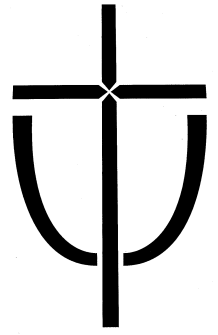




Still Speaking



Indeed, the word of God is living and active...
-Hebrews 4:12

December 2024

New Insights into Christmas

“There was a moment when the Presence of God was felt as uneasy morning sickness.”

—Scott Erickson

As you might imagine, I spend much of my year keeping my eye out for new angles to tell the Christmas story, new insights to use on Christmas Eve to both inspire people with the story of Love Incarnate and then in turn inspire people to incarnate love.

For decades, I have saved articles and highlighted passages that give me a glimpse of Christmas, archiving them away in case they resonate come December. I’ve sat in movie theaters in July, trying to hide the glow of my phone as I take notes about scenes that might give you all new insights into what it might mean for God to be Emmanuel, God-With-Us.

Despite that, I was floundering as I faced the prospect of writing this article. Then I encountered the quote above, noting that there very likely was a moment when Mary experienced the presence of God as morning sickness. It blew my mind.

Now, I’ve talked with folks before about Jesus being truly human, that before he delivered the Sermon on the Mount he undoubtedly had a pimply phase and that eating beans made him gassy just like the rest of us. Oddly, these bits aren’t recorded in the scriptures.

But it never occurred to me that all of the normal things that inevitably happened in Mary’s pregnancy, including morning sickness, were experiences of the presence of God.

And that got me thinking about how other feelings of unease in us might also be experiences of the presence of God. What if our unease is really God growing something new within us? God gestating our capacity for more love

(continued on page 2)

The Inside Scoop

Newsletter Deadline

Our next newsletter will be published the week of February 19, 2025.

The deadline for that newsletter is Friday, February 14, 2025.

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Lectionary Readings**Dec. 22—4th Sunday of Advent**

Micah 5:2-5a

Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 80:1-7

Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)

Dec. 24—Christmas Eve

Isaiah 62:6-12; Psalm 97; Titus 3:4-7

Luke 2:(1-7), 8-20

Dec. 25—Christmas Day

Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)

Dec. 29—1st Sunday after Christmas

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Psalm 148

Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

New Year's Eve and New Year's Day

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13; Psalm 8

Revelation 21:1-6a; Matthew 25:31-46

Jan. 5—2nd Sunday after ChristmasJeremiah 31:7-14 or Sirach 24:1-12 and
Psalm 147:12-20 or

Wisdom of Solomon 10:15-21

Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:(1-9), 10-18

Jan. 6—Epiphany

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Jan. 12—Baptism of the Lord

Isaiah 43:1-7 and Psalm 29

Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Jan. 19—2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 62:1-5 and Psalm 36:5-10

1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

Jan. 26—3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 and Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21

Feb. 2—4th Sunday after Epiphany

Jeremiah 1:4-10 and Psalm 71:1-6

1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30

Feb. 9—5th Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 6:1-8, (9-13) and Psalm 138

1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

(continued from page 1)

and more hope and more justice and more peace? Growth, Erickson notes, is always uneasy, because it's new and stretches us into different ways of being than we've been before.

"Often the change that needs to happen in order for you to grow may leave you dry heaving on the sidelines. Like when you run until you feel like throwing up as you prepare for the day of the marathon. Or the anxiety nausea of packing up your worldly possessions and moving to a part of the world that is unknown to you. Or the gagging nerves of trying to date again. Or the vomitous risk of starting a new career. The uneasiness is not a sign you're doing it wrong. In fact, just as with pregnancy, it's a sign you're on the right track." (Erickson)

Friends, I know that as we approach Christmas, a number of you are living with a feeling of unease. Maybe it's the first holiday without a loved one, or maybe it's the 50th. Maybe the prospect of four hours with your racist/misogynistic uncle is tying your stomach in knots. Maybe the wars continuing to rage in Ukraine and Israel are the source of your unease, or maybe it's the feeling that you've outgrown your marriage, or the fear that the marriage that you fought so hard for may not be legally recognized soon. There's more than enough unease out there to go around.

When we frame our current unease as morning sickness, it not only connects that unease to growth, it also ties it to love. "It is for love that you are being broken open so a larger capacity of faith, hope, and love can be built inside you." (Erickson)

So, maybe this is a saltine and water Christmas. Maybe it's a season in which we sit back and dream and wonder, between the waves of nausea, what God might be gestating within us, what, with God, we might give birth to.

In Joyful Hope,
Rev. Bridget Flad Daniels

Souper Cooks December 26

Want to volunteer, but not sure you can commit to a specific day? Becoming a part of Souper Cooks allows you to choose a time that fits your schedule. Souper Cooks is a group of volunteers that cooks (1 p.m.) and serves (4:45 p.m.) a meal at the NEW Community Shelter (Mather Street) eight Thursdays a year. We look forward to having you as part of our volunteer group. Our next date is December 26.

Please contact:

Marty Berry mjpberry@sbcglobal.net

Achim Seifert Seif409@sbcglobal.net

Our Attendance

November	<u>2024</u>	<u>2023</u>
1st Sunday	127	77
2nd Sunday	134	119
3rd Sunday	113	99
4th Sunday	130	79
Totals	504	374
Average	126.0	93.5

Sojourner Circle Returns January 16

Sojourner Circle returns at 6 p.m. on Thursday, January 16, with dinner and a lecture series regarding the Hmong in America. If you have questions, contact Emily Lakatos at emilyclakatos@gmail.com.

Priscilla Circle Returns January 28

Priscilla Circle returns at 1 p.m. on Tuesday, January 28, in the English Room. An individual from the Aging & Disability Resource Center will speak to the group.

Questions? Contact Helen Krueger at chkruieger@new.rr.com.

Toy Donations Welcome

Union's nursery staff is seeking the donation of gently used toys suitable for 3 to 6-year-olds to refresh our Sunday morning childcare space. Because this is a multi-age offering that welcomes children younger than 3, we would ask folks not to donate toys with small parts that might be choking hazards. Donations can be dropped off in the nursery any Sunday morning. Thank you!

Winter Sowing Workshop

As we look to next year in the native plant gardens, there's a need for quite a few forest floor native plants. We plan to do some winter sowing in gallon milk jugs. We have seeds, a supply of Pro Mix, and a plant corral for overwintering the jugs.

If you'd like to learn this technique and give us a hand, I plan to have a workshop on either Thursday, January 9, or Friday, January 10, at church in the early afternoon. If this interests you, email Cathy Putman (cputman@new.rr.com) or use the sign up sheet at Union Central.

Advent and Christmas at a Glance



Saturday, December 21 Christmas Pageant Rehearsal

9:00 a.m. Costume Distribution and Readers

9:45 a.m. Pageant Walk-Through

Rehearsal should be finished by 11 a.m.

Sunday, December 22 Christmas Pageant

8:30 a.m. Costumes and Rehearsal

10:00 a.m. Christmas Pageant

NO FAITH FORMATION or CONFIRMATION this Sunday.

Tuesday, December 24 Christmas Eve

Our early service is more informal with special thought given to children's attention spans. Our later service of scripture, carols, and candlelight is preceded by wonderful Christmas music starting at 7:30 p.m. Join us!

3:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Family Service

7:30 p.m. The Music of Christmas

8:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Candlelight worship

Sunday, December 29 Christmastide

10:00 a.m. We continue the celebration of Jesus' birth.

NO FAITH FORMATION or CONFIRMATION this Sunday.

January Adult Education

Sundays, 9 a.m., Bagby Chapel

January 5

Making Relationships Work An Overview of the 7 Principles

No doubt you've seen the ad for the 7 Principles Couples Workshop (see page 6). Maybe you're curious about what it actually teaches and why it's any better than the myriad other relationship aids out there.

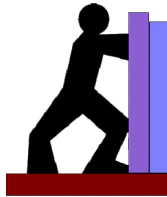
The primary difference between the 7 Principles and most other strategies is that it is based on empiric research done by John Gottman, Ph.D. Rather than assume what works to strengthen (or destroy) relationships, Dr. Gottman spent decades observing thousands of couples, gathering data on their interactions. He then followed each couple for years to determine the patterns that predicted long, happy relationships and those which predicted divorce.

On January 5, Julie Harder will:

- Explain how Gottman did his research
- Provide a brief glimpse of each principle
- Describe the format of the workshop
- Suggest other Gottman resources for those who can't attend the workshop

January 19 Bonhoeffer Discussion Continues

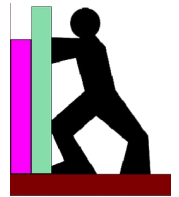
The discussion of the new, controversial film, "Bonhoeffer: Pastor. Spy. Assassin." will continue on January 19 during the Adult Education hour, beginning at 9:00 a.m. in Bagby Chapel. The film is not available online, but there are reviews of the film available. This open discussion will be led by Professor Emeritus Michael Lukens who has engaged in studies of Bonhoeffer's life and work over several decades.



Your Church Library

Christmas Picture Books

by Cathy Putman

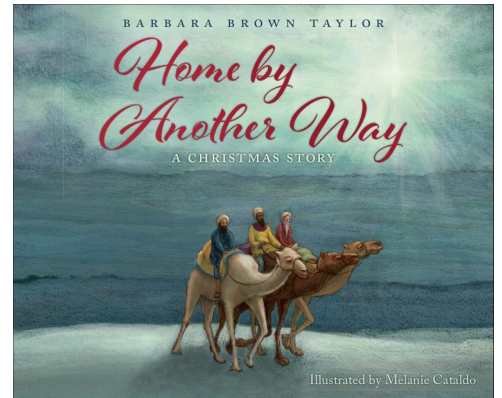


The church library has about three dozen Christmas picture books for use by church families, books that address the interests of toddlers to elementary schoolers, with a few mostly for adults. Two of our more recent purchases are featured here.

Barbara Taylor Brown's "Home by Another Way" follows the wise men in their journey to Bethlehem

in a picture book for all ages. It incorporates a distinct humanness into the mythic as the visitors realize that gold, frankincense and myrrh are not the best choices for baby gifts. This baby offers his own gifts to them.

The "Night of His Birth" is a deeply thoughtful Christmas story better suited for grown-up readers. Katherine Paterson is an acclaimed chapter book author ("Bridge to Terabithia") and she brings a mini-novel sensibility to this work. She tells the story from Mary's point of view through a well-developed context for this 'strange event.'



Blessing Box Food Drive Sunday, January 5

**Thank you for your continuing support
of the Blessing Box ministry!**

Current needs include:

- Boxed or Microwave Soups
- Boxed Cereal
- Fruit Pouches
- Instant Oatmeal or Cocoa Packets
- Instant Pasta or Rice Meals
- Pouch Tuna or Chicken
- Toilet Paper or Paper Towels

Donations can be placed on the cart at the front of the Sanctuary on Sunday, January 5 or on the blue table inside the Mayflower entrance at any time.

Monetary donations are also welcome, and we'll do the shopping! To make a monetary donation, send a check with "Blessing Box" on the memo line, or donate via the church website at www.unionucc.com/giving.



Seminary Secrets January Classes: The Bible's Two (very different) Creation Stories

Most people are taught that the biblical creation story starts with God creating the world in six days, with all of creation "very good," but then Adam and Eve "sin" and thus bring doom upon humanity. It may surprise you to learn that, actually, these two stories were written independently, in very different eras, and for different purposes. For example, the Adam and Eve story is centuries older than the six days of creation story; the latter was written as a parallel to the Babylonian creation story in order to show that Israel's god was superior to the chief Babylonian god.

In January, Seminary Secrets will explore these two creation narratives. Who wrote them and when? What were they trying to accomplish? Do they have any application to our context? If you have never participated in Seminary Secrets, this study would be a good introduction on how to thoughtfully apply the standard tools of historical-critical method to biblical texts. No previous experience required!

LEADER: Julie Harder. Julie holds a master's degree in theology and has taught at St. Norbert College.

VENUE—HYBRID CLASSES: Be present in-person or Zoom in remotely.

DATES: Wednesdays, starting January 8 (will run 5 to 6 weeks)

TIME: 6:15 to 7:30 p.m.

MISS A CLASS? Video recordings will be available so you can catch up.

TO SIGN UP AND GET THE READINGS: Contact Julie at jblackharder@gmail.com.

Our Church Family

Christmas is often the season when we experience extraordinary joy: the joy of the birth of Christ, the joy of gatherings of loved ones, family and friends, the joy of giving and receiving, the joy of hospitality and celebrating God-With-Us.

Yet, because of the very nature of the holiday, many people also encounter great pain at this time, especially around loss and the death of a loved one. The source of our greatest joy can put us in touch with deep sadness.

As we celebrate Christmas, let us be particularly mindful of those who are grieving:

- Grief shared is grief diminished. Call, write notes, visit; invite them out for coffee, to take a walk, etc. Contact the church office if you need a fellow church member's address.
- Talk about the deceased. Many people erroneously think that this is painful for the bereaved. On the contrary, it is part of the healing process to talk about the loved one.
- Let the griever know that you are praying for them; invite them to go to church with you.
- Amidst grief, it is often hard to know what will be good for you. Invite not only grieving people but also their grief to be part of your holiday. Allow people flexibility - it's okay to not make up your mind about plans until the day before. Allow for both joy and sadness - offer time together as well as space to be quiet amidst the celebrations.

In a special way this year, we join with ...

The Seven Principles Couples Workshop — Coming in February!

The Seven Principles Couples Workshop is based on the internationally acclaimed research of Dr. John Gottman as presented in his bestselling book—The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work. This educational workshop is designed to help committed couples improve their friendship, enhance romance and intimacy, and manage conflict constructively.

LEADER: Julie Harder, who has completed training to become a Gottman Leader, will present the workshop.

FORMAT: This structured program, designed by the Gottman Institute, includes short lectures alternating with private couple exercises (no public sharing of issues).

BENEFITS: Provides structure, motivation, and accountability to truly enhance your relationship, using evidence-based tools gleaned from Dr. Gottman’s forty years of research.

LOCATION: Union Congregational Church, 716 S. Madison Street, Green Bay, WI 54301

COST: \$90 per couple includes books and presenter; \$10 Early Bird Discount; scholarships are available by contacting Pastor Bridget Flad Daniels at the church office.

DATES & TIMES: Sundays, February 9, 16, 23 and March 2; 1 to 4:30 p.m. Couples should attend all four sessions.

DEADLINES: Registration must be received by Thursday, January 16. Early Bird deadline is Friday, January 3.

HOW TO REGISTER: Registration forms are available at Union Central or by calling the church office (920-437-9266). Return the form to the church office (see address above). Include a check or pay online at www.unionucc.com/giving (click on “7 Principles Couples Workshop”). Or, register at www.unionucc.com/updates and pay online

Space is limited to 14 couples; registration will close when the workshop fills. Non Union Church members are welcome!

THIS WORKSHOP IS APPROPRIATE FOR HETERO-SEXUAL AND GAY/LESBIAN COUPLES WHO ARE:

- From newlyweds to decades-long marrieds
- Pre-marital or contemplating engagement
- In other long-term committed relationships

IT IS INAPPROPRIATE FOR COUPLES:

- In severe relationship distress or with significant emotional or physical abuse or with mental health problems
- In which one or both partners are addicted to drugs, alcohol, or other compulsive behavior.

QUESTIONS? Contact Julie Harder at julie.harder.projects@gmail.com.

Women’s Advent Event was December 2

(photos by Sue Tucker)



Union Church Calendar

December 22, 2024—February 4, 2025

December 22 Sunday

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
CHRISTMAS PAGEANT**

NO Faith Formation or Confirmation

10:00 a.m. Union's Christmas Pageant in the sanctuary (or stream it online) followed by Coffee Hour

December 24 Tuesday

CHRISTMAS EVE

3:00 p.m. Early Worship Service
7:30 p.m. The Music of Christmas
8:00 p.m. Candlelight Worship Service

CHURCH OFFICE is CLOSED

December 25 Wednesday

CHRISTMAS DAY

HAVE A BLESSED CHRISTMAS!
CHURCH OFFICE is CLOSED

December 29 Sunday

NO FAITH FORMATION or
CONFIRMATION

10:00 a.m. Worship in the sanctuary or stream it online

December 31-January 1

Tuesday-Wednesday

CHURCH OFFICE is CLOSED

January 5 Sunday

9:00 a.m. Faith Formation and Confirmation
10:00 a.m. Worship with Holy Communion in the sanctuary (or stream it online) followed by Coffee Hour in the church hall

January 7 Tuesday

4:30 p.m. Outreach Ministry
5:30 p.m. Worship Ministry
6:30 p.m. Chancel Choir

January 8 Wednesday

7:00 a.m. Men's Breakfast Group
1:00 p.m. Bible Study
6:15 p.m. Seminary Secrets

January 12 Sunday

9:00 a.m. Faith Formation and Confirmation
10:00 a.m. Worship in the sanctuary (or stream it online) followed by Coffee Hour in the church hall

January 13 Monday

5:00 p.m. Common Ministry

January 14 Tuesday

4:00 p.m. Education Ministry
5:00 p.m. Stewardship Ministry
5:30 p.m. Bell Choir
6:30 p.m. Chancel Choir

January 15 Wednesday

1:00 p.m. Bible Study
5:45 p.m. Dinner
6:15 p.m. Youth Group
6:15 p.m. Seminary Secrets

January 16 Thursday

6:00 p.m. Sojourner Circle

January 19 Sunday

9:00 a.m. Faith Formation and Confirmation
10:00 a.m. Worship in the sanctuary (or stream it online) followed by Coffee Hour in the church hall

January 20 Monday

11:30 a.m. Ladies Lunch Bunch at the Village Grille

January 21 Tuesday

5:30 p.m. Bell Choir
6:30 p.m. Chancel Choir

January 22 Wednesday

1:00 p.m. Bible Study
6:15 p.m. Seminary Secrets

January 26 Sunday

189th ANNUAL MEETING

9:00 a.m. Faith Formation and Confirmation
10:00 a.m. Worship in the sanctuary (or stream it online) followed by Annual Meeting and Potluck

January 28 Tuesday

1:00 p.m. Priscilla Circle
6:30 p.m. Chancel Choir

January 29 Wednesday

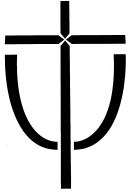
1:00 p.m. Bible Study

February 2 Sunday

9:00 a.m. Faith Formation and Confirmation
10:00 a.m. Worship with Holy Communion in the sanctuary (or stream it online) followed by Coffee Hour in the church hall

February 4 Tuesday

4:30 p.m. Outreach Ministry
5:30 p.m. Worship Ministry
6:30 p.m. Chancel Choir



Union Congregational
United Church of Christ
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ANNUAL MEETING

Call to the 189th Annual Meeting

The 189th Annual Meeting of Union Congregational United Church of Christ will convene on Sunday, January 26 at 11:30 a.m. We will conduct our business meeting and share a time of fellowship after our agenda is concluded. Reports concerning the ministry of Union Church in 2024 will be presented, outgoing ministry chairs and vice-chairs will be recognized, elections will be held for new leaders, and a budget for the ministry of Union Church in 2025 will be adopted.

Our annual report will be emailed to all households on our mailing list. Contact the church office if you would like a paper copy mailed to you.

Union Congregational United Church of Christ

716 S. Madison Street
Green Bay, WI 54301
e-mail: office@unionucc.com
(920) 437-9266

Bridget M. Flad Daniels

Senior Minister

Tim Harder, M.D.

Moderator

Church Office Hours

Mon.-Fri. 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

For more information about us,
visit our web page
at <http://www.unionucc.com>