



Vestry Voices

The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational
Church of Clinton

December 2021

Editor
Charles T. Tamminen

Now and NOT Yet

God's saving grace has been revealed to all ... training to righteousness ...
while waiting for the blessed hope of His appearing

Titus 2:11-14 (Paraphrase)

You broke the bonds and you
Loosed the chains
Carried the cross
Of my shame
You know I believed it
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

Bono & U2

Inside this issue:

Now and NOT Yet	1
Sundays in December	2
Sterling Village Christmas Presents	2
First Christmas!	3
Movie Night	4
Candlelight Christmas Eve Service in the Sanctuary	4
December 2021 Calendar of Events	5



Rev. Gary Kiontke



When I first heard Bono sing “*I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For*,” I wondered how he could be so sure of receiving full forgiveness from Jesus and still feel discontented. Part of the reason I felt this way about the song is most of the troubles in my life are self-inflicted. Once I knew by grace, through faith in Jesus’ work on the Cross, that I was forgiven and reconciled with God through Him, I had what I thought I was looking for. But that was over thirty years ago. Since then I have become more aware of great injustices around the world, and in the United States. One reason is that “the whole world in the evil one is being made (temporarily) to exist” (1 John 5:18-21, my translation). But as I have gotten a better understanding of the meaning of Advent, I have come to realize it is a good song for Advent.

In Jesus’ first coming (advent), He made the way for sinful people to be reconciled to a perfect and holy God. He loosed the chains of the sins that bind us to death through His death on the Cross. As a result, all who turn to Him and confess their sins to God, and believe they will be forgiven because Jesus The Savior died in their place, receive forgiveness and the resurrection life of Jesus as The Holy Spirit brings their dead spirits to life (Titus 3:4-8). Before Jesus returned to His Father, He told His disciples to make disciples of all nations and to be His witnesses in ever widening circles to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:1-8). Fifty days after His Resurrection, on the day

of Pentecost, Jesus and His Father poured out the Holy Spirit from the Throne in the highest heaven on His disciples, and the Church (the Body of Christ) was born (Acts 2). By the end of the book of Acts, local churches had been planted and sprung up throughout the Roman Empire. One-time agnostic historian Rodney Stark in his book *The Rise of Christianity* says there were an estimated thirteen million Christians in the world by the time of Constantine’s conversion.

This rapid growth was in spite of intense persecutions of Christians from the start. Jesus said in the Upper Room, at the last Passover before His death, that His followers will always be experiencing some kind of tribulation (John 16:17-33). And in his last letter before being executed as a Christian, Paul wrote to his son in the faith, Timothy, that all desiring to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:10-17). This is because of the influence of the evil one mentioned above in the conclusion of the apostle John’s discipleship letter to churches at the end of the first century.

In his follow up book on the history of Christianity, *The Triumph of Christianity*, finished on Palm Sunday, 2011, now Christian Rodney Stark writes over four hundred pages on the amazing world-wide growth of Jesus’ Church up to the current new millennium.

All of this is the “now” people are living in. But, even with amazing world-wide Church growth, the majority of people on earth are not yet Christians; persecution of Christians world-wide has been increasing; there is a world-wide pandemic; govern-

(continued on page 2 ...)



Now and NOT Yet (... continued from page #1)

ments are oppressing people in many countries; and, people are dividing into many hostile fragments of “us” versus “them,” both in the public arena and on virtual platforms. This is causing many of the majority of people who do not know Jesus to despair.

The hope Christians have in this present world is the second coming (advent) of Jesus for the final judgment. When He returns, all that is wicked will be cast into the eternal lake of fire; and, all followers of Jesus will serve Him forever with joy in the new heaven and earth (Revelation 20-22). As amazing as it sounds, Christians can in some way hasten that day (2 Peter 3:8-14).

The second coming (advent) of Jesus is the “and NOT yet” all Christians are longing for. This is why many church historians call the time between Pentecost and the Second

Coming, in which we are living, the time of “now and NOT yet.” This is our focus during Advent this year. We look back in gratitude that Jesus came to earth to initiate God’s Rescue Mission. And we look forward to His return to establish His eternal Kingdom where there will be no sin, and His people will enjoy His amazing life-giving LOVE by serving Him forever.

These are the “now and NOT yet” themes for the four weeks of Advent: faith-hope, fulfillment-peace, light-joy, and God with us-LOVE. The Christmas Eve service will be about God’s saving grace in Jesus. And for the Sunday after Christmas, when people think about taking down their Christmas trees, some of the amazing people in the human family tree of Jesus will be discussed.

May you all have a blessed Christmas season.

Sundays in December

We will have Communion on December 5 and 19.

Our Candlelight Service will be Friday, December 24 at 7:00 PM in the sanctuary.

Here are the details on the sermon texts and themes for each of the worship services:

Date	Scripture	Title
December 5	<i>Esther 4:1-7;</i> <i>Matthew 5:13-16</i>	To fulfill His Word of deliverance, God raises up the right person at the right time
December 12	<i>Isaiah 42:1-9;</i>	Jesus came to bring light and freedom to all people
December 19	<i>Matthew 1:18-25;</i> <i>Psalm 23</i>	God’s LOVE is shown through Emmanuel (God with us)
December 24	<i>Luke 2:8-20;</i> <i>Psalm 95</i>	God gives the peace of salvation because of His grace
December 26	<i>Matthew 1:1-17;</i> <i>Psalm 132:1-12</i>	Jesus The Messiah is the son of Abraham and of king David

As we go through the season of Advent and Christmas, we invite people to participate in the gathering together to worship the glorious God and Savior who came to give abundant life now so His servants will serve Him in the new heaven and earth forever and ever (John 10:7-11; Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5).

Sterling Village Christmas Presents

This year we are providing Christmas gifts to 40 residents at Sterling Village.

The gifts need to be at the church by Sunday, December 19.





First Christmas!

By: A Shepherd That Got It

This is the reprint of an article that first appeared in the December 2018 Vestry Voices:



I remember my father telling me the story that was told by his father's father, and so on, back to when Moses directed the generations to come to tell of the love of God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1, 1:1) So there we were, keeping watch over our flocks when "An angel of the Lord appeared to (us) them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and (we) they were terrified. But the angel said to (us) them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord."

"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests.'" (Luke 2:9-14). "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1, 1:14)

"But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.'" (Luke 1:30-32)

"When the angels had left (us) them and gone into heaven, (we) the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.' So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told." (Luke 2:15-20)

"Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (John 1, 1:12-13). "But as I told you, you have seen Me and still you do not believe. ... For I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent me. ... For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him

shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day." (John 6:36-40)

"For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them' ... 'It is written they will all be taught by God. Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from Him comes to Me.' ... 'Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life.' ... 'But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.'" (John 6:33-51)

"Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, 'Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you — they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.' He went on to say, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled them.' From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed Him." (John 6:61-66)

The terrified shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen. Truly the first Christmas was grand beyond duplication but more significant was how God as the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. God, in the flesh, as Jesus, announced He brought the Kingdom of heaven to earth when He entered our world as a man. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matthew 4:17). The concept of His love is so moving that it is compared to the faith of a mustard seed moving a mountain. The "Father's will is that everyone ... shall have eternal life." But first "repent" and turn from our ways and look to the Son and believe in Him. Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. ... It is written in the Prophets: They will all be taught by God. Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from Him comes to Me." "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened ... how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:9-13)

As we all know, anything given freely won't be appreciated and loses the spirit from which it was given. To realize the true meaning of Christmas is to understand why "many of

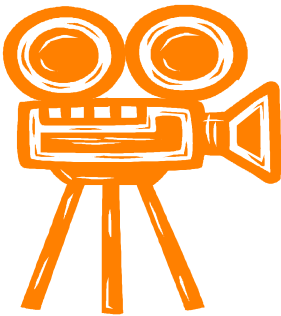
(continued on page 4 ...)

First Christmas! (... continued from page #3)

his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.” It is our sole (also soul!) responsibility to discover why God gives “the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die.” Following the steps for the Bread of Life will unfold the mystery to the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. Few will travel the narrow road to find the small

gate and that leads to life. I leave you with the words Jesus teaches in the Lord’s Prayer (God) “Our Father, ... Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven ...”. May you find this place of peace and joy beyond human understanding.

Movie Night **Friday, December 17 at 7:00 PM**



We show a movie once each month, in Fellowship Hall, usually on the fourth Friday (third Friday, this month). The movies shown in the past have covered a range of genres, and were usually thought provoking.

We are able to show these movies based on the church’s CVLI® license. However, this license does not allow us to advertise or publicize the names of these movies to the general public, and they are always free of charge.

We usually have free snacks available, and you are also welcome to bring your own meal, if you wish (many of us do!). So, please join us for a night out at the movies!



Candlelight Christmas Eve Service in the Sanctuary

Because it was such a blessing last year, the Candlelight Christmas Eve service will again be in the sanctuary. If anyone has difficulty with the front stairs, help will be available to get him or her up to the sanctuary and back out after *Silent Night*. This will be a wonderful way for us to close the calendar year with a traditional Christmas Eve service.



Photo by Susan H. from Freemages



DECEMBER 2021

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1 (††)	2 (**)	3	4
5 Communion Sunday; Advent #2 (Note #1)	6	7	8 (††)	9 (**)	10	11
12 FCC Worship; Advent #3; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #2)	13	14	15 (††)	16 (**)	17 Movie Night (Note #3)	18
19 Communion Sunday; Advent #4; Sterling Village Presents (Note #4)	20	21	22 (††)	23 (**)	24 Christmas Eve Candlelight Service (Note #5)	25 CHRISTMAS DAY
26 Christmas Sunday Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #6)	27	28	29 (††)	30 (**)	31	

Calendar Notes:

- #1) 12/05 — Communion and Second Sunday of Advent: **10:27 AM.**
- #2) 12/12 — Third Sunday of Advent: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour after Worship.
- #3) 12/17 — Movie Night — in Fellowship Hall: **7:00 PM.**
- #4) 12/19 — Communion and Fourth Sunday of Advent: **10:27 AM.**
Also: Have all Sterling Village Christmas presents at the church building.
- #5) 12/24 — Sanctuary Christmas Eve Candlelight Service: **7:00 PM.**
- #6) 12/26 — Christmas Sunday Worship: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour after Worship.
- (††) Wednesday Bible Study: **6:00 PM** (in Fellowship Hall).
- (**) Thursday Prayer in Parlor: **3:00 PM.**

