



From Pastor Gail's Study

Greetings Friends in Christ

Advent: The liturgical season of *Advent is meant to be a time of waiting, watching, and preparation—a time of **anticipation***. It is meant to be a spiritual journey while we together prepare for Christ's birth and allow God through Christ to become that much more significant in our lives.

The challenge of course is to make the time to reflect, to observe, and to listen to God's movement in our lives within a season that is packed full of the commercialism of Christmas. Moreover, many experience a sense of melancholy during this season. More than ever, I believe we are being called to spend time reflecting on Christ's birth and God in our lives.

So, I have a few questions for you: How will this season of Advent shape your life and that of your family? How does the story of Christ's birth shape your life? How might God be calling you to journey differently through Advent this year in making space and time for the Spirit's movement?

Advent Worship:

This year at church we're using a theme for the lighting of our Advent Candles each week that ties together the overall Biblical story with Christ's birth and our lives. The theme connects the Old Testament with the New Testament and leads us to actually live into the Biblical story. This year for our four Sunday Advent wreath lightings we will light the 1. *The Light of the Prophets*; 2. *The Light of the Holy Family*; 3. *The Light of the Shepherds*; 4. *The Light of the Magi (Wisemen)* and Christmas Eve, *The Christ Candle*. Please join us for worship in person or on line as we journey to Bethlehem together.



Advent Devotions:

The Life and Teaching of Jesus of Nazareth Book: Free copies of this small book will be available starting Sunday, December 3. This book is a compilation of Jesus' life from the four gospels. I encourage you to read a chapter each week of Advent or at least read the first chapter during Advent. (Thanks to Nancy Turk, Elder for finding this resource!)

d365.org Following the Star. I also invite and encourage you to participate in the Advent daily devotional online at d365.org. This is my favorite daily devotional because it's short, yet solid theology that helps me connect with God. You can follow on your computer, iPad, or smart phone during Advent beginning on Sunday December 3. If you miss a day, you can always catch up by going into the archives. These devotions can be followed individually or as a family; either way, it is solid material that will make you think and ponder just as this season is meant to do.

Making time for worship and daily devotionals during this season helps us set our priorities; it allows room for Christ in our lives, and it centers us in the mystery of the incarnation: *Emmanuel—God with us*.

Invite a friend to worship: I also encourage you to invite a friend or two to join us in worship this year. This is a time of year when so many people seek and need a sense of holiness. Through our faith and community, we have a gift to share with others.

It is my prayer this year that we can journey together during Advent and really listen to how God is calling and speaking to us as individuals, families and as community of faith. May we watch and prepare to be changed by God's vulnerability of coming into the world through that of a baby, one who shared our humanity, grew in faith and now shows us the way.

In Christ's light, love, and hope,
Pastor Gail



ADVENT/CHRISTMAS MISSION: (Mission Committee)



Magnify the Light Mission It is always a blessing to be able to participate in this mission with our community!

- We have five families with three to four family members from DHHS (Department of Human Health Services) as well as the Domani Family.
- This year we are going back to “adopt a family”. Feel free to adopt a complete family or go together with someone to adopt a family.
- If you want to donate money, we will do the shopping for you.
- Additionally, if you just want to buy one or two gifts, we can accommodate that, too.

As you decide how you want to participate, please contact Nancy Turk (269 251-8291) so we can answer any questions and get you started on helping to make this mission as successful as always!

KPEP Christmas Donations (Kalamazoo Probation Enhancement Program)

Presbyterian Women are again collecting gifts for the men at the KPEP motel on Red Arrow highway west of town. This was a huge success last year! The motel can hold a total capacity of 12 – 24 men at one time. A box will be in the Narthex with a list of items needed...*gloves, hats, scarfs, etc.* Let's help make their Christmas happy and warm by getting your gifts in by Dec 17! Let's help make their Christmas happy and warm!

Christmas Through the Eyes of Joseph

From his beginnings as a humble carpenter to his all-important role as the earthly father of Jesus Christ, Joseph's place in the nativity story is sometimes overlooked but contains valuable lessons for all of



us. In this DVD from our church library, you will join Pastor Adam Hamilton as he examines Christmas through the eyes of Joseph in short, 12-minute segments. Absent from much of the biblical narrative, Joseph never spoke a word, but his courageous actions were crucial to the birth of Christ and God's salvation plan for humanity.

As you watch, you will understand how Joseph's story is much like our own. In life, we encounter circumstances that we would never have chosen for ourselves. At times it can be tempting just to walk away. Joseph provides us a great example of humbly obeying God even when we don't understand and faithfully moving forward in the strength that God provides.

Exchange your doubt for courage this Advent and Christmas season. The story of Joseph provides us a great example of humbly obeying God even when we don't understand and faithfully moving forward in the strength that God provides.

Chapter topics include:

- ➔ A Carpenter Named Joseph
- ➔ Whose Child Is This?
- ➔ Raising a Child Not Your Own
- ➔ The Journey to Bethlehem
- ➔ The Rest of the Story

**New in our Library Kiosk at
entranceway to Sanctuary:
"Christmas Through the
Eyes of Joseph"
DVD or Book**

Living Faith

Healing the Sick and Demon- Possessed

Sunday Bible Study at 9:15 am

You are invited to join our Bible Study every Sunday at 9:15 am in the library at First Presbyterian Church of Paw Paw. At the recent Nov. 5 meeting we discussed Mark 1: 35 to 45 and we sincerely hope these highlights encourage you to visit our friendly family. "See you there!"

Dave Nielsen: We come to the evening where people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. We see the whole town gathered at the door. Jesus healed many, first he healed the mother-in-law, then he healed many who had various diseases, he also drove out many demons but he would not let them speak because they knew who he was. All these people who needed healing came to him -- he'd already developed that reputation in a very short period of time -- Jesus forces healing on no one, he does not seek people out to heal but heals only those who come to him. He does not require that a person be morally good and that's interesting. Jesus does not expect to gain personally from healing for he never asks anyone he heals to follow him. He is not using this opportunity as a big sales pitch because usually he orders those who have been healed or exorcised to keep quiet. They then proclaim or follow on their own. Jesus does not consider either action a condition of healing. So I just thought this is important to us to keep in mind because there's a tendency out in the religious world to say, well if you don't believe the way I believe then you're not (this or that, you know). He doesn't make those demands.

Sue Zygodlo reads Mark 1:40-45: A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus was indignant. He reached out and touched the man, "I am willing," he said. "Be clean." Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning, "See that you don't tell this to anyone but go show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifice that Moses commanded for your cleansing as a testimony to them." Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside at lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Dave Nielsen: Was his primary ministry to heal people?

Tom Shoemaker: It's like Jesus is saying, "I'm here to preach and I'm here to teach. Let's go into the city and do that."

The Process Has Begun

The recent Focus Group sessions with both Decatur and Paw Paw churches made a big step but several remain in our effort to hire an installed pastor.

Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me I will hear you."

Focus Groups help us see values for our church; they help us to understand more fully the values we share; they help us discern how we should move forward, and see the hopes Decatur and Paw Paw churches share for our relationship. The Transition Team learned more about who we are as we talked about the times church was at its best, what contributes to our spiritual growth, and qualities and skills we seek in Pastoral leadership. Some of this data requires more attention than others.

Tom Shoemaker, Transition Team member, said at Sunday Service, "Recent Focus Group meetings in both Decatur and Paw Paw have revealed a general consensus of optimism that our two congregations might work together in cost sharing ways that would benefit both of our church families. We're discussing new possibilities based on each congregation's present and anticipated needs. Regardless where these conversations take us, we will have to accept some changes."

Next the Transition Team will begin a Congregational Mission Study, the document that shares our history, mission, demographics, and vision. This document forms a realistic picture of who we are and where we want to go. It establishes the desired skill set of the next installed pastor and lists items the installed pastor will still need to work on here. It is also an extremely important tool for candidates making decisions about us. A well-done Congregational Mission Study produces a better match in calling an installed pastor.

We expect Presbytery will authorize us to form a Pastor Nominating Committee in the late spring, 2024.

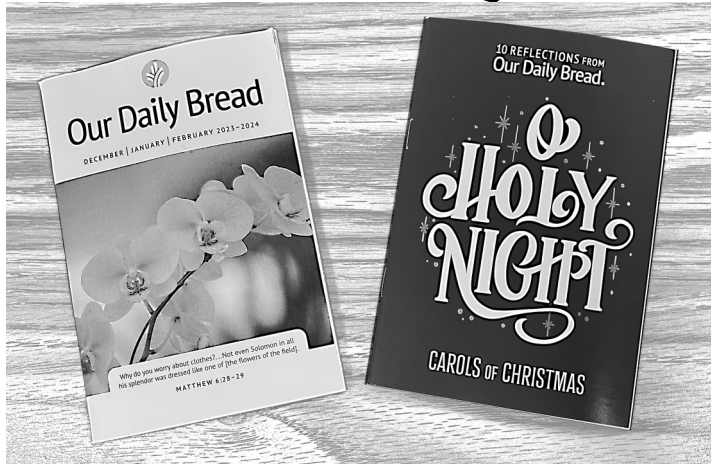
Focus Groups, conversations about our relationship with Decatur, Congregational Mission Study, Pastor Nominating Committee, and calling a new installed pastor. That's the plan. And now we've made an important first step.

✓ Rev. Gail Monsma was welcomed to Paw Paw Presbyterian in June 2022 to begin her interim / transitional ministry work with us. We all need to be open to new ways of doing "church" in order to best serve God and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.

✓ Decatur's and Paw Paw's Presbyterian Churches started worshipping together on Easter Sunday, April 2023. Rev. Gail Monsma began interim pastoring in Decatur over Easter 2023 and she shares her time between the two churches.

Chuck Williams

Explore the context of beloved favorite Christmas songs!



The Good Faith Library has partnered with Our Daily Bread Ministries in Grand Rapids (formerly Radio Bible Class) to make daily devotional booklets available on a quarterly basis. The December through February issue is now available. The library has also obtained copies of the booklet "O Holy Night" which has reflections on ten Christmas Carols. These booklets can be found in the Good Faith Library kiosk.

Debby Williams

Can You Help?

This Christmas season can you help one of our Wings of God "Pearls" who graduated from their program and is now living on her own? She needs a queen mattress and dresser. Please contact Susan Zygadlo. Thanks in advance!

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Faith Journey

Christ in Today's Culture

✓ ... is on break til Spring 2024! A few notes from the November meetings follow:

Galatians 3:24-28

Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

The Rule of Love

The fundamental expression of God's will is the two-fold commandment to love God and neighbor, and all interpretations are to be judged by the question whether they offer and support the love given and commanded by God. When interpretations do not meet this criterion, it must be asked whether the text has been used correctly in the light of the whole Scripture and its subject.

- Are you getting the church email updates? Contact the office if you need help at 269-657-3111.
- Also see pawpawpres.org for updates too.
- Scheduling a church meeting? Contact the church office at 269-657-3111 and avoid conflicts!

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Presbyterian News

[youtube.com/@1stprespawpaw](https://www.youtube.com/@1stprespawpaw)

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