

December 1, 2014

The Oaks



T *SCRATCHINGS FROM THE DIXON PENCIL*

I don't know what day Jesus was born. It probably wasn't December 25. But it is as good a day as any to celebrate the Incarnation. God took on the trappings and limitations of a human in order to save humans. He chose to come not with a flash of power and might, but as a helpless baby. He came into a family among the socially and economically disadvantaged. He came to experience poverty and to feel the oppression of the Roman occupation of the land. He experienced family life and growing pains, just like the rest of us.

The one incident of Jesus' childhood for which we have a biblical account shows him as curious and knowledgeable, speaking with the scholars at the Temple. He was respectful to the scholars, and obedient to his parents when they found him. He returned with them to their home.

Most of what we know of Jesus from the Gospels is his life and work as a young man. He was insightful, idealistic, compassionate and honest. He mixed with all kinds of people, and cared for both their physical and spiritual needs. He was direct, but forgiving. Most of all, Jesus was loving. He loved so much he gave his very life for humans, past, present and future.

Loving and giving are what we associate most with Christmas. We zero in on the beginning of Jesus' life story, because he was the ultimate gift of love.

But why this particular time, December 25? Certainly not because we can prove it was his actual birthday. Tradition tells us that the date was selected to correspond to the Winter Solstice, the shortest, darkest, coldest (at least in the northern hemisphere) day of the year. Think about that symbolism. Jesus comes to us when it's dark, when we are cold. He comes at the times we need him most.

Cold, dark, dreary winter is a good time to stop and make ourselves remember God's gift of love in Jesus – the baby, the man the Savior. Remember that this Christmas. Enjoy the story of the baby's birth. Remember the angels, the Wise Men, the glory. Remember the Gift of Love.

Memories alone won't make the daylight last longer, but they can bring light to your soul. And once we get past that solstice, the days will actually get longer, and the nights shorter. The lowest point, the shortest day, marks the beginning of longer, warmer days to come, eventually. May the spirit of Christmas warm your soul and prepare you for brighter days ahead.

Merry Christmas
Pastor Jonathan Dixon

United Methodist Women will meet Tuesday, December 2 at 6:00 PM

Program: Christmas Potluck
Hostesses: Nancy Daniels, Rose Hughes & Betty Peel

We welcome all ladies of the church. Come see us in the fellowship hall.

RFUMC Calendar – December 2014

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 7:00 PM Trustees	2 6:00 PM United Methodist Women Christmas Party	3 9:00 AM Quilt- ing; 6:00 PM Bi- ble Study; 7:00 PM Choir Prac- tice	4	5	6 6 – 8 PM Par- sonage Open House
7 Second Sunday of Advent 9:30 AM Worship; 10:30 AM Adult Bible Class; 6:30 PM Finance and Administration	8	9	10 9:00 AM Quilt- ing; 7:00 PM Choir Practice	11	12	13
14 9:30 AM Wor- ship; 10:30 AM Adult Bible Class; 4:00 PM Christmas Mu- sical Program	15	16	17 9:00 AM Quilt- ing; 9 – 12 CLM at Church; 6:00 PM Bible Study	18	19	20
21 9:30 AM Wor- ship; 10:30 AM Jesus Birthday Cake; 10:35 AM Adult Bible Class	22	23	24 10:00 PM Christmas Eve Candlelight Ser- vice	25 Merry Christmas!	26	27
28 9:30 AM Worship; 10:30 AM Adult Bible Class	29	30	31			

Looking Ahead...

January 17, UMM Beef Noodle Dinner
 February 7, Family Valentine Dinner
 February 17, Shrove Tuesday pancake Supper
 February 18, Ash Wednesday Service
 March 17, UMM Annual Meeting
 March 29, Palm Sunday
 April 5, Easter
 June 10-13, Annual Conference

December Anniversaries

Bill and Yvonne Mann	12/8
Roger and Melissa Pfeiffer	12/18/1988
Richard and Jolene Carr	12/28/2009
Tyler and Samantha Sloman	12/28/2002

Congregational Meeting Report

Based on concerns discussed by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee earlier this year, the congregation was invited to participate in two congregational meetings this fall.

In September, we invited Rev. Michael Crawford, Director of Congregational Development, to meet with us on a weeknight evening. We initiated the meeting because many of us are concerned about the future of our church congregation. Our Sunday morning attendance has been lower than usual in recent months and money is tight. With Rev. Crawford, we discussed possible strategies to attract new attendees and members and to deepen the involvement of less-frequently involved attendees and members. Rev. Crawford assured us that our concerns are shared by many smaller churches and it is good for us to be discussing them as a congregation, but that there was no magic formula we could enact to secure our future. We decided to pray, together and separately, about the situation and to convene in a few months for further discussion. Rev. Dixon held 8:30 AM prayer sessions on Sunday mornings throughout much of the fall for this purpose.

On the afternoon of Sunday, November 2, a second meeting was held, this time without Rev. Crawford present. At this meeting, many of us expressed a wide range of personal stories about our own involvement in this church and stories of those members whom some of us know more personally. These personal stories led us to further believe that there is not a clear and present need to immediately begin a new program, form a new committee, or schedule new church activities. There did seem to be a level of consensus among those gathered that we need to identify ourselves as members of our congregation and to share our own stories of faith and involvement in this church with others in our life and in our community. Over the course of the next several months, as we move into 2015, we hope to bring some additional focus to the mission and vision of our church, considering how we can better live these ideas within our existing programs and church experiences.

We are aware that our church likely cannot thrive without prayerfully considering and likely enacting possible changes, such as a change in worship time. To that end, we expect that we will survey the congregation about their church experience sometime in the early part of 2015 and use that information to help inform future decisions.

It is our hope that through a focus on the church mission and vision, we can bring others into our church who will have the same kind of unique personal stories that many of us shared with each other this fall. It is our current and future congregation who will help us celebrate the next 140 years and beyond. Please pray and join us in this effort!

Reported by: Carly Shank

MISSION STATEMENT: *Our mission is to draw people into relationship with Christ and the church and to lovingly challenge them to spiritual growth.*

OUR VISION: *A warm fellowship of Christians in the Riverton area, growing in numbers and spiritual nurture, with facilities and programs to do ministry in the name of Jesus Christ for generations to come.*

Parsonage Christmas Open House

AGAIN we are thrilled to invite you all to Our Home for an Open House! Time 6-8 Saturday the 2nd of December. There will be plenty of food so come to have supper with all. This is a time of fun and talk that I have enjoyed yearly and am anticipating another joyous Christmas time with you.

Come and enjoy please.
Jonathan and Ellen

Trustee News

The new trees have been planted. They are from memorials given for our church families who designated their donations be used toward planting a new tree in memory of their loved one. The church yard has beautiful trees (and lots, and lots of leaves!), but many of those trees are very old. The trustees feel it is time to begin growing some replacements.

Also one of the church's furnaces was in need of repair and that has been completed. We still have a lot of leaves (from those beautiful trees) and they need to be raked, burned and/or hauled off for mulch, etc. Help yourself!

Scrip Update

The season for giving is closing in on us. If you need a gift that will always be appreciated and used, please consider giving the gift cards from the SCRIP Program. It



has proved very helpful in paying down our church's loan principal....WHICH....this last month the SCRIP Program paid another \$1,000.00 on the principal. Thank you to everyone who has used the program and hopefully continue using it.

During the holiday season, many cards are offered (temporarily) in small denominations. Some of those include: AMC Theatres \$10.00; Barnes & Noble \$5.00; CVS \$10.00; Meijer \$10.00; Outback Steakhouse \$10.00; Panera bread \$5.00; Pizza Hut \$5.00; Target \$10.00; Starbucks \$5.00; and Walmart \$10.00. These will not show on the regular order sheets, so please, mark the orders with exactly what you desire. These cards will be available for a short time....till they run out.

December Birthdays

Lisa Dungey	12/1
Betty Peel	12/1
Harold Shepherdson	12/2/1932
Lawrence Lafary	12/5
Timothy Phillips	12/11
Tom Higgins	12/13
Sandy Caldwell	12/16/1962
Alexander Sloman	12/17/2003
Melissa Pfeiffer	12/18/1963
Glenna Wainwright	12/21
Jolene Carr	12/23/1963
Carolyn Binion	12/24/1949
Eileen Kendle	12/27/1942
Debbie Shipman	12/29
Timothy Sexton	12/29/1957
Tyson Binion	12/31/2005

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Address Correction Requested

RFUMC PHONE: (217) 629-9721
E-MAIL: rvtnumc@sbcglobal.net
WEBSITE: www.rivertonfirstumc.org

Please join us for the **Christmas Musical** program,
Jesus There's Something About That Name
Sunday, December 14 at 4 PM



There will be performances by the choir and the children of the Sunday School, and lots of special moments that will help all of us celebrate the birth of our Lord. Please join us for the performance and stay afterwards for a few minutes to celebrate with some holiday cheer.