



WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2022: "We saw the star in the East..."

"We saw the star in the East, and we came to worship him." - Matthew 2:2

The Middle East Council of Churches, based in Beirut, Lebanon, has been the convener for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2022 drafting group and has published materials in several languages. The reflections explore how Christians are called to be a sign to the world of God bringing about unity. Drawn from different cultures, races, and languages, Christians share in a common search for Christ and a common desire to worship him.

Although the people of Lebanon have been burdened by the daily consequences of a persistent political and economic crisis, and faced the tragedy of the August 2020 explosion in Beirut, which caused hundreds of deaths and left hundreds of thousands injured or homeless, Christians from different churches in Lebanon and neighboring countries have found the spiritual force to come together and prepare the resources, said Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus, acting deputy general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and director of its Faith and Order Commission.

"They invite us to turn to the star in the East and worship together the Son of God incarnate," said Mateus. "For this precious spiritual gift, we are thankful to God and to them."

Christians from Lebanon, Syria and Egypt developed the local draft for the resources. As is the tradition, it was finalized by an international group representing the Roman Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission. The resources include an ecumenical opening prayer service, biblical reflections and prayers for eight days, and other elements of worship.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an international Christian ecumenical observance held annually between 18-25 January in the Northern Hemisphere. With roots going back over 100 years, the dedicated octave of prayers has been jointly commissioned and prepared since 1966, after the Second Vatican Council, by the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC. The materials for 2022 are already available in English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian.

On January 18th we will join with the churches in our Region, the Christian Church (DOC) in Alabama-Northwest Florida, for a prayer service by Zoom at 7:00 p.m. the first day of the observance of the Week of Prayer (please use this link (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85205831489#success>).

This prayer service will include a communion service led by our Moderator, Fannie Ashley. You are asked to prepare elements so that you partake with others during this special time together. First Christian Church will be participating in person as well at 7:00 pm in the Family Services room. A screen will be in place to view all participants and we will pray together. For more information please contact the church office.

Deadline for the *Journey* is **Thursday, January 20**, at Noon. Email to: publisher@fcc-hsv.org

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

**CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S MINISTRIES
(CWM) BLANKET MONTH 2022**



CWM's January service is supporting Church World Service that will send blankets to people in need all round the world. What do you do if you are cold? At home you reach for a blanket or turn up the heat.

What if you didn't have an extra blanket or no blanket at all? What if you didn't have a home because of a natural disaster, tornado, hurricane, earthquake, or flood?

Church World Service provides blankets to those without blankets all over the world. CWM invites FCC to join us in giving blankets during the month of January. The cost of a blanket is \$10. Make your check out to FCC and mark for blankets. As one person put it, "it's about loving our neighbors on this small, interconnected planet, just as Jesus commanded".

Only \$10 per blanket warms someone, furnishes a carry-all, as well as offers protection and shelter. For more information go to churchworldservice.org.

Margaret J. Vann, CWM Blanket Chair

CHURCH CALENDAR

- Jan. 17 **Church Office Closed**
10:30 am Quilters
- Jan. 18 7 pm Region-Wide Prayer Service
by Zoom or in Family Services
- Jan. 19 6 pm Men's Group
- Jan. 23 10:45 am Worship Committee
- Jan 24 10:30 am Quilters
- Jan. 26 6 pm Men's Group
- Jan. 31 10:30 am Quilters
- Feb. 2 6 pm Men's Group
Phoebe Circle
7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- Feb. 7. 10:30 am Quilters
- Feb. 8 6 pm Elders' Meeting
- Feb. 9 6 pm Men's Group
7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- Feb. 10 6 pm Board Meeting
- Feb. 13 11:45 Community Outreach
- Feb. 14 **Happy Valentine's Day!**
9:30 am Esther Circle
10:30 am Quilters
5 pm Conveners' Meeting



**SHORT TERM
PRAYER CONCERNS**



Not Published Online

CONDOLENCES to the family of Dr. Guy A. Montgomery, Jr., brother-in-law of Dorothy Montgomery; who recently passed; and to the family of Amy Faulkenberry Henley, former member, who also recently passed

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 Christian Church, Dothan, AL

**CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S MINISTRIES (CWM)
VALENTINE PROJECT**
CWM is seeking current names and addresses for our college students and service men and women. If you have this information, please email *****@gmail.com
Thank you for your help with this outreach

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS, ONE COIN BY ONE!

Women of FCC, do you have many wonderful memories of the holidays and feel blessed in so many ways? Hopefully you have remembered to drop a coin in your blessing box as those blessings have filled your heart. If you haven't established this practice, why not start now at the beginning of this new year? Christian Women's Ministries will be collecting your coins and bills in the month of March. There is still plenty time to count your blessings.

Sue Seward, Blessing Box Coordinator

YOU WERE SO GENEROUS!

Through your generosity, Adult Protective Services at DHR and CASA each received \$500 in gift cards! Both of the organizations were so grateful to FCC for our concern for vulnerable adults in our community. DHR had no more cards left from last year and were very much in need of this gift. Thank you for caring about "the least of these." Your donations are truly making a difference in the community.

THE COFFEE CART ANNOUNCEMENT

Due to a lack of interest, the Coffee Cart is closed until a later date.



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. You may also make your payment through PayPal and designate Food Basket through this QR code linked to our website.



THIS WEEK'S FOOD BASKET is in memory of Henry Waites by his family.



BAPTIZATUS SUM

By Mary Luti

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. As he was praying, the Holy Spirit descended on him ... and a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. – Luke 3:21-22; 4:1 (NIV)

Immediately after his baptism, Jesus was led into a wilderness. There he struggled with a Tempter who tried to make him doubt the voice that named him Beloved Child. "If you are God's son...", Satan prefaced the temptations. But Jesus remembered who he was. There was no "if." Assured of God's approval and drenched with the Spirit, he blew the Tempter away.

Whenever the great reformer Martin Luther was in trouble, tormented, tempted, and afraid (he often was), he'd tell himself that he was baptized: "Baptizatus sum"- "I am baptized." Over and over he'd remind his beleaguered heart who he was: a beloved child of God whose life was forever entwined with Christ's. He said it blew the demons away.

I used to teach a class about sacraments. Every semester I found that many students didn't know when they were baptized. Birthdays they knew, and other anniversaries. But not the day a voice from heaven called them beloved and their lives were forever joined to Christ's. I encouraged them to find out and celebrate that gift.

And I hoped that whenever things got rough (they always do), they'd call on its grace. I hoped they'd remember that they are in Christ, fully known and loved. I hoped they'd remind their frightened hearts, "I am baptized." I hoped it would make them brave and blow the Devil away.

Prayer

By your grace, O God, I am known and loved. My life is joined to Christ's forever. I am not afraid.

SUNDAY ATTENDANCE

Jan. 3 Worship Service: 30
Small Groups: 8



SAVING THE BEST FOR LAST

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV

Sermon: Jan. 16, 2022

Scripture Verses:

John 2: 1-11

In the gospel of John the first miracle that Jesus performs is at a wedding. But when we hear about it, it does not sound very impressive. Water is turned to wine. Anyone who enjoys magic or basic chemistry knows that this can be reproduced in any number of ways. I have even seen a few children's moments where they do this.

Often, the sign at Cana is misunderstood. We view it as an act of kindness, Jesus saving the wedding feast, but, as always, there is more, a simple story with a deeper meaning.

Weddings were occasions for a community celebration in Jesus' time. The life of a common person was difficult. Most of the residents were poor and after working all day the men and women would return home to a simple meal of cheese, bread, and olive oil, the dietary staples of that time.

Of course, most of the time, they drank water. In the desert area of Israel water is still the most important natural resource. Even in the fertile area of Galilee water is scarce.

Wine was also an important recourse. Water could be easily contaminated and sometimes was not safe to drink, but the alcohol in wine would kill most of the parasites and diseases making it safe. However, wine was expensive. It took time to make wine so only the rich could afford it as an everyday beverage. For the poor in Galilee wine was something that they saved for celebrations.

At a wedding families would provide the best for their guests and of course weddings did not just last a day, they were week-long occasions. The family would have saved all of their lives so they could provide meat, bread, and wine in abundance, and if a family did not provide handsomely they would be shamed in front of their whole village.

This is why it was a disaster when the wine, saved for the feast, ran out. The families of the bride and the groom would be embarrassed unless something was done. So Mary turned to Jesus and said to him, "They have no wine."

Strangely, Jesus seems to rebuke Mary. He was not prepared for her request and told her that it was not time for His glory to be revealed to the world.

But then why does Mary tell the servants to do what Jesus asks them to do? Does she assume Jesus will respond to her request?

Of course Jesus is smart. He listens to his mother and does something. He told the servants to fill six stone water jars, used for the Jewish rites of purification. We know that each of these jars held twenty to thirty gallons of water. In essence, Jesus was creating 120 to 180 gallons of wine. But why would the simple village of Cana need so much water for the rite of purification and why would Jesus create so much wine, more than could be consumed at several weddings?

If we simply look at the action we miss the point. Remember, wine was purer than water, and the water that Jesus turned to wine was for the rite of purification. Jesus was purifying enough water, creating enough wine, for the whole of Israel, and the world.

When the steward, the overseer of the party, tasted the wine he was amazed at its quality. He called the bridegroom and asked him why he would serve the quality wine now when the guests were already tipsy. Usually, a host would serve the good wine first and then the lesser vintages when the guests had a little fun.

Basically, the author of the gospel of John is making the same point about Jesus. Dr. William Willimon states, "Throughout the history of Israel, God sent the great patriarchs and the prophets. But now, in Jesus, the best is being saved for last."

In verse 11 the story seems to stop, and John tells us that this is the first sign of Jesus. In John's gospel, a sign is not a miracle or a reversal of a natural process. For John, a sign pointed beyond itself to something different, to something more real. Jesus' miracle at Cana, is a sign pointing to his glory.

This may seem a strange miracle to begin a ministry. There were few witnesses to the event, and even though a large volume of wine was created and the bride, groom, and their families were surely thankful, their lives were not changed. Of course, Mary and Jesus' disciples saw what he did and we are told that they believed in him, but we soon see that this belief rose and fell as their expectations of the Messiah were or were not met.

The miracle at Cana is not an expression of divine
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power nor is it driven by the need to relieve the discomfort of the wedding party. Its true meaning is that the hidden life of the children of God is now revealed. Just as the story of John the Baptist shows us the coming of a new age, so too does this miracle represent change through Christ.

Common water and expensive wine are the symbols of this change for now we enter into a time when all people will be purified and share in the blessings of God. This transformation echoes the covenantal promises of the Old Testament but also points to the reality that our old existence is at an end; we are called to something new, a way of life that is open, inclusive, and celebratory.

One of the great musicians of our time was a composer named Puccini, who wrote some of the best-known operas such as *Madame Butterfly*. In 1922 Puccini learned from his doctor that he had cancer. He declared that he wanted to write one final work: *Turandot*. His students said, "But, master, what will happen if you're not able to finish the work?" Puccini answered, "My disciples will finish it for me."

In 1924 Puccini died, and the work of *Turandot* was not yet finished. But his disciples completed the work. The first performance was given in Milan in the La Scala Theater. It was directed by Puccini's greatest student, Toscanini. Toscanini directed the music to the point where the master lay down his pen and answered the call to eternal life.

At that point, Toscanini stopped the orchestra, laid down his baton, turned to the audience, and said, "Thus far, the master wrote, and then the master died." After a long pause, he picked up the baton, addressed the audience, and said, "But his disciples will finish the work." Toscanini then directed the music to its conclusion.

This new way of life that we are called to is of discipleship. We are to continue the work of Christ, to share in his blessings, and tell others there is plenty of wine, plenty of water, and plenty of grace to go around.

At the end of the wedding feast there was still much left to do. Jesus' life stretched out in front of him, his ministry had just begun. He knew that like this miracle his message would be difficult for many

to understand. Many would look at the surface and never look deeper.

In the same way our lives as Christians have just begun and we are filled with questions and doubts concerning our worth and the strength of our faith. Yet, we are constantly reminded that the old order has passed away, the new has come and we have a place in God's plan. This gives us hope.

But our hopes amount to nothing if we do not believe that the same Lord who turns water into wine can also purify us. Through the miracle of life, Jesus reveals his glory, and for those who see and believe, the best is yet to come. Amen.

COVID-19 CHURCH PROTOCOLS

- **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.
- **Coffee is temporarily suspended.**
- **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 10 days
- **Please notify the church office immediately if you develop symptoms after attending a service.**