



WELCOMING CHURCH

It always seems a little strange to write a Newsletter article that will come out the week of Christmas the week before. The New Year seems a world away as we are still amid Advent and looking forward to Christmas. The decorations are still on our tree, we are buying and wrapping presents for friends and loved ones, and I am still working on my Christmas Eve sermon. Yet, the calendar tells us that 2022 is right around the corner, a new year, new opportunities, and new adventures await.

Speaking of new adventures Abby is home from Auburn University for the holidays, Joe is finishing the first semester of High School, and events are gearing up at the Space and Rocket Center for Patti. With our family celebration in mind, this led me to think about the people in our community who will be alone during the holiday season. Do they have friends that will care for them and invite them to meals and gatherings? Will they have places in the community where they can celebrate? Will they find a place where they are welcome to worship and greet the New Year that God has provided?

The church must reach out to these people who need friendship, care, and comfort, not just during the holidays but throughout the year. They could be soldiers away from their home and families, someone new to Huntsville or new to the country, the elderly whose families live far away, or young families who have just moved to begin a new life. Whatever the case may be, we must be hospitable and welcoming, that we invite them to church events, but more importantly, we invite them to our homes and into our lives so we can share our insight but also our love and joy.

This year let us become an inviting church, not just one that welcomes people that walk in the door, but a community that reaches out to others and invites them into our congregation and our communal journey with Christ. We have a lot to offer and Jesus calls us to reach out to the ends of the earth to share the good news. On the way, we will meet people who are different than us, who hold dissimilar views or beliefs, but if we open our hearts and minds we can learn from them, and together we can build a community that works to unite rather than divide, to care rather than to show contempt, and that loves one another. I hope you had a very merry Christmas and a Happy New year, Amen.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE 5:00 PM



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.

Deadline for the *Journey* is **Wednesday, December 22**, at Noon. Email to: publisher@fcc-hsv.org

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

LONG TERM PRAYER CONCERNS



Not Published Online

**SHORT TERM
PRAYER CONCERNS**



Not Published Online



Long term prayer concerns are published once a month in the *Journey*. **Please** keep the church office informed of the status of individuals you put on the lists.

CHURCH CALENDAR

- 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. 26 8:30 am Small Groups
9:30 am Worship Service
10:30 am Small Groups
- Dec. 30 12:30 pm **Church Office Closes**
- Dec. 31 **Church Office Closed**

THANK YOU FOR CARING!

Because of your generosity, a check for \$780 was sent to Harris Home for Children. What a great gift for the Home as they work with foster children and other at-risk youth! Funding is always a great concern for agencies and you have ease that burden. Thank you for caring about those in crisis in our community.

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
First Christ Christian Church
Meridian, MS

THIS WEEK'S FOOD BASKET is in honor of Colleen Cannon Jenkins birthday by Beverly Cannon



YOUR HELP IS NEEDED

I've been asked to lead up a committee to help grow the number of volunteers on our AV/ Technical crew - the people that run our sound, record and livestream our services, and put the visuals on our screens. For far too long, we've relied on our friends Chuck and Michael, as volunteers, to run all our systems, week in and week out.

None of the work is particularly difficult ...in fact, it's pretty routine once you know how to do it. Have you ever...

- Shot some video with a camcorder, smart-phone or digital camera?
- Pushed some buttons to change the music on your stereo?
- Worked a slide projector, or run a Power-Point presentation?
- Used a microphone?

Our goal is to build a large group, maybe twenty or so...to help with our AV team. A group this size gives us the ability to rotate people to help out once every two, three, or four weeks. And, we don't need everyone to know how to do everything. It's OK just to want to help run camera, or run slides...that would be great.

Chuck wants to step away from this big weekly commitment, and we should show our thanks for all he has done, by giving him that opportunity. Personally, I don't want to work AV every week, and I'm not planning to, but I'm going to learn how, and I'd like you to join us. And that goes for our youth, too.

With Chuck's guidance, our church has invested in good quality AV equipment in recent years. Our committee is going to work very hard to simplify and streamline our processes...and our equipment, and make them simple to learn, and as dependable as we can.

If you'd like to help, reach out to me at 256- or bclasgens@, or call the church office. We're scheduling evening/weekend training sessions now. Watch for more information in the Journey, the bulletin, and our social media in the weeks ahead. I hope you'll join us!

Brad Clasgens



Congratulations to Brandon & Sharifa Love Rutledge on the birth of Jacqueline Rebecca Love-Rutledge on December 15th.

FINANCIAL AID FOR THE FORGOTTEN ONES, NEEDEY 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

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 pervious services anytime, on facebook.com/fcchsv, twitch.tv/fcchsv, or youtube.com/channel/UCzQCRY8Vfa-IDhuqUnUhCKw

IRS CREDIT FOR 2021 GIVING

Thank you so much for your tithes and offerings; they have a tremendous impact on the missions and ministries of our church. Please remember that all contributions toward 2021 giving must be received by the church office **before 12:30 pm on Thursday, December 30, 2021 or postmarked by December 31.**

DREAMING by Rachel Hackenberg

*When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.*

- Psalm 126:1 (NRSV)

Am I the only person who reads Scripture and begins to hum a Broadway tune? I suspect I'm not.

"We were like those who dream," pens the psalmist, and I start singing: "I dreamed a dream in times gone by, when hope was high and life worth living," in my most dramatic Fantine imitation (*Les Misérables*).

Dreams - aspirational, fantastical, and nightmarish alike - are something of a time warp experience. In a moment of dreaming, our minds trip across past, present, future, to create something new in a moment when it is intangible. A nightmare can interrupt the present with the past. A vision can give the present a hint of the future. A daydream can reimagine the present with an entirely different future.

"In the past when God restored the fortunes of Zion," describes the psalmist, "we were like those who had imagined such a future but couldn't believe it was at last their present reality." And then the psalmist prays: "Do that again, O God. Interrupt our present with future fortunes that we used to have. Speed the season between weeping and rejoicing, between planting and harvesting, so that we can reap goodness in the present to heal our past."

The psalmist's dreamy conflation of time reminds us - helpfully, thankfully - that God is not a linear God. God is not a time-bound God. A dream can heal the past. A prophesy can secure the future. A new awakening can change the present.

And who I am, how I am, is neither pre-determined by my past nor by my future nor by my present. It is still being dreamed by God.

Prayer - Miraculous God, unbound God, healing God - let me not lose hope that the past can be healed, let me not be afraid that the future is unknown, let me not believe that the present is without a harvest.

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](https://www.facebook.com/fcchsv), [twitch.tv/fcchsv](https://www.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.

ATTENDANCE NOVEMBER 5

Worship Service: 79

Small Groups: 26

LEAPING FOR JOY

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV Sermon Dec. 19, 2021

Scripture Verses: Luke 1: 39-45

This year, as Patti the kids, and I decorated our home for Christmas, we carefully unwrapped ornaments from years past, placed the stockings on our mantel, and even put inflatables in front of our home. Darth Vader, a Stormtrooper, and Yoda all dressed in their Christmas best in case you wanted to know. We also placed some of the nativity sets that we have collected over the years. This is a hobby that I inherited from my father. He loved the symbolism of crèches, or nativity sets, the idea of the different players in the cosmic drama of Christ's birth crowded together in one place welcoming the child to earth.

We unwrapped the wise men, angels, shepherds, the animals, and even Mary and Joseph. As we unwrapped them I could remember their stories and understand how their presence, their influence, made the night of Christmas so special. Yet, these are not the only characters in the story of the birth of Christ. Many helped to welcome the Christ child in their own way.

Today we hear about one of these people, Elizabeth, wife to Zechariah, and mother to John the Baptist, important figures in the Jewish and Christian faiths. However, Elizabeth becomes just as important, and is a prophet in her own right, as we welcome the Christ child when he was still in Mary's womb and supports Mary in a time of joy, confusion, and fear.

Mary and Elizabeth were two women in different stages of life, but both exemplify the trust and obedience that are at the heart of authentic, joyful faith. Of course, Mary must have felt the nervous joy that comes with the announcement of new life, but at first, Mary believed the news of the birth of Jesus was troubling, something to overcome.

Through the angel's visit Mary became aware that Elizabeth was also pregnant. This must have been a time of celebration and fear for Mary. She was thrilled about the promise of her own child but concerned about the response of her

family, friends, and society. The realization that she could share this experience with another person meant the world to her. Elizabeth was someone she could trust, a person who understood what was happening, and a comforting companion.

So she traveled to a Judean town in the hill country; quite a journey for a young pregnant woman of that day and age, to stay with Elizabeth. It is important to understand that Mary was not traveling to see if Elizabeth was pregnant, she was not testing the promises of God. But, she realized, from the angel's pronouncement, that Elizabeth's child and her son would be connected.

Elizabeth was also filled with joy about the news of her child, but unlike Mary her pregnancy was not a cause for concern, it was an answer to prayer. Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah were righteous people; Luke writes that they lived blamelessly according to the commandments of the Lord.

But Elizabeth was barren; she had given birth to no children. In her society children were seen as blessings from God, hope for the future, and the way to continue your lineage. At best Elizabeth and Zechariah were viewed with pity and at worst, seen as sinners, unrighteous in God's eyes.

When the angel of the Lord spoke to Zechariah and told him that his wife would conceive, he would not believe the angel. He looked at the facts, they were both getting on in years; it was probably physically impossible for Elizabeth to have a child.

Zechariah could not believe that he would have a son, and so he was struck mute, unable to speak, until John's naming day. However, after Elizabeth learned she was pregnant she secluded herself and thanked God for the gift she had been given. Elizabeth understood the blessing and realized that it was a sign of things to come.

Luke's gospel joins the two annunciation accounts of the births of John and Jesus when Mary enters the house of Zechariah and greets Elizabeth. All signs point to the fact that these two

Joy continued on page 6...

...**Joy** continued from page 5 births will be miraculous, but the signs are equally clear that Jesus' will be the greater of the two.

We are told that the child in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy when Mary gave her greeting. Even as an infant John the Baptist recognized the Messiah and knew that he would serve him.

John, the representative of the prophets and the messenger who prepares the way of the Lord, rejoices in the presence of the still unborn savior of the world, the one who would change and make all things new. In this manner much like Esau and Jacob struggling in the womb in the book of Genesis, the elder would serve the younger.

At this time Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed in a loud voice, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." Elizabeth's speech brings to mind the image of the prophets, those who spoke the word of God. She becomes a mouthpiece for the Creator and exalts in the blessings she has received.

For she saw the mother of her Lord, she knew that her own child will play a part in the coming of the Messiah. Not only had Elizabeth been given a child, but she had also been blessed by the opportunity to know that all of God's promises are about to come true. She is one of the first to realize the importance of this child, of the gift that all of humanity had been given.

Elizabeth also recognized the importance of Mary who had been chosen as the bearer of the Messiah, the human mother of God's son. Mary believed God when she was told the news of Jesus' birth. Unlike Zechariah, she did not try to anchor her beliefs on what she thought was true, Mary had faith, faith in what the angel told her, faith that God would bless her, faith that her community would understand, and faith that her intended husband would comprehend what had happened. It is Mary's faith that is epitomized, not her selection as the mother of Christ, her

virginity, or her worth. She believed that God's word would be fulfilled.

Christmas is approaching very soon. Later this week we will gather together to celebrate the night of Jesus' birth, and proclaim once again the coming of the King, but does this event have the same meaning that it held years ago when a star rested over the sleepy town of Bethlehem?

We think we realize the true meaning of the season of Advent, we believe that we know the importance of Christmas, but can we truly understand the joy and fear that Mary felt when she was given the news of the Christ child?

Of course not. Like the people of Mary's day and age, we are still waiting for a sign, the realization that God has come. We look for meaning in everything that we do and wonder what our place in the world is. We question the basic gifts of God and found our beliefs in our understanding of what is true.

What we do not realize is that the answer to our questions has already arrived. This is what we are celebrating, not the coming of Christ, but the fact that he is already here. Like John, we should leap for joy for we are in the presence of the Lord every day; Jesus has never left us, and through him, we are reborn when we open ourselves to his will and faithfully serve God.

The promises of the Lord have been fulfilled, Jesus is with us, the Holy Spirit empowers us and so we respond with joy, the joy that comes from the knowledge that we are not alone. We are one, connected with each other with Christ as our head, filled by the Spirit, and fulfilled by the Lord.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

