



Vestry Voices

The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational
Church of Clinton

December 2022

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Jesus Is Coming Again

[Christ] will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him

Hebrews 9:28b (RSV)

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God

Hebrews 10:31 (RSV)



Rev. Gary Kiontke

Advent, beginning the fourth Sunday before Christmas, is a time when the church of Jesus Christ looks forward to His second coming. It is a time for His people to recommit to Him and His mission on earth. In the apostle Peter's last letter to persecuted churches scattered throughout nations around the Mediterranean Sea, he wrote that it is possible for people in Jesus' Church to hasten the day in which He will return (2 Peter 3:11-14). He will return when His Church has made disciples of the people of all nations. Disciples having been taught to obey all He commanded by His grace through faith (Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 2:8-10).

The day of Christ's second coming is called the "day of the Lord" twenty-five times in the Bible. The last time is in Peter's letter. But, as the quotes at the head of this article suggest, it will be a day of mixed results. When Jesus returns, He will separate "the sheep from the goats." The latter will go to eternal punishment and the former into eternal life (Matthew 25:31-46).

Nowhere is this more strongly stated than in the prophet Amos. He was sent to the northern ten tribes of Israel who had rejected their covenant God for worthless idols for almost two hundred years. As a result the widows, orphans, poor and needy were living under the weight of heavy oppression of a greedy and powerful minority. As the rulers fell deeper into depravity, spurred on by false prophets who got a portion of the ill-gotten gains, they were assuming they would benefit by the "day of the Lord." Through Amos, the Lord debunks this notion. He begins by saying, "Woe to you who desire the day of

the LORD!" This day will be darkness to them, not light. He follows with two metaphors of judgment: As if fleeing from a lion and meeting a bear, or leaning on the wall of a house to be bitten by a serpent (see Revelation 20:2). Doubling down on the opening statement, he continues, the "day of the LORD" is very dark (like the underworld) with no brightness in it. He then tells them He despises all their half-hearted worship rituals before again condemning their idolatry. He concludes by saying He will be the cause of their captivity. They experienced this negative "day of the Lord" some thirty years later when Israel was conquered by Assyria and carried into exile (Amos 5:18-27).

The only hope for Israel, and the people of every nation on earth, is to receive the gift of the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1-18). He came to earth the first time conceived by the Holy Spirit in a young virgin who found grace in God's eyes. From the time He reached the age when priests entered into service (Numbers 4), He traveled throughout David's Israel, showing and telling the people all about God. Then, on the day the Passover lamb was sacrificed, He gave His life on a Roman cross to pay the penalty of sin for all who come to Him in humble, dependent and obedient faith. All who receive Him enter God's family and kingdom, having their born-dead spirits made alive by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14; 2:1-5). Through the Spirit they are empowered to share His amazing sacrificial love with everyone they know, as Paul reminded Timothy (2 Timothy 1:6-11).

Because of the first Christmas and all Jesus did, His Church has His marching orders to work for His return by obeying His final command in the faith He gives to His brothers and sisters who know His will and

(continued on page 2 ...)

Inside this issue:

Jesus Is Coming Again	1
Worship in December	2
It Just Happens ... Life Has Been a Blur	2
Sterling Village Christmas Presents	4
Movie Night	4
Renato Menezes and Luis Gregorio	4
Sunday, December 18	4
Candlelight Christmas Eve Service in the Sanctuary	4
December 2022 Calendar of Events	5



Jesus Is Coming Again (... continued from page #1)

do it (Matthew 12:50). So, starting now, let us all meditate on this brief survey of the “day of the Lord” from God’s Word in order to “please Him in every way” (Colossians 1:10-14, NIV).

May you always experience the blessings of Christmas, when Jesus’ Church remembers the eternal Word who took on human flesh to redeem them to work for Him to hasten His return. ~V~

Worship in December

We will have Communion on December 4 and 18.

Our Candlelight Service will be Saturday, 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 4	Ezekiel 37:1-14; John 11:25-26	God raises “dead bones” by His Spirit
December 11	Isaiah 55:1-13; John 4:13-14	God gives the “bread of life” to the thirsty poor
December 18	John 1:1-18; Psalm 130:5-8	The eternal spirit-savior took on human flesh
December 24	Luke 2:8-20 Psalm 96:7-10	Mary treasured the grace she knew as the mother of The Savior
December 25	Luke 2:8-20 Psalm 123:1-2	Those who encounter The Savior will tell others about Him

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).

It Just Happens ... Life Has Been a Blur

By Petros

“It Just Happens ...” there are many Bible verses that have become my anchors because God’s Word helps me to believe in the righteousness of His people and the way to live; including finding the Kingdom of God (Heaven) where I have been given a life of peace and joy. His Word is like a beacon of light in a dark world getting darker. There are people, including loved ones, who have been blinded from the Word. Unknowingly doing Satan’s work and thinking they are fighting for their personal freedom and values. Our land, which every American was proud to proclaim, has allowed changing long time standards (what the Bible states is wrong). It has reached a point where laws are imposed on fellow Bible believers to conform to the new socially approved standard, even though God’s Word clearly defines it as sin. It appears that we are spiraling downward, spinning around the rim of a downspout and soon the irreversible plunge. Take heart, “for where there is Light ... darkness has to flee.”

“It Just Happens ...” taking a bathroom break as I write, on Insight for Living, Rev. Chuck Swindoll just said, “today ... we are in the worst cultural confusion – ever ... God’s Word will silence the noise ...”



“It Just Happens ...” this week’s service song by Clara Scott, *Open My Eyes, That I May See*, highlighted the need to “... live and keep Your word. Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law ...” (Psalm 119:17-18). The lyrics line up perfectly with our need for the Light; illuminate, as defined by M. Webster, is to “enlighten spiritually or intellectually.”

(continued on page 3 ...)



It Just Happens ... (... continued from page #2)

Open My Eyes, That I May See
Clara Scott

Open my eyes, that I may see Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key That shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready my God, Thy will to see,
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my ears, that I may hear Voices of truth Thou sendest clear;
And while the wave notes fall on my ear, Everything false will disappear.
Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready my God, Thy will to see,
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my mind, that I may read More of Thy love in word and deed;
What shall I fear while yet Thou dost lead? Only for light from Thee I plead.
Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready my God, Thy will to see,
Open my mind, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my mouth, and let me bear, Gladly the warm truth everywhere;
Open my heart and let me prepare Love with Thy children thus to share.
Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready my God, Thy will to see,
Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!

The signs of God's Law being undermined by man's law speaks loudly to me that time is running out. How much suffering is God going to allow. The need is now for loved family and friends to know they will face eternal death if they don't know Jesus. The to-do list keeps growing. I'm not sure why every thing seems to be a blur. Maybe Covid and the protocols to follow. Whatever, I find myself planning and doing "backyard work." Even when I take a break and try to clear my mind to listen to God ... in less than two minutes I'm thinking "backyard work." God has a plan for each person. And each person will stand before the throne – either you're with Him or against Him.

Things break down, need replacement, etc., but they are things in the end time that will burn and rust. Loved ones and our thoughts of them stay with us.

"It Just Happens ..." Rev. Chuck Swindoll referenced Revelation 22 when he said, "today ... we are in the worst cultural confusion – ever." ... "there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever ... These words are faithful and true; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place. ... behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book." (Revelation 22:5-7).

A while back, I discovered that nothing I say or relate to can give the reader a hunger for the Word. A hunger that is

insatiable. A hunger that the Truth discovered by reading the Word and accepting God on the terms He has for the reader awakens the senses to want more. Discovering the meaning of repenting. Setting aside quiet time, just as Jesus prayed before the sun came up to God the Father. This was how I found the Kingdom of God. I believe setting aside time with God everyday will help me to give up my compulsions. The reader has to discover for oneself to find and own the desires of God. Start by reading the Bible to find the great "I Am" who wants to be our God.

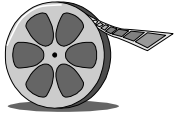
In closing, I pray that this verse will help you as it has so abundantly for me and will continue to do so – to eternity. *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not depend on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight."* (Proverbs 3:5-6). Amen. ~W~

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not depend on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight."



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 18. As of the publication date, there are several residents who need someone to buy them gifts.



Movie Night Friday, December 16 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!



Renato Menezes and Luis Gregorio

In September, Renato Menezes gave his notice that December 25 would be his last Sunday as the piano player for our Sunday morning worship. The good news in this is that he has found a replacement from the music worship team in his home church, Luis Gregorio. He came early with Renato on Sunday, November 20 to meet with many of us and get to know us through worshipping with us. After the benediction I was able to meet with the both musicians long enough to know that both men have the spiritual gift for leading worship music. They both speak highly of each other's talents. Renato says that Luis plays multiple instruments and is an excellent soloist on the violin. Just before our meeting ended Luis said that until he was eighteen years old he was part of the Spanish Adventist Church that met in the FCC building until 2000, the year before I was called to FCC. He said it felt good to be back in the building that was an important part of his childhood. He will be an asset to FCC. I can't wait to start working with him on New Year's Sunday, 2023.

Sunday, December 18

Renato has agreed to stay after the benediction on Sunday December 18 so we may say good-bye to him and to wish him well in the future. Mark your calendars and come to thank our brother for twenty years of blessing us with his gift of leading us in worship with his piano playing, and all he has done to lead us into deeper worship with our voices.



Candlelight Christmas Eve Service in the Sanctuary

Once again the Candlelight Christmas Eve service will be at 7:00 PM 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.



DECEMBER 2022

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

Calendar Notes:

- #1) 12/4 — Communion and Second Sunday of Advent: **10:27 AM.**
- #2) 12/11 — Third Sunday of Advent: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour after Worship.
- #3) 12/16 — Movie Night — in Fellowship Hall: **7:00 PM.**
- #4) 12/18 — Communion and Fourth Sunday of Advent: **10:27 AM.**
Also: Have Sterling Village Christmas presents at the church building.
Also: Farewell for Renato Menezes, With Coffee Hour after Worship.
- #5) 12/24 — Sanctuary Christmas Eve Candlelight Service: **7:00 PM.**
- #6) 12/26 — Christmas Sunday Worship: **10:27 AM.**
- (††) Wednesday Bible Study: Psalms — **3:00 PM (in Fellowship Hall).**
- (**) Thursday Prayer in Parlor: **3:00 PM.**

