In delivering both Thanksgiving baskets and Angel Food baskets, we have been

blessed by the thanks, and sometimes even the tears, of the recipients. Some families have been in desperate need. Others are grateful for a helping hand. In all, we give thanks for God for meeting needs through the response of our church family to God's call.



For December, we are continuing to collect items for Christmas baskets. In addition to traditional food items, please consider paper products, diapers, baby wipes, cleaning supplies, and personal hygiene items that cannot be purchased with EBT cards (food stamps).

We will also have a tree set up in the welcome center with "Christmas Angels." Please take an angel or two, as you are able, to provide a child with a Christmas present that they otherwise would not be able to have. Return any gift you purchase to the church, wrapped and with the tag attached. There will be a table set up in the Welcome Center for distributing angels and collecting presents. Thank you again for helping local children this Christmas season.

Advent Meditations

Four members of our congregation will again be preparing meditations to enhance our spiritual life during this season of Advent. Look for these devotional materials in the bulletin inserts each week during the weeks leading up to Christmas Day. Each week we will focus on the theme of "anticipation." The following scripture will guide our thoughts:

Nov. 30 — Matthew 1:18-25 Joseph anticipated the birth of Jesus after an angel appeared to him in a dream.

Dec. 7 — Luke 1:39-55 Elizabeth anticipated the birth of the Savior when Mary visited her.

Dec. 14 — Luke 2:10-20 The shepherds couldn't believe that the Messiah that they had long anticipated had, indeed, been born. They went to the stable to see for themselves.

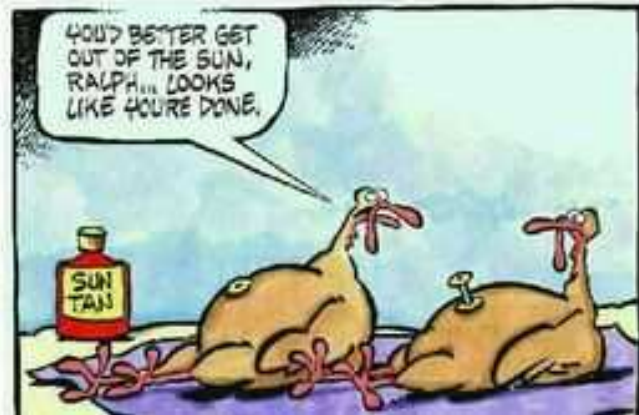
Dec. 21 — Matthew 2:1-12 Wise Men came from far away—following a star. They anticipated that a new king had been born and didn't give up until they found Him.

A Word of Gratitude!

The friends and family of Dawn Merrill appreciate your expressions of love and support following her untimely death.

Bless You

On the Lighter Side...

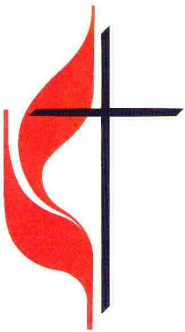


The Sunday School teacher walked into the classroom and was surprised to discover five-year-old Sammie hiding beneath the table. "What are you doing under there?" she asked the youngster. Sammie replied, "I'm playing the game Jesus taught his disciples." "And what game is that?" inquired the curious teacher. Sammie answered, "Seek and you shall find!"

The driver parked his car and then discovered he didn't have any coins for the meter. So he took out a pen and piece of paper and scrawled the following message which he left on his windshield: "'Tis better to forgive and to forget." When he returned a few hours later, another note from the traffic cop had been added along with a ticket for violating the law. The added words said: "Lead me not into temptation."

Marvin Tuttle has notified the church office that he has lost his dog somewhere in the vicinity of Lake Charles. The dog is deaf and answers to the name of Thunder.

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