



Cedar Grove UMC

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Office Hours

Monday	10:00 am to 5:00 pm
Tuesday	10:00 am to 5:00 pm
Wednesday	10:00 am to 5:00 pm

From the Pastor's Desk . . .

CHRISTMAS 2014

The four Gospels give us four different ways to look at the birth of Jesus. The Gospel of Mark ignores it and starts with the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist and how Jesus came preaching about the Kingdom of God. The Gospel of John tells us theologically what it meant that the Word became flesh. Luke tells us the story of how Mary found herself with child and the beautiful story of Jesus being born in the manger. Finally, Matthew tells the story of how Joseph came to accept what had happened to his bride and tells us the story of the magi who came to honor the new born King. The story of the coming of Jesus is best remembered when we combine all four of these accounts. All four accounts tell us powerfully about who Jesus is and why He came into the world.

My guess is if I asked you to tell the story of the coming of Jesus you would tell the story combining Luke and Matthew. This is not a criticism for most of the imagery we use and decorations we put up tell Luke's and Matthew's story because they describe the conception and birth of Jesus. For me Mark and John deserve to be remembered because Mark makes it so clear that child's destiny was to proclaim the Kingdom of God and John makes it clear that Jesus is the Word, a message to us to save us. I encourage you to read on Christmas Eve and/or Day Mark 1, John 1:1-18, Luke 1-2, and Matthew 1-2 and embrace the totality of how God introduces Jesus to us. We should take time to receive anew the gift, its meaning and importance. It doesn't matter how young or old you are, we should take the time to embrace the truth and power of the coming of Christ.

But Christmas time is not just to be a time of reflection and wonder, it is also a time for us to act upon what we know is true about the coming of Jesus. Christmas presents a unique opportunity each year to share the truth about Jesus. So I encourage you to use Christmas 2014 to say and do things that tell those around you, this is the reason for the season. For Jesus came to us not so that we could have a gift giving holiday or to gather our families or to get a day off of work, but rather to save sinners, to change lives, and to glorify God. Take time this Christmas to make it clear to those close and far, family and stranger, that ultimately what you celebrate on Christmas is the salvation that came through that babe in a manger. Do this by sharing the Good News, helping the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the jailed, the lonely, and the naked and do this by helping the church be the church.

It is my hope and prayer for all of you that you have a very Happy Christmas and a blessed New Year and that Jesus is at the center and heart of all you do this Christmas and next year.

Your fellow servant of our Lord and Savior,

Glen





Book Corner



Christmas: The Sacred to Santa
Tara Moore Reaktion Books Ltd. 2014 261pgs

I always like to review a Christmas related book in the December newsletter, and I saw this book in a discount catalog from an academic press seller so I bought it. It is a nice solidly built hardback printed on high quality paper with illustrations throughout. I didn't realize that it had just come out because usually discounted books are at least a few years old, but this book was written this year. I also feared that this book might be anti-Christian Christmas or only briefly address the Christian nature of Christmas but my fears were answered by a well written, even handed, and insightful book.

The first two chapters are an excellent look at the Christian origin of Christmas and give clear explanations as to how the year of his birth was figured out, what day, and other facts about how the Christian Christmas began and developed. For example in determining the date of Jesus' birth one must consider societal norms, when would the shepherds be out watching their flocks, and other little issues. Without choosing which answers are best Moore lays out the various arguments and ways these events were studied, and answers given. The book is worth having just for these two chapters!

The middle section of the book addresses interesting aspects of Christmas such as how it is depicted in art, when Christmas was outlawed, the effect of being away from home on Christmas and how people cope with it, how commercialism has impacted Christmas, how other figures have competed with St. Nicholas such as Krampus have competed for center place in Christmas, and Christmas traditions from around the world.

The book concludes with a chapter on the battle for Christmas between the church and the world and a concluding chapter. Throughout the whole book Moore simply reports the facts and speculation and bashes neither side of how Christmas is celebrated she simply tells you the story of Christmas.

I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to think concretely about Christmas and what it means. There is really something for everyone in this book, beautiful pictures and artwork, an investigation of the religious aspect of Christmas, and an interesting look at all of the rest of the Christmas traditions.

CHURCH NEWS

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Services: This year we will be having one Christmas Eve service at 8pm and one Christmas Day service at 10am. Come and celebrate in worship, the way God intended, the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ!

Poinsettia Orders. Each year during the Christmas season the altar is adorned with poinsettias that are sponsored by members of our congregation. If you would like to sponsor a red poinsettia plant, please complete an order form at church and leave it with your payment in the offering plate. The deadline to order is Sunday, Dec. 14th. Please contact the office should you have questions.

Greening of the Church: Join us on December 3rd from 6pm to 7:30pm as we gather for soup, fellowship, and to decorate the church for Christmas. The youth group and the women's Bible study are leading this event and we would love to have has many helping hands as possible.

Cedar Grove Family Tree: Join us in decorating the Cedar Grove Christmas Tree this year by bringing in an appropriate ornament from your home or purchasing a new ornament and placing it on the Christmas Tree in the narthex on Sunday, December 7th. Please be sure to mark it with your name!

Wednesday Night Dinners: We will not have dinner on December 17th, 24th, and 31st. The dinners and groups will resume on January 7th. (Some of the groups will be having Christmas parties on the 17th.)

Thanks to everyone who helped us have a great Thanksgiving Eve dinner and mission on November 26th.

Care Packages for Service Members in Afghanistan. This Christmas season, our kids' Sunday school classes will be combining (K-12th grade) on Sunday, Dec. 7 to assemble care packages and make cards for our service members in Afghanistan. **How you can help:** We can use donations of the following favorite treats: M&Ms (all flavors); any snack bags of chocolates, Twizzlers, Oreos and Chips Ahoy chocolate chip cookies; Non-dairy coffee creamer, and Starbucks K-cup coffee pods. We will also gratefully accept Christmas cards (for the kids to write) and money for postage. If you have school-age kids, please bring them to Sunday school at 9:00 am so that they may participate.

Angel Tree Gifts for Children at Deale Elementary School: CGUMC is again working with Deale Elementary to provide Christmas gifts for children in need. If you can sponsor a child, please take a star from the bulletin board in the church hallway, purchase the noted gifts for the child, and then deliver the gifts wrapped in a gift bag with the star attached to the Church **by Sunday, Dec. 14th**. Please contact the office should you have questions.

WHAT ABOUT THE DINOSAURS AND OTHER QUESTIONS? A STUDY OF GENESIS 1-11

I can't tell you how many times recently I have been asked the question "What about the dinosaurs?". It is the newest version of the question "how do we reconcile the creation story with what modern science is telling us?". But there are many other things about Genesis 1-11 that are debated, considered controversial, or are wondered about. For example: Do you know that some do not believe that Eve was the first woman created according to the Bible? Do you know that the Bible tells the story of creation in Genesis 1-2, not once but twice? Ever wondered why the apple became the most common image of what fruit was on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Why was Cain's offering rejected? Do you know the true ending of Noah's story according to the Bible? What was really wrong about the building of the Tower of Babel? I would like to offer a Bible study to answer and address these and other questions.

This Bible study is open to anyone and no previous Bible knowledge is required. It will be a detailed study, along with a close reading and interpretation of Genesis 1-11, that will include:

- » How do Christians, Jews, and Muslims agree/differ on their understanding of Genesis 1-11?
- » How do we as Christians understand Genesis 1-11 in light of modern science?
- » How is Genesis 1-11 understood in different cultures, at different times, and different perspectives?
- » Why is knowing and understanding Genesis 1-11 so important and help us in understanding the rest of the Bible?
- » What else does the Bible have to say about the stories in Genesis 1-11?

If there is enough interest, I will hold this Bible study on Monday nights, starting January 12, at 7pm to 8:15pm. (Also, if there is interest, I would be willing to teach this class on Tuesday mornings at 10am.) There will be at least 10 sessions and maybe more depending on the progress that we make. There will be a sign-up sheet in the narthex. If you have any questions about this study please do not hesitate to let me know.