



# FIRST and ForMOST

December 2011

## CHRISTMAS?

*By Dr. Chris Looker*

As I was preparing to write this article about the upcoming Christmas season, I could not help but to look out at our society and scratch my head. The question, ***“What has happened to Christmas?”*** kept coming to the forefront of my mind. It’s all about presents, trees, shopping, sales, advertising, jingles, and where manger scenes may be ***“legally”*** placed and where they may not.

***“Christmas”*** literally means, ***“a mass or worship service for Christ.”*** It’s supposed to be all about Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem and His life of love, miracles, teachings, and wonders. **But, look at what it has become!**

Maybe it has always been like this in modern-day society. Maybe I just didn’t notice how ***“UN-Christmassy”*** Christmas had become in my 49 years of life on this earth.

But, as I was thinking and praying about this whole issue, I began to write the following poem. I have no idea if it is an example of ***“good”*** or ***“bad”*** poetry. All I know is that it reflects the thoughts that came to mind as I pondered just what our society has done to Christmas and what we have allowed Christmas to become in today’s world.

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***“They”*** say that we are in  
The post-Christian days.  
Where we have all changed,  
In so many ways.

Jesus has become  
A thing of the past.  
***“They”*** always said  
He never would last.

We have grown to believe ***“them,”***  
Whoever ***“they”*** are.  
***“There’s no Christ in Christmas!”***  
How truly bizarre.

Sundays are for ANYTHING  
Except going to church.  
***“They”*** say that for God,  
It is foolish to search.

We used to be known  
As ***“One Nation Under God.”***  
Once worshipped so freely,  
God is now often outlawed.

What did God do  
To deserve this from us?  
To turn our backs,  
On the One we used to trust.

I don't understand  
How people could miss,  
The obvious "**Christ**"  
That is in "**Christmas.**"

So loved by God's Spirit,  
So blessed by His Son,  
The "**Creator,**" we, the "**created**"  
So easily shun.

So this is Christmas,  
In two thousand eleven?  
What must God be thinking  
In His glorious heaven?

I, for one,  
Will try to recall,  
The true meaning  
Of this greatest day of all.

When meek and mild,  
God came to earth.  
In Bethlehem's stable  
'Twas the Savior's birth.

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May your celebration of Christmas this Advent season be focused on the true meaning of Christmas.

May you be filled with the joy, peace, and love that can only come from our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

And, may all of you know that the members of the Looker family (Genny, Ben, Sam, and Chris) love you very, very much and wish you a very merry Christmas.

Your Friend and Pastor, **Chris**

  **HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**  

**Margaret Anderson ~ December 2**

**Sterns Lott ~ December 2**

**Rose May Dodd ~ December 3**

**Lynette Kwaku ~ December 3**

**Betty Beal ~ December 4**

**Bob Paukert ~ December 4**

**Jane Rottier ~ December 4**

**Lois Little ~ December 7**

**Sandra Malone ~ December 10**

**Sandy Mori ~ December 10**

**Elsie Salyer ~ December 17**

**Art Gose ~ December 19**

**Trilby Belz ~ December 24**

**Christina DeVera ~ December 28**

**Tom Rockett ~ December 31**

## **PREACHING SCHEDULE FOR DECEMBER 2011**

### **December 4, 2011 THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

Scripture Lesson: Mark 1: 1-8

Sermon Title: **"THE ULTIMATE PROPHET"**

***Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching***

### **December 11, 2011 THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

Scripture Lesson: John 1:6-8, 19-28

Sermon Title: **"WHO ARE YOU?"**

***Rev. Bill Jokela, Preaching***

### **December 18, 2011 THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

Scripture Lesson: Luke 1: 26-38

Sermon Title: **"THE LORD BE WITH YOU"**

***Dr. Chris Looker, Preaching***

### **December 24, 2011 - 7:00 PM - Saturday Evening**

***SPECIAL COMBINED CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE***

### **December 25, 2011 CHRISTMAS DAY "WORSHIP LITE" SERVICE**

Scripture Lesson: Isaiah 9: 6-7

Message: **"WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE CHRISTMAS GIFT?"**

Please come in casual clothes and be prepared to share with the congregation what your favorite Christmas present was in 2011. Thank you.

***Dr. Chris Looker, Worship Leader***

## **HOW DO WE LOOK AT CHRISTMAS?**

**By Marta Strada**

Let us imagine we are in Galtür, a town in the Tyrolean Alps. It is time for the famous "Bergweihnachten" (mountain Christmas). Celebrations start days before Christmas Eve. The famous "Wiener Saengerknaben" (Viennese Choir Boys) in their sailor's outfits give a concert singing beautiful Christmas hymns. Another evening before Christmas people go on a "Mondscheinwanderung" to the chapel in the forest, a moonlight walk, a walk through the peaceful, quiet surroundings of the town, full of the Spirit of Christmas. When they arrive, the

chaplain reads Christmas stories, made even more picturesque by lovely Christmas music in the background. What an experience!

Now let us fly to a town in the United States. People are still shopping for Christmas presents to put under their decorated Christmas trees, and Santa Claus is ready to slide down through the chimney to visit the children. You have already mailed your Christmas cards – I mean Holiday Cards, with Season's Greetings on it. You had to take a good look to find cards that wished "Merry Christmas."

The other day I read a German article "Is Christmas a Christian festival?" It states that during the most recent decades people all over the world tried to turn Christmas into a "worldly" event, by eliminating the presence of Jesus and His birth. It became illegal to display scenes of the Nativity in front of judicial buildings; there are even school choirs that avoid singing Christmas songs with religious texts. And Santa Claus became the main feature of the holiday. The article continues that Jesus Christ's birth is not the true reason of the holiday. Of course, you won't find any reference to Christmas in the New Testament. There were "Holy Night" celebrations in Rome long before people began to celebrate the birth of Jesus. In some ancient calendars the 25th of December is called "naturalis invincit solis" – the birthday of the Sun that cannot be defeated. When the early church in Rome established a feast day to celebrate the birth of the Messiah, they picked a day which coincided with the birthday of the Pagan Sun God. They picked a pagan feast day and adapted pagan rituals and customs to familiarize the pagans with Christian ideas. And Jesus could not have been born in the winter. We know that the shepherds were watching their flocks – however, due to the rainy season starting in November, they had to bring their sheep back to the villages so they could be protected in their stables.

When you ask today's Christian who is preparing to celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas, whether it bothers him that Christmas was basically a pagan festival, he/she would probably say, "What is the difference?" and insist that they celebrate Christmas to honor Christ.

Does today's tendency to leave Christ out of Christmas remind us of ancient Pagan times? The German article suggests that we should ignore all the customs and traditions, and celebrate Jesus' birth in a purely religious way, basing our traditions strictly on the Bible, praying to our Creator in spirit and truth, as He has taught us through John 4:24: "God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

***Have a blessed Christmas!***

**ACOLYTE SCHEDULE**

**12/11/2011 ~ Sarah Metzel**

**12/18/2011 ~ Nathan Youmans**

**12/25/2011 ~ Mariam T. Javed**

**1/8/2012 ~ Andrew Lauer**

**1/15/12 ~ Scott Springston**

**1/22/12 ~ Isabella Jackson**

**1/29/11 ~ Ben Looker**

## GREETINGS FROM MARGARET!

To my dear friends at First Presbyterian Church,

I think of you often and miss you very much. To those who participated in the music program, (singers, instrumentalists and actors/actresses), while I was there, I want to thank you again so much. You were wonderful. To those who have made my days bright with kind words and being my friend, I deeply appreciate you and enjoy seeing you again from time to time.

I am playing now at **Fairfax United Methodist Church, on Stratford Dr, Fairfax.**

I would like to invite you to the **Christmas Concert on Dec. 4th at 3 p.m.** In addition to several vocal and bell choirs, the adult choir will present the masterwork, Poulenc's "Gloria." I would love it if you could come and join us in celebrating the wonderful Christmas season.

Have a wonderful and beautiful Christmas.

Love,

*Margaret Whitfield*

## OUR FRIEND SUSI BECAME THE REVEREND SUSAN ENNIS Susi's Ordination on November 13, 2011

What a joyous celebration we witnessed at FPCA for our own Susi Ennis on the occasion of her ordination on November 13, 2011. The Ordination Service is a service of National Capital Presbytery; an Administrative Commission acted on its behalf. The Rev. Yena Hwang, as moderator of National Capital Presbytery, officiated. Pastors from FKPCV, Knox Presbyterian Church, and Urdu-Hindi Fellowship at FPCA also participated, as well as Susi's children and her brother.

The highlight of the Ordination Service was the laying on of hands with unison prayer offered in many languages. Then The Rev. Yena Hwang declared Susi to be THE REVEREND SUSAN LOUISE ENNIS, a teaching elder.

The Rev. Robert Harris challenged Susi to continue using her many gifts and to build trust with her new congregation and community by being open to new culture and experiences. He encouraged her to stay anchored with personal Bible study and prayer.

FPCA'S gift to Susi was a red stole with appliquéd symbols of a dove and a flame. The symbols represent the Holy Spirit's presence at Jesus' baptism and at the church's first Pentecost.

Music performed by the choirs of FPCA, FKPCV, and EIPC enhanced the joyous mood. A spectacular floral arrangement from Susi's new church in Poplar, Montana, added to the celebration. The offering will go to the National Capital Presbytery Scholarship Fund for seminary students.

A reception in Susi's honor followed the service.

May God's blessing be upon her as she accepts this new call.

*Tuula Jung and Stephanie Berg*

## MEET OUR NEW ASSISTANT TO THE PASTOR, The Rev. Bill Jokela

Most of you have seen me in the choir since the Fall of 1998 but probably know very little about me. Since I am now doing regular volunteer work at the church it seemed appropriate to introduce myself. Born in 1944 in Decatur, Alabama, my early years were spent in Savannah, Georgia. My dad got a job at Tyndall Air Force Base in Panama City, Florida, and we moved there in 1955. I called Panama City home since I attended Junior High and Senior High School there and my parents lived there for the remainder of their lives.

I graduated from Stetson University in 1965 with a degree in Music Education and taught band and played in the Jacksonville, Florida Symphony until I entered the Army as a bandsman in 1968. I was introduced to Virginia in the Summer of 1968 when I was assigned to the 50<sup>th</sup> Army Band at Fort Monroe near Hampton. I spent 7 months there and 27 months in Worms, Germany assigned to the 76<sup>th</sup> Army Band. After being discharged from the Army I taught orchestra and band in Daytona Beach, Florida for three years before entering Columbia Theological Seminary in 1974.

While at Seminary I felt led to the Army Chaplaincy. Upon graduation in 1978 I was able to attend the Chaplain Officer Basic Course at Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island during that summer. I returned to Atlanta for a year of training at Georgia Mental Health Institute. I then taught band in Dekalb County and served as choir director at North Decatur Presbyterian Church until I was ordained for the Army Chaplaincy on June 1<sup>st</sup> 1982 in Ormond Beach, Florida. I had been under care of the Presbytery of St. Johns in Orlando prior to that time.

My assignments have included Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri; 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division in South Korea; 4 years in Bavaria, Germany; the Chaplain Officer Advance Course at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey; Eisenhower Army Medical Center at Fort Gordon, Georgia; Installation Chaplain at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin; Deputy Base Support Battalion Chaplain in Schinnen, The Netherlands and finally service at Arlington National Cemetery where I retired in November of 1999. In 15 months of duty at Arlington I participated in 630 funerals.

In January of 2001 I returned to Arlington as a Cemetery Representative, not as a Chaplain. In 7 years as a Cemetery Rep I estimate that I oversaw around 6,000 funerals. It was while serving at Arlington that the opportunity arose for me to return to active duty as a Chaplain and serve with the Warrior Transition Brigade at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. My tour of duty there was for exactly 3 years, 2008 - 2011. I am now retired as I like to say for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time! As you can see, I have experienced an unusual career progression but in all of my different positions and locations I have always experienced God's active presence. As I told the Wounded Warriors at Walter Reed during my weekly introduction to the new brigade members, I took my first induction physical in 1968 and my second induction physical in 2008, 40 years later! God does move in mysterious ways. I now look forward to service at First Presbyterian Church of Annandale. I feel privileged to work with Dr. Chris Looker, Tariq Javed, Ron Freeman, Felipe Dominguez and the members of the congregation.

*Bill Jokela*

# SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

## October 19, 2011

The Devotion was based on the book Developing a Servant's Heart. Dr. Looker read selections from the chapter Holes, stating that there should be no "holes" in communities, they should be complete, individuals working together and helping in areas which need help. The Church being the nucleus of the community, and it is the Church's responsibility to see that people in need are taken care of properly.

Dr. Looker shared with the Session that our future Assistant to the Pastor, Rev. Bill Jokela's office hours are on Monday from 2:00-4:00 pm. Rev. Jokela will visit the sick and will preach at worship service once a month.

Elder Susan Ennis, chair of the Mission Commission, called to Session's attention that there were hardly any participants. Now that she is leaving FPCA, it is necessary that somebody replace her. Also, hardly anybody participates in the Scholarship Committee. There should be at least 5 members participating. As this was the last Session meeting Elder Susan Ennis would attend, she expressed her deeply felt appreciation for the years she had been active at FPCA: she had learned very much which will help her in her future as pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Poplar, Montana.

Deacon Joan Johnson called to Session's attention that on November 13 Sarah Schmoyer will celebrate her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday!

Session is preparing for Susi Ennis's Ordination on November 13. Susi is selecting the various representatives, both from her family, from FPCA and FKPCV. Both choirs will add to the beauty of the service. The big event will be followed by a reception for which the congregation is encouraged to contribute delicacies. There will be an offering collected during service for the Scholarship Fund and Ministry Crisis Fund of Presbytery. Elder Susan Ennis made the motion that such offering be taken. Session approved the motion unanimously.

It has been decided to have a special session meeting before the Ordination.

Both choirs, the choir of FPCA as well as the choir of FKPCV, will participate during the service. There will be a reception in the Activities Building following Worship Service on November 6 as well as after the ordination on November 13. Sign-up sheets will be posted for food to be brought by the congregation.

Next, Session discussed the budget for 2012. Commissions had handed in the amounts of money they thought they needed to function properly in the coming year, but it turned out that the total was much higher than the amount budgeted for 2011. Session discussed the various items and several session members explained why their commission was not only unable to reduce the amount that was needed, but had to raise it. However, after talking over the needs in detail, Session was able to reduce the amount requested for 2012, with the following result:

<u>2011 Budget</u>	<u>Proposed 2012 Budget</u>	<u>Amended 2012 Proposed Budget</u>
\$ 238,430.00	\$ 253,919.00	\$ 246,267.00

The Commission moved the Amended Proposed Budget; the majority of Session approved the amended budget.

Elder Ruth Sutton reported that the pledge cards are being revised and will be ready to be picked up or sent out by October 30, 2012. November 20, 2011, will be Stewardship Dedication Sunday.

Reporting for the **Worship Commission**, Elder Sandy Mori, Chair of Worship Commission, made two motions:

1. Prince George's Choral Society be authorized to take a "Free Will Donation" at the upcoming 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Concert at FPCA on Sunday, November 20, 2011, at 4:30 PM, when Ron Freeman will be the director. Session approved the motion.

2. To have one Christmas Eve Worship Service at 7:00 PM on Saturday, December 24, 2011. A traditional, joint service is planned. This motion also carried.

Reporting for the **Buildings and Ground Commission**, Elder Jack Belz reported, that John Fennig, chair of the Commission, will install windows in the doors leading to Dr. Chris Looker's and Elder Susan Ennis' offices.

As currently the **Congregational Life and New Member Commission** has no members and is unable to function, Elder Cara Laufer suggested that, in order to get people involved, there should be a meeting once a month after worship instead of Adult Sunday School, not only to familiarize them with the Congregational Life and New Member Commission, but to make them realize that all members are on a Commission and are welcome to come up with ideas.

*Marta Strada, Clerk of Session*

## **BOOK CLUB NEWS**

The Book Club is not planning to meet in December. The next meeting will be on Tuesday, January 17 at 1:00 PM in the church library. Members of the group will discuss the novel, Madonnas of Leningrad by Debra Dean. Newcomers are welcome.

*Randy Meli*

## **HEALTHY EATING, ACTIVE LIVING**

Are you interested in attending this free Interfaith Panel Workshop at George Mason University Johnson Center, on Thursday, January 12, 8:00 am-12:00 pm?

For More Information, Contact [Tenia.simmons@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Tenia.simmons@fairfaxcounty.gov) Tel.: 703-324-3453

To Register go to: [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dsm/cil](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dsm/cil) Click: "Register for Upcoming Events"



***Deadline for the January 2012 issue of FIRST and ForMOST is December 15, 2011. Please e-mail your announcements and reports to the Editor, Marta Strada, LUXI7777@aol.com, or put them in the FIRST and ForMOST drawer in the church office. Thank you.***

## **DO YOU WANT TO CLOSE THE YEAR 2011 LAUGHING?**

Can you imagine the nun sitting at her desk grading these papers, all the while trying to keep a straight face and maintain her composure!

Kids were asked questions about the Old and New Testaments. The following statements about the Bible were written by children. They have not been retouched or corrected. Incorrect spelling has been left in.

1. In the First Book of the Bible, Guinnessis. God got tired of creating the world so he took the Sabbath off.
2. Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree. Noah's wife was Joan of Ark. Noah built an ark and the animals came on in pears.
3. Lot's wife was a pillar of salt during the day, but a ball of fire during the night.
4. The Jews were a proud people and throughout history they had trouble with unsympathetic genitals.
5. Sampson was a strongman who let himself be led astray by a Jezebel like Delilah.
6. Moses led the Jews to the Red Sea where they made unleavened bread, which is bread without any ingredients.
7. The Egyptians were all drowned in the dessert. Afterwards, Moses went up to mount Cyanide to get the Ten Commandments.
8. The First Commandments was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple.
9. The Seventh Commandment is thou shalt not admit adultery.
10. Moses died before he ever reached Canada then Joshua led the Hebrews in the battle of Geritol.
11. The greatest miracle in the Bible is when Joshua told his son to stand still and he obeyed him.
12. David was a Hebrew king who was skilled at playing the liar. He fought the Finkelsteins , a race of people who lived in Biblical times.
13. Solomon, one of Davids sons, had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.
14. When Mary heard she was the mother of Jesus, she sang the Magna Carta.
15. When the three wise guys from the East side arrived they found Jesus in the manager.
16. Jesus was born because Mary had an immaculate contraption.
17. St. John the Blacksmith dumped water on his head.
18. Jesus enunciated the golden rule, which says to do others before they do one to you. He He also explained a man doth not live by sweat alone.
19. It was a miracle when Jesus rose from the dead and managed to get the tombstone off the entrance.
20. The people who followed the Lord were called the 12 Decibels.
21. Epistels were the wives of the Apostles.
22. One of the oppossums was St. Matthew who was also a taximan.
23. St. Paul cavorted to Christianity, he preached holy acrimony, who is another name for marraige.
24. Christians have only one spouse. This is called monotony.

*Contributed by Nancy DeVera*