

I want to talk to you a moment about Christmas trees. I know this is the January newsletter, but I am writing this pre-Christmas because of holiday vacations. And, hopefully, as you read this your Christmas tree is still standing prettily nearby because we are still in the Christmas season.

When you look at your Christmas tree, what do you see? Bright lights that can cause frustration when a bulb is burned out. Several years ago I finally bought a pre-lit tree. Before that I had the task of untangling the numerous strings of lights and checking them for burned out bulbs. It never failed that even though each string had been tested beforehand, once on the tree there was always at least one string that failed to light.

The ornaments. I have an aunt who likes to decorate her tree with just one or two colors and all the ornaments, ribbons, and tinsel are of those colors. That is not my preference. On my tree are all kinds of ornaments and most of them have a story. There is the one I made my mother when I was in kindergarten that she returned to me several years ago. There are various ones made by the kids, or with one of their pictures in it. Ornaments bought on vacations. Now that the children have grown, some of those ornaments have migrated to their trees.

The presents. Of course, the whole point of the tree is to have a place for the presents. There they sit. Wrapped up, hiding what lies within. Unknown. Objects of hope.

As I think about it, growing up there were three kinds of gifts. First, the hoped for gifts that I actually received. Second, the hoped for gifts that I didn't get. Third, the not hoped for gifts that I got anyway. Think clothes. What 8 year-old wants socks, underwear, a sweater, or pajamas for Christmas? Were there no basketballs left? Really? But sometimes an unwished for gift brought real happiness.

"Ok, Jeremy, enough about the tree. What about the New Year?" Ahhh, but don't you see? The tree and the New Year are so similar. Let's take it in reverse.

The presents. Unknown. Objects of hope. We have no idea what this year will bring us. It is unknown. But, this year we have hopes. Hopes that things will be better. Or, at least no worse. As with the gifts of our childhood, some of our hopes will be realized and some will not. And, we will receive some gifts that we had not even imagined, and they just might turn out to be better than what we could have hoped for.

Did you ever notice that when you were a kid, some of the things you hoped for turned out not to be as fulfilling as you thought? That some of the toys you hadn't wished for actually turned out to be your favorites. Do you remember that some of the joy you had with a wished for toy was short-lived because the toy broke way to soon? Indeed, our wishes and hopes often turned out not to be what truly brought us joy. And some of our joys are all too fleeting.

The ornaments. The stories of our past. As with the ornaments, they are a part of the shaping our picture of the present. They remind us of Christmases past. But, they do not control the present nor the nature of the presents under the tree. They remind us of what we have come through and the joys of past years. They remind us to go forward to make new memories and celebrate new joys.

The lights. Not to be pessimistic, but there may be moments when a bulb burns out. The whole tree won't go out, but a part of lives will be darkened. Our stress and anxiety will go up. We will become sad or unhappy. Remember, into our darkness shines the Light of the World.

Ok, I think you get the point. As I close, I remind you of this. When we were children, the presents were not only objects of hope, they were signs that we were loved and that we were blessed. As we go into this year, the Child of Christmas offers us the assurance that we are loved, and the hope of blessings yet to be revealed.

God's blessings this year!

Jeremy



January 2024

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 New Year's Day- Church Office CLOSED	2 Lillian Hudson Linda Whisnant	3 6:30 Choir Rehearsal Denny Hatchette Kirsten Button	4 Marian Hampton Charlie Milford	5 10:00 Threads of Agape Jordyn Antonio Wesley Antonio Nancy Omer	6
7 Epiphany Sunday 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Worship Service 1:00 Pickleball for Members 4:45 Youth United 6:00 UMM	8	9 11:30 49ers 7:00 Alice Walker Circle (outside venue) Fern Powell	10 6:30 Choir Rehearsal Mark Edward Gentry	11 5:45 PS Board Meeting	12	13
14 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Worship Service 1:00 Pickleball for Members 4:45 Youth United Michele Bishop	15 10:00 Blanche Greer Circle	16 Newsletter Deadline Shirley Pridgen	17 6:30 Choir Rehearsal Kemp Sigmon	18 Jane Pittman Sharon Spencer	19 10:00 Threads of Agape Theresa Lassiter Kemp Gurganus	20 Don Sanders Gloria Gordon
21 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Worship Service 1:00 Pickleball for Members 4:45 Youth United Cammie Myers	22 Anne Arbuckle Nola Chaplin Natalie Koller Ray Parker	23 Kadi Traxler	24 6:30 Choir Rehearsal	25 5:30 Fellowship Meal	26	27
28 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Worship Service 1:00 Pickleball for Members 4:45 Youth United	29	30 J R Parrish	31 6:30 Choir Rehearsal Laurie Wilson			