



Vestry Voices

The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational
Church of Clinton

December 2023

Editor
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Waiting for the Return of The King

[K]eep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And convince some, who doubt; save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear ...

Jude, verses 21:23 (RSV)



Rev. Gary Kiontek



When I read the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy my sophomore year at WPI, I was one of the last guys in the dorm to read these books. There were many discussions about how the fantasy world of Middle Earth connected with the real world in which we are living.

We all agreed that hobbits are common every day people. One guy who lived across the hall from me thought they were “very British.”

If anyone has never read the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and is planning to read it sometime in the future, this is a spoiler alert to skip ahead to “*Advent this year*” (in the next column).

About half-way through the first book we meet Aragorn, son of Arathorn, a.k.a. Strider, the leader of the Rangers. I was very intrigued by him. He is introduced as a secretive man who hangs out in bars. He has both a loyal following and detractors. It is whispered that he is the deposed rightful king of Middle Earth. At that point, I had a feeling he was a hero, but I was not quite sure. I asked a friend who had completed reading the trilogy if he could tell me, without giving away any details, whether I could afford to invest emotional energy in him as a good guy, or maybe his detractors were right about him? He assured me Aragorn is a hero.

The last novel is *The Return of the King*. At the end of the book, after Aragorn leads the victory over evil forces, he is finally installed as king over Middle Earth.

Now that I am a follower of King Jesus, and know God’s Word better, I can see that Aragorn is a “type” of Jesus: King of kings and Lord of lords. And, his part in the “big story” is what Advent is all about. At this time, Jesus is in the world, but He is “hidden” in His Church. He has both loyal

followers and detractors. But, a day is soon coming when He will return to put an end to all evil, and rule the universe as its rightful King.

Advent this year:

We will look at the following themes during the four weeks of Advent. First, our present hope is based on the truth that even now, Jesus is bringing justice to the earth, and He will fully establish it when He returns (Isaiah 42:1-4), our glory is in knowing He is doing justice now (Jeremiah 9:23-24; 33:15), and he is feeding His flock in justice (Ezekiel 34:16). Second, our present peace is from the comfort the mighty Lord gives (Isaiah 40:1-10; 17-19; Zechariah 1:16-17). Third, our joy comes from God who builds up what was destroyed (Ezra 1:1-4; Psalm 147:1-8; Isaiah 45:11-13; Jeremiah 31:27-34; Zechariah 6:11-15). Fourth, love is why God sent His Son to give salvation (Isaiah 25:7-9; 46:12-13; 49:5-10; 56:1; Hosea 10:12; Habakkuk 3:17-18; Luke 1:67-80). In short, Jesus will forever establish justice, comfort, building up and salvation when he returns as King of kings.

There is one more aspect of Advent we need to practice before we celebrate the birth of The King over two-thousand years ago. We should seek every day, while we are in the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, to reflect on how we are living our lives. Then we need to repent of areas in our lives where we are falling short of whatever He wants us to do that we are not doing.

Then we need to pray He will help us to do what we are not doing. Let us all ask ourselves: what are we doing individually, in small groups, and as His Church to bring His salvation, which is hope, peace, joy and love to our neighbors? More than ever as the world is filled with: despair, addiction, runaway consumerism, and individuals who are isolated on homogenous social media sites – all people need to know the good news of Jesus. He will show us what to do if we earnestly take time each day to seek Him in this way.

(continued on page 2 ...)

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Waiting for the Return of The King (... continued from page #1)

He will answer our seeking because He is faithful (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24).

what He did when He came to earth as a baby born in Bethlehem; and, what will happen when He returns as The King!

So, while all of us who are followers of Jesus wait for His return, we must do all we can so our neighbors know

~v~

Worship in December

We will have Communion on December 3 and 17.

Our Candlelight Service will be Sunday, December 24 at 7:00 PM downstairs.

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

Date	Scripture	Title
December 3	Jeremiah 33:10-18; Mark 8:27-29	HOPE: The eternal King from David will do justice
December 10	Isaiah 40:1-11; Mark 1:1-4	PEACE: Adonai comforts with gentle power
December 17	Ezra 1:1-4; 3:1-4, 10-13; Luke 2:25-32	JOY: God can rebuild what was destroyed
December 24 (morning)	Luke 1:67-80; Psalm 113	LOVE: Salvation comes from God's mercy
December 24 (Candlelight)	Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-15; Luke 2:8-20; Psalm 44:1-3	Joseph is a man of great strength and integrity
December 31	Mark 1:1-20; Psalm 91:9-12	God's Son is The King who calls followers to Himself

Notice we will have two worship services on December 24. It is the fourth Sunday of Advent, which we will celebrate in the morning. And it is also Christmas Eve, so we will have the candlelight service in the evening (see article on page 3).

Missions Report By Sally Camara

It is with surprise and great thankfulness to both the Lord and our congregation, we report that our church was able to fulfill our commitments to the eleven missionary organizations and individuals we supported in FY 2023. With the loss of several long-time elderly members, and our dwindling numbers, we were contemplating having to either drop our support to some or reduce it. So, we thank those who continue to be mindful of Jesus' great commission to go into all the world and spread the Good News. Thank you for your generosity. Even though WE don't physically go to the "ends of the earth," your giving helps others do so. We were able to send yearly support to the following organizations – First Concern, Act Beyond, WARM, Widows Friend, Voice of the Martyrs, New England Aftercare Ministries, Salvation Army, Water of Life, Child Evangelism Fellowship (Massachusetts), LATCOM, and Action International.

In September, we were fortunate enough to have Steven S. come and update us on the work he is involved with, and his vision to move forward with a much needed after-school youth center type of program. Just recently, he learned of a possible piece of land available and has also received funds to move forward with this project. On top of that, there is a fellow worker who is interested in partnering with him on the project. The Lord seems to be bringing this vision together. Please keep it in your prayers as it is much needed among the children there. We are thankful for his and his wife's ministry to children there – not only on a group level but also with individuals.

Again, thanks to all who gave generously to missions this past year. May the Lord multiply your gifts into eternity.

~v~





Sterling Village Christmas Presents

This year FCC has been asked to donate gifts in three categories: stuffed animals (appropriately sized for a shared bedroom), body wash, and 2024 calendars.

Joy Stockwell requested ten of each category. She said to put a stuffed animal and body wash together in one gift bag and attach a tag "from members of First Congregational Church." She said to keep the calendars separate. She will distribute the gifts to the right people. If we get ten of each item, twenty residents will receive a Christmas present. She mentioned she has about forty residents in need of gifts this year, and one other church gives gifts. Sheets are being put on a table for people to sign-up after worship for what they can contribute.

The presents should be delivered to the church building by Sunday, December 17.

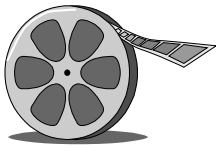


Candlelight Christmas Eve Service Downstairs

The Candlelight Christmas Eve service will be at 7:00 PM in the downstairs Fellowship Hall. We are in the process of doing something different this year. It is too early to give all the details, but once everything is worked out we will put the details in a *Bulletin Insert* and on the FCC website.

Movie Night

**** SPECIAL NIGHT ** — Friday, December 29 at 7:00 PM**



We show a movie once each month, in Fellowship Hall, usually on the fourth Friday (fifth 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. So, please join us for a night out at the movies!



DECEMBER 2023

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

Calendar Notes:

- #1) 12/3 — Communion and First Sunday of Advent: **10:27 AM.**
- #2) 12/10 — Second Sunday of Advent: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour after Worship.
- #3) 12/17 — Communion and Third Sunday of Advent: **10:27 AM.**
Also: Have Sterling Village Christmas presents at the church building.
- #4) 12/24 — Fourth Sunday of Advent: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour after Worship.
Also: Christmas Eve Candlelight Service (downstairs): **7:00 PM.**
- #5) 12/29 — Movie Night — in Fellowship Hall: **7:00 PM.**
- #6) 12/31 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM.**
- (**) Thursday Prayer in Parlor: **3:00 PM.**

