



The Journey

Volume XXIX No. 49
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www.fcc-hsv.org

PREPARING OUR LIVES

Everywhere we go people are preparing for the holidays, making their homes and their hearts ready for the wonder of Christmas. Now is the time when decorations are placed, shopping is done, meal plans are finalized, and the hectic nature of the season becomes apparent., In my own home, we are getting ready for Abby to come back for winter vacation and preparing for our own celebrations.

Yet, as busy as Advent and Christmas can become, we, as Christians, hold a special sense of peace because we know that our celebration is not based on the needs of society or the materialism of our culture, rather, it is based in a rude stable and a rough-hewn manger. The glory of the birth of Christ was not reflected in his birthplace; it shined in the sky as the angels sang of his coming, rang forth from the mouths of simple shepherds, and found true measure in Mary as she treasured the words of the shepherds and pondered them in her heart.

The most important aspect of this season is not the preparation of our homes but the preparation of our lives for the coming of Christ. Together we celebrate the certainty that God's promises are secure, that the Emmanuel, the God with us, came to earth to experience humanity, and doing so provided forgiveness and salvation to us all. We know that Christ is still with us and that he will come again and so we are called to prepare the way of the Lord.

I hope that every one of you will enjoy the season of Advent, have a Merry Christmas, and a happy New Year. May the love of God enfold you, the blessings of Jesus Christ flow down upon you, and the encouragement of the Holy Spirit give you strength so that the year ahead will be filled with wonder and joy.

Thanks be to God,
Amen.

SAVE THE DATE!

There will be a very important Congregational Meeting concerning the 2022 Church Budget on December 12. It will take place after the Lessons and Carols 9:30 am Worship Service. Please plan to attend.

IN PERSON & ONLINE WORSHIP SERVICES

We offer in-person worship services Sunday mornings at 9:30 or you may also stream them live at 9:30, or watch previous services anytime, on [facebook.com/fcchsv](https://www.facebook.com/fcchsv), [twitch.tv/fcchsv](https://www.twitch.tv/fcchsv), or [youtube.com/channel/UCzQCRY8Vfa-IDhuqUnUhCKw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzQCRY8Vfa-IDhuqUnUhCKw)

Deadline for the *Journey* is **Thursday, December 9**, at Noon. Email to: publisher@fcc-hsv.org

3209 Whitesburg Drive, Huntsville, Alabama 35802
Telephone: 256-881-0150 **Leave a message.**

JOIN THE COFFEE CREW

Looking for a way to serve the church? Join the Coffee Crew! It is not rocket science, but rocket scientists are welcome. Drop a coffee pouch in the machine and press brew, get some orange juice out of the Parlor kitchen refrigerator., and set up on the cart in the Commons area. Bingo! You've helped to facilitate fellowship at the church. (Kitchen orientation is provided.) Depending on the size of the crew, you serve about once every other month. Email publisher@fcc-hsv.org or call 256-881-0150 and say that you want to sign up for the Coffee Crew!



SHORT TERM PRAYER CONCERNS



Not Published Online

THIS WEEK'S FOOD BASKET is in memory of Sue Christiansen to honor her birthday by Chet & Louise May



CHURCH CALENDAR

- Dec. 6 10:30 am Quilters
- Dec. 8 6 pm Men's Group
7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- Dec. 11 10:00 am til noon **Christmas Fest**
- Dec. 12 9:30 am **Lessons & Carols**
10:30 am **Congregational Budget Meeting**
- Dec. 13 10:30 am Quilters
11 am Esther Circle
5 pm Conveners' Meeting
- Dec. 14 6 pm ECM Christmas Sing
Elders' Meeting
- Dec. 15 6 pm Men's Group
7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- Dec. 20 10:30 am Quilters
- Dec. 23 12:30 pm **Church Office Closes**
- Dec. 24 **Church Office Closed**
5:00 pm **Christmas Eve Service**
- Dec. 27 10:30 am Quilters
- Dec. 30 12:30 pm **Church Office Closes**
- Dec. 31 **Church Office Closed**

We are temporarily publishing, as space allows, the prayer concerns that are normally listed in the Sunday bulletins. **Concerns are listed for one month unless we receive an update.** Long term prayer concerns are published monthly in the *Journey*. Send requests to publisher@fcc-hsv.org or call the church office at 256-881-0150 to leave a message.

Please notify the Pastors or the church office if you are going to the hospital and would like to be contacted

REGIONAL PRAYER REQUESTS

Ambassadors for Christ Christian Church
Greenville, AL



FINDING OUR WAY (AGAIN)

By Talitha Arnold

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that the Lord may teach us the way and that we may walk in God’s paths.”
- Micah 4:2 (NRSV)

“Being on automatic pilot,” said my friend Gary, “never means you’ll go in a straight line to your destination. If it did, you’d crash.” Gary knew that firsthand since he was a pilot. “You set your destination,” he continued, “but throughout the flight, the program continually recalibrates the route. Just like a human pilot, the automatic pilot has to take into consideration all the unexpected events—wind shears, storms, changes in barometric pressure.”

“You never know what’s between you and your destination,” Gary said. “Whether it’s a computer or yourself, a good pilot needs ongoing direction to get back on track.”

The prophet Micah never piloted a plane, but he would have known exactly what Gary was talking about. When the people strayed far from God’s path—each walking “in the name of its god”—Micah called them back to the mountain of the Lord, where God would teach them again. When they lived in fear of a foreign army, Micah gave them God’s vision of swords beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.

“Climb that mountain,” Micah said, “and come back to God.”

“Recalibrate and you’ll get through the storm,” my pilot friend Gary advised.

“Draw near,” Advent calls, “and you’ll find your way back to Bethlehem.”

Prayer

Guide us, O God, on Advent’s journey. Help us find our way back to you. Amen.

We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord’s Table as God has welcomed us.

- 21st Century Vision Team

FINANCIAL AID FOR THE FORGOTTEN ONES, NEEDY ADULTS

Needy Adults are often a forgotten population but one that is frequently in desperate need, particularly in these difficult times. For several years, Community Outreach has contributed financially during December to the Adult Services Unit of DHR and CASA to be used throughout the year in their work with needy adults.

As you make your Christmas list, please consider a donation to these two agencies. Checks can be made to FCC with *CO December project* in the memo line. The project will go through the end of December. Your support will make a difference to our community’s vulnerable adults who are supported by DHR and CASA.

Thank you for caring, Community Outreach

The 2022 sign up chart for **FOOD BASKETS** is available. **You may call the office at 256-881-0150 or email publisher@fcc-hsv.org to select a Sunday to remember or honor a friend, loved one, anniversary, birthday, or other special occasion.** Donations are \$25.00 and go to Community Outreach. Make checks payable to First Christian Church and Food Basket on the notation line.

ATTENDANCE NOVEMBER 5

Worship Service: 80

Small Groups: NR

HELP THE CHURCH WHEN YOU SHOP AT AMAZON

Click the link below, click on Start Shopping, and sign in to your Amazon account. FCC will automatically be credited with 0.5% of your purchases at no additional cost to you and no deductions from the donated amount to FCC.

Shop at AmazonSmile
and Amazon will make
a donation to:

First Christian Church

Get started

amazonsmile

PREPARE YOURSELVES

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV Sermon Dec. 5, 2021

Scripture Verses: Luke 3: 1-6

For many of us Christmas is a time of clutter. Our calendars are already filled, and yet we find more things vying for our time. Most of us know that our lives, our homes, and our schedules are already over stuffed and here we bring out more stuff.

When we decorate, boxes are pulled out from the attic, the basement, a closet or maybe from all these places. As we begin to unpack the decorations we also unpack memories. But in order to find a place to put our decorations, we have to rearrange some of the things that we already have in our homes during the year. Most of us already have items filling shelves, tabletops, and cabinets, and here comes more.

The world doesn't stop for Christmas. Many will still have to work, keep appointments or do those things that keep our lives running. But in the midst of this we find more time for friends and family. We add to an already hectic world more things that need to be done.

Then there is shopping. The economic times we live in make this even a greater challenge, as we desire to please those we are giving gifts to with the budget we have. This means more time and more effort.

As the rush and hurry of preparing for Christmas begins to crowd into our already filled lives, we hear with new meaning the words of the prophet Malachi, "But who can endure the day of his coming?" Of course, Malachi's question was one of far greater magnitude, of standing before the judgment of God, but his warning speaks to us as we approach another Christmas season.

Chapter one of the gospel of Luke can also seem rather cluttered. The author is verifying the facts of Jesus' life for his friend, Theophilus so Luke locates Jesus in history to show that John the Baptist and Jesus were not fictional or romanticized characters. They were real men born into times when people faced real challenges.

Often, when we read the bible, we tend skip over genealogies and historical references because we think they are boring or believe that the information is not useful, it is just clutter, but when we do this we miss the author's intent. Luke picked the six most important political figures of the day, the greatest men in their time, to show us when Jesus began his ministry.

Tiberius, Augustus Caesar's stepson, was the Emperor of Rome, the ruler of the known world. Herod and Phillip were the two sons of Herod the Great, known from Jesus' birth story. Herod Antipus, as he was known, was the ruler of Galilee, while his brother Phillip ruled the Golan Heights.

The area around Israel was under the authority of Lysanias, who controlled what we would now call modern day Lebanon, while a petty magistrate from Italy named Pontius Pilate ruled Jerusalem with an iron fist. Finally, the temple in Jerusalem was controlled by Caiaphas the High Priest but was really run by Annas, his father in law, from the shadows.

However, Luke is doing more than just showing us the political scene or locating Jesus in time. He also shared what God did through the last of the prophets, John the Baptist, as he prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah.

John did not look or act like these important men. He was an undisciplined character who lived in the wilderness far away from society, ate insects and wild honey, and wore clothing of camel hair. John is not what we expect during Christmas. He was an echo of a former time when God's voice was heard through the prophets.

John was the end of one kind of proclamation, but the beginning of something new; a connection with God that would change faith, worship, and the world around him. John resided in the desert to remind the Jewish people of their heritage. After Moses freed them from bondage in Egypt they spent a generation wandering in the wilderness searching for the Promised Land.

John believed that the people were once again in

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...**Prepare** continued the wilderness, searching for salvation, hoping for the fulfillment of God's promises and so his message was essentially one word, prepare. In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. In the desert of our lives make ready for a King.

The valleys of our soul will be raised, mountains and hills will become level, crooked paths and rough places will become easy to travel when all people see the salvation of God in their midst. John believed that this miracle could only happen in the desert, in the wilderness, in those places that God lives.

Rev. Edward Markquart believes that the wilderness is where we find God. It is where we are truly alone, dealing with the ultimate issues of life, death and eternity.

We find the wilderness away from the clutter and business that invade our lives. It can be in a piece of bread and a cup of juice, in a prayer or a still small voice. Sometimes it is a slum, sometimes a closet, sometimes it is an apartment, but the wilderness is always where the cross of Christ is present.

God speaks to us in the wilderness, the silence and quiet, when we are not distracted by the noise of the world. God tells us, "Prepare yourself. Be washed of the pollution of resentment, rage and revenge. Be cleansed of whatever is hurting your life and the lives of others. Know that your sins are forgiven and then go forth to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength."

In the wilderness people sought John but they found God. Then in an act of humility, were baptized to repent of their sins. They were cleansed so they could become a part of what was happening in the world, just as we are cleansed to continue the ministry of Christ and share the love of God.

According to the gospels, Jesus' ministry only lasted three years. In his day and age Jesus was not considered important. But what about those powerful political figures that Luke mentioned?

Tiberius Caesar died in the year 37 A.D. He had become so unpopular that he was forced to leave Rome in 27 A.D. and never returned. Lysanias may have been executed in that same year. Pontius Pilate was sent back to Rome in disgrace in 36 A.D. and was never active in politics again.

Herod Antipus died in exile in 39 A.D. while his brother Philip died in 33 A.D. Caiaphas was deposed three years after presiding over the trial of Jesus and died a short time later. When Caiaphas passed away Annas lost power and became a bitter and broken man.

Talk about the mountains and hills being made low, but Luke is making a point here. These powerful men, who had authority throughout the world, were all brought low within 10 years of Jesus' death and Luke's readers would have known that. They were swept away in history in disgrace and dishonor, many just a footnote in Jesus' life.

Christ's authority was not based on human power or located in Empires or Kingdoms. Jesus was and is more influential than all of the rulers Luke mentioned and all of the rulers we know, because Jesus' message challenged and changed the world in ways we still do not fully understand.

John told the crowds that listened to him that when the Messiah came all people would see the salvation of God. That meant that everyone, rich or poor, slave or free, woman or man could be redeemed and delivered by the power of God.

This message of hope is still relevant today, which is why it is repeated every year during the Advent season and imprinted in the hearts of every Christian. For we are called to be the servants of God, preparing the way for the coming of the Lord, making the rough places smooth, and the crooked places straight.

We are the messengers of God's mercy, the prophets of God's redemption, called to live in communion with the poor and the oppressed, caring for the abused and frightened, comforting those who are hurting, and bringing light to those who live in darkness.

We are living incarnations of the good news,

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...*Prepare* continued

proclaimers of salvation, and we are voices shouting in the wilderness saying, "Prepare yourselves, for God has a place for you."

Today we are called to put away the clutter, to overcome the business, to look beyond all the other distractions that move us away from faith, and prepare ourselves and our world for the coming of Christ again. Now is a time to celebrate, to challenge, and to hear the good news! Jesus Christ has come, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Amen.



Dear FCC Members and Friends,

It is with a huge heart that I thank all of you for your love and generosity this year in filling the Christmas Charities Stockings. I will be honest and say that I worried about taking 100 stockings to be filled this year because of Covid. Not only did those stockings get filled but at least 50 to 75 more children will be "All Smiles" Christmas morning because of your support and extreme generosity! I will never doubt you again!

If you would like to read about what "Christmas Charities Year Round" provides to our Community visit www.CCYR.org.

Blessings, Cindy Taylor Burger

COVID-19 CHURCH PROTOCOLS

(Approved by the Board on October 14.)

- **One 9:30 a.m. service** will be offered at least through May 2022. First Christian Church offers virtual services (facebook.com/fcchsv, twitch.tv/fcchsv, or First Christian Church Huntsville on YouTube) every Sunday. While FCC and State recommendations are good benchmarks, we invite all people to worship with us based on their comfort level.
- **Enter the church through the Bell Tower Garden/Narthex doors.** The doors by the church office are locked.
- **Wearing face coverings/masks at all times inside the church is encouraged for everyone.**
- Hand sanitizer and masks are available at the Lobby Welcome Table along with prepackaged communion elements.
- The **nursery** is open for the 9:30 a.m. service and the 10:30 a.m. small group time.
- **Every other row of pews is roped off on the pulpit side of the sanctuary to allow individuals to practice social distancing so that they may worship at their level of comfort. The front section on the pulpit side is the least impacted zone with our heating and cooling system.**
- **Attendees may vocalize** during the service, such as stating the Lord's Prayer, litanies, etc., and sing hymns/songs when lyrics are projected on the screens.
- Offerings may be placed in the brass plate when exiting the sanctuary or sent by mail.
- Food, coffee, and other hospitality services remain suspended until further notice.
- **Small groups** (including Sunday school classes) will meet at **8:30 a.m. or 10:30 a.m.**
- Anyone with any symptoms will remain home and celebrate virtually for at least 14 days.
- Please notify the church office immediately if you develop symptoms after attending service.