As Christmas approaches and we are moving through Advent with the familiar scriptures of the season, I would call your attention to three short verses in Luke’s first chapter. Mary has been visited by the angel Gabriel, who has announced to her that she will give birth to a child – a child who “will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of his ancestor David.” The church calls this moment “The Annunciation”, and Frederick Buechner muses that the angels in heaven held their breath at how Mary would respond!

Mary’s response becomes a model for Christian discipleship ever after, so much so that New Testament scholar Beverly Gaventa calls her the first disciple. “Here am I,” Mary said, “the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.” According to Luke, Mary left Nazareth almost immediately after receiving this life-giving, life-changing word, and went to visit Zechariah and Elizabeth. The meeting between these two family members is one of sheer delight. Luke puts it like this: “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Elizabeth, Mary’s older cousin, pregnant herself at an advanced age, exclaimed, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Note that in these three short verses, the word “blessed” is used no less than three times – and I think that’s worth a little reflection as we prepare for Christmas.

For Mary to be blessed by God meant that she would soon become the object of whispers and rumors in her own town of Nazareth, and it meant that she still faced the task of telling Joseph that she was with child. It would mean giving birth to the child in a manger stall as there would be no room in the inn for them. Being blessed would also mean fleeing to Egypt when Herod would seek to kill the child who would be King. And it would one day mean standing by as her son hung helpless from a cross.

We use the words “blessing” and “blessed” usually to mean some special favor from the hand of God. We pray to be blessed with good health, or with healthy children, or a good job, or the right life partner. We tend to think of blessings in terms of how they will enhance and enrich our lives. We are tempted to pray for blessings that will bring us joy, comfort, security, health and wealth. But here, Mary is blessed in ways that will bring her challenge and heartache and complete upheaval of her life. Mary’s blessedness will not bring her wealth, status, security, or even happiness. Mary’s blessedness is found in being elected by God to bear the divine Son. Her blessedness comes in being chosen to be a vital part of God’s plan. William Barclay calls this “the paradox of blessedness”.

The piercing truth is that God does not choose to bless a person for ease and comfort and selfish joy, but for a task that will take all that head and heart and hand can bring to it. Mary is blessed by God to be a blessing to the world but it was not an easy calling – it was not one that would bring her comfort and approval from others.

As we think about our blessings here in Muncie at First Presbyterian Church, may we come to realize that blessings come from God so that we can serve God more faithfully and effectively. They are not to...
Dear Members and Friends,

We are approaching the new year—the new year of the Church, that is. The first Sunday of Advent is the beginning of the church year, which we begin with a season of preparation, waiting and anticipation. I have always loved that about the Church, that we begin with purposeful waiting, with looking ahead to what’s to come and, more importantly, what we need to do to get ready for it. Our society is so much about instant realization that the idea of prayerful waiting and purposeful anticipation has become an important spiritual discipline for me. As I look toward the beginning of the church year and then the calendar year soon after, I am compelled by the Advent scriptures to reflect on what the past year has meant for me, where it has taken me and then turn spiritually to look ahead and ask God to inhabit the imagination of my prayers for a vision of what is to come and how I might need to change or be strengthened to meet it as faithfully as possible.

At first it has seemed ironic to me that the beginning of the Church year will be the ending of my radiation treatments, that have taken longer and been more difficult than I had expected. Upon further reflection I see that because of this challenging time of treatment I am starting to look toward whatever happens next with a deeper sense of appreciation; for health, for caregiving, for hearing people tell me that I am in their prayers, for the simple pleasure of just being here. As I begin my preparations for the new year, I am filled with an indescribable gratitude that this new year will be here in Muncie, with all of you in this truly wonderful congregation. As life in the church has taught me, endings always lead to beginnings. All thanks and praise to God! And may God bless each one of you as we enter our season of spiritual preparation for another new year.

Love in Christ,
Pastor Laura, *Interim Associate Pastor

(Advent, continued from page 1)

bring us comfort or ease so much as they are given to strengthen and to deepen us as human beings. God blesses us so that we might become greater blessings to the world. God blesses us so that we might share our blessings and multiply God’s gifts entrusted to us.

As we embark on a new and exciting future here at First Presbyterian Church in 2013, I am deeply moved that so many of you have responded to our Consecration Sunday with a sense of blessedness. By that I mean you are looking forward to the future with hope, with anticipation, and wanting to be a part – in a very real way – of what God has in store for this congregation.

If we are truly going to be blessings the way God envisioned each of us to be a blessing, we are not called to operate from fear. I’ve heard a few comments like, “Well, we just don’t know what the future of the church will be” – and that is hardly confident faith. That’s not operating out of our blessings. It is only through perspective and time that we learn some of the things that we regarded as burdens or concerns have turned out, by God’s grace, to be some of the greatest blessings of our lives.

In this Advent season of joy and celebration, may each one of us seek to be a light here in Muncie as we let our light shine within First Presbyterian Church and our community, knowing that God has blessed us to be a blessing. May God bless you in this wonderful season, and may wisdom and strength come to you through the blessings God gives.

With great love as your pastor,
Ron Maylor

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

—Luke 2: 4 - 7
Looking for Something Different to Give?

After my eye-opening mission trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), Christmas shopping for my children was impossible. How could I buy another sweater or jewelry or perfume to add to the collection they already had when I knew that the children and their parents in Congo would not even have the lavish Christmas dinner we’d enjoy. Nor would they have peace, for the fighting that began while we were there continued and threatened their very lives. Our hosts in Congo prepared delicious meals for us—usually rice and beans and fruit—and goat. Now goat is not my favorite meat but we quickly realized meat was a luxury. The Congolese had no meat or very little. So that’s how it came to be that I always send livestock via Heifer Project International to Africans or Hondurans or wherever HPI feels they are most needed. And they return the favor to me.

Along with the Giving Tree that provides for children right here in Muncie, we offer Heifer International gift cards to give to those hard-to-buy-for, have-everything people on your gift list or for your children who would love learning about how their gift is bringing a better life for other children. And it is a gift that continues to grow through the years as recipients of animals are required to pass on offspring of the animal to others. We saw in person Heifer International at work in Honduras on our mission trips. Once we even stayed on a HPI demonstration farm where people from neighboring villages came to learn how to care for the animals which will help them feed their families and even earn income for them. We were so impressed! What a great gift—a gift that goes on giving.

Wishing you joy and peace in this Advent time,
Carrie Jo

~ ADVENT DEVOTIONALS ~
for Individuals and Families
~ Pick yours up at the information desk or in the narthex this Sunday ~

~ FOR INDIVIDUALS ~
JESUS, BELOVED SON  (Henri Nouwen)
Daily devotions and prayer for each day of Advent from the writings of one of the most innovative and influential spiritual writers of the past century.

~ FOR FAMILIES ~
THE ADVERBS OF ADVENT (David Mead)
Devotionals for families with children of all ages—focusing on one Adverb that describes the Advent story for all the days of Advent.

First Presbyterian Church
1400 W. Riverside Ave.
Muncie IN 47303
Phone: 765-289-4431
Fax: 765-289-4486
www.firstprespuncie.org

SUNDAY SERVICE TIMES:
8:30 a.m.—Contemporary Service (Sanctuary)
11:00 a.m.—International Service (Chapel)
11:00 a.m.—Traditional Service (Sanctuary)

The Rev. Dr. Ronald Naylor, Senior Pastor
ronpres@sbcglobal.net

The Rev. Dr. Myungku Lee, Associate Pastor
ninebrights@hotmail.com

The Rev. Laura Sherwood, Interim Associate Pastor
lsherwood@firstprespuncie.org

Pastor Carrie Jo Miller, Commissioned Lay Pastor
carriejo1stpres@sbcglobal.net

Cathy Alexander, Youth Director
cathy@firstprespuncie.org

Lisa Ulrich, Business Administrator
lisa@firstprespuncie.org

Jane Smith, Administrative Assistant
jsmith@firstprespuncie.org
### Branches’ Upcoming Events

To glorify God, Branches’ activities provide education, fellowship, mission, stewardship, and worship experiences for all junior high and senior high students. All gatherings are from 5:00 to 7:00 pm at the church unless otherwise noted and will usually include dinner. Always check your email for more details and last minute changes. If I don’t have your email address, please send it to [cathy@firstpresmuncie.org](mailto:cathy@firstpresmuncie.org).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 2</td>
<td>Advent Workshop</td>
<td>This year, the workshop will be on <strong>Sunday afternoon from 2:00 to 5:00 pm</strong>. We will provide an afternoon of games, crafts, singing and snacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 9</td>
<td>YWCA Extreme Makeover</td>
<td>We are going to work to create a warm and welcoming space in an upstairs lounge. We will plan and shop for this project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 16</td>
<td>Mystery meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 23</td>
<td>&quot;Meals on Wheels&quot;</td>
<td>We will not meet as a group, but this would be a great Sunday for your family to deliver Christmas baskets assembled by the Mission Committee. Watch for details!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 28-30</td>
<td>YWCA Extreme Makeover</td>
<td>Now it is time to do the work! Over these three days, we will tear down wallpaper, paint walls and murals, clean carpet, and move in new furniture. We hope some former Branches members who are home for the holidays will join us! Watch for more details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 6</td>
<td>Job Jar Sunday</td>
<td>We’ll take down the manger scene and do other jobs around the church.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

### 2013 Presbyterian Youth Triennium

**July 16-20 • Purdue University**

At the Presbyterian Youth Triennium, through the presentations, studies, recreational events and mission experiences, youth participate in activities that inspire them to be alert, active and seek ways to connect their lives with their growing faith. FPC high school students (rising high school freshmen through graduated seniors) may attend.

**COST & DEADLINE...**

Cost is $100 per person. Deadline to sign up with Thea is **December 30**.

---

### AP Bible Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who:</th>
<th>High School and middle school students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What:</td>
<td>Light supper and Bible study (right now we are studying Malachi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why:</td>
<td>Because Sunday School isn’t enough!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When:</td>
<td>Thursday evenings, time varies*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where:</td>
<td>Locations vary (junior high room, Starbucks, etc.)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Email Thea for time and location...we’re mixing it up!

---

We Welcome Children and Families on Sunday Mornings!

Infants through 3 year olds receive child care and Christian nurturing in Room 101 with Marie Burkey and her helper throughout Sunday morning from 8:15 am to noon.

**During Worship Services:** **Children’s Worship Center**

Children 4 years old through 2nd grade join their parents in the sanctuary for the beginning of worship and are dismissed with a leader for Children’s Worship Center. Storytelling is used as a way for children to be in worship so God is experienced, not just learned about. Children in the 3rd grade and older remain in worship with their parents.

**9:45-10:30 am Sunday School for Children and Youth:**

- Room 104: 4-year-olds through 5th graders with Jeff & Tracy Clinger (combined class using “One Room Sunday School curriculum”)
- Room 23 (on the stage): 6th-12th graders with Aaron & Jacqueline Burton

---

*I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.* —John 15:5
Advent Workshop

Who: Elementary and preschool children of First Pres
When: Sunday, December 2, 2012, 2:00 – 5:00 pm
Where: Fellowship Hall, Youth Hall, various classrooms
What: Crafts, stories, games, snacks, and short rehearsal for the Christmas program, “The Not So Silent Night”
Why: This is the youth group’s present to the families in our congregation. Parents are welcome to stay, but the youth group will supervise the children so parents can spend the afternoon preparing for the season.

Please call the church office (289-4431) or email Thea (cathy@firstpresmuncie.org) if you’d like to make a last-minute reservation.

All-Church Carry-In Advent Brunch!

Sunday, December 23rd
9:30 am
in Fellowship Hall

includes the Christmas program by FPC performers of all ages “The Not-So-Silent Night” (see side panel)

Bring a brunch dish to serve 10 - 12!

You won’t want to miss...

The Not-So-Silent Night

Sunday, December 23rd
10:00 am in Fellowship Hall

“And so we’re offering an all-star cast
Of kids from one to ninety-two
Although its been said many times, many ways
A very Merry Christmas to you!”
Special Services of the Season

Sunday, December 9, 8:30 am
A Praise & Worship Christmas
presented by The Celebration Praise Team
Celebrate and worship the coming Messiah by experiencing this powerful service of scripture, contemporary music, and traditional carols

Monday, December 24
Christmas Eve Services
12 noon ~ Communion Service
4:30 pm ~ Family Service
7:30 pm ~ Candlelight Service

Tuesday, December 25, 10:00 am
Casual Worship Service
Regular 8:30 & 11:00 am Services will be held on Dec. 2, 9, 16, 23, & 30

The Giving Tree

The Giving Tree is now up in the Lounge hallway, and you can help decorate it with ornaments which are displayed on the table beside the tree. Please select an ornament or several, remove the tag from the ornament and place the ornament on the tree. Then purchase the gift, wrap it, PUT YOUR TAG ON THE GIFT IDENTIFYING THE RECIPIENT, MAKING SURE THE FAMILY NUMBER IS ON IT. And put it under the tree.

Many ornaments represent a very special need of a family of children or of persons identified by the Salvation Army, A Better Way or the YWCA. Other ornaments represent gifts for agencies with whom we partner - some specific gifts and some monetary gifts.

It’s such a joy to buy for a child knowing how excited he or she will be. Each child will have two ornaments: one with toy or game suggestions and one with clothing suggestions and sizes. We ask that you choose only one of the suggestions per child because all the families have more than one child represented by ornaments. It wouldn't be fair for one child in the family to receive 12 gifts while the others each receive two. If you want to buy many gifts, you could take ornaments for all the children in the family.

Agencies represented by some of the ornaments include Christian Ministries, Muncie Habitat for Humanity, Second Harvest Food Bank, Motivate Our Minds (MOMS), and Muncie Mission.

Place your gift(s) under our Giving Tree by Friday, December 21, for delivery on the 23rd.

Be a Bell Ringer for Salvation Army
at the Muncie Mall (just inside the entrance by MCL Cafeteria).
First Pres members will be ringing the bells on December 3-7 and December 10-14 from 4:00-8:00 p.m.
Choose a one-hour time slot and sign up in the Lounge Hallway.
This is a great holiday activity for the whole family!

PANTRY ITEM FOR DECEMBER:
CANNED SOUPS & CHILI
Please place your donation(s) in the cart in Fellowship Hall.
Life, Death, and Hope in a Great City

Mumbai, India, is one of the world’s great cities. But near the airport lies a makeshift settlement where poverty reigns. Practically in the shadow of luxury hotels, poor people struggle to survive in the community of Annawadi.

The people of Annawadi hope and strive for a better future. An American reporter has written a book about these people and their daily lives. Their stories are told in Behind the Beautiful Forevers (305.5 BOO) by Katherine Boo.

The author is a writer at “The New Yorker” and a former reporter and editor at the “Washington Post.” Her book is based on three year’s research.

A Resilient Woman

As an attorney and the wife of a United States Senator and candidate for vice president, the late Elizabeth Edwards achieved almost-celebrity status. But behind the glamour and excitement of high-level politics lay a world of suffering and pain. Her son Wade was killed in a freak accident at age 16. While still relatively young, she contracted the breast cancer which would eventually prove fatal. She was caught up the sensational scandal of her husband’s infidelity.

Her reflections on facing adversity are recounted in a beautifully-written memoir Resilience (973.931 EDWA). Her bravery in the face of tragedy is an inspiration, but also a reminder that life is full of pitfalls. She writes, “We all tumble and fall. I certainly have, but in truth it is going to happen, in some degree, to all of us. Oh, maybe everyone we care about will live to attend our funerals. Maybe everyone whom you love and who loves you will be loyal to you in every way for every day or your life. Or maybe not.”

Bad Habits

It’s easy to fall into bad habits, but not so easy to break them. David Hawkins, a counselor and author with more than 300,000 copies of his books in print, believes that bad habits are really addictions that control behavior and limit the ability to make good choices.

In Breaking Everyday Addictions (248.8 HAWK), the author shows how to overcome bad habits and – with the help of God – to replace them with positive patterns of behavior. He provides answers to common questions such as why anorexics and obese people continue their self-destructive behavior and why compulsive gamblers continue to bet against nearly unbeatable odds.

A Way to Make Christmas Merrier

In this time of gift-giving and good cheer, could you make a special effort to make life merrier for your librarians? An easy way to do it is to return books promptly after you have read them. An even easier way to bring a smile to a librarian’s face is to put returned books in the return box just left of the library entrance. Never put a book back on the shelf or rack.

Merry Christmas to all.

Want to learn more about some of the great figures of the New Testament? Here’s an opportunity. The Thursday Noon Bible Study group has just begun a new series that does just that. Dr. Amy-Jill Levine will give 30-minute video lectures on people such as John the Baptist, the Virgin Mary, Joseph, Peter, John and James, as well as fictional characters such as the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. Dr. Levine is a professor of New Testament Studies at the Vanderbilt University Divinity School. Discussion, led by Roger Sherwood & Ron Naylor will follow Dr. Levine’s talk. Bring your lunch and come and enjoy a stimulating and informative hour. The class meets in the conference room.
**Short Series' Sunday School**

2012-2013 Theme: *Disciples in Transition*

December focus, beginning Sunday, Dec. 2: 

"Christmas Characters in Transition"

9:45am • Conference Room

Come for this 3-week series that focuses on 3 main Bible characters in the Advent and Christmas story of scripture. 

*What do you think of when you hear these names? How important is each one to the story of Jesus’ birth? Come to have many of the details of our beloved Christmas story filled in starting with a short video lecture from acclaimed New Testament scholar Amy Jill-Levine, Ph.D.*, followed by lively discussion led by one of our pastors.

**ADVENT WEEK I**—December 2nd — **JOHN THE BAPTIST** (led by Rev. Roger Sherwood)

**ADVENT WEEK II**—December 9th — **THE VIRGIN MARY** (led by Carrie Jo Miller, CLP)

**ADVENT WEEK III**—December 16th — **JOSEPH, MAGI, and SHEPHERDS** (led by Rev. Laura Sherwood)

*Lectures from Great Figures of the New Testament series published by The Great Courses, Chantilly, VA, 2002*

**ADVENT WEEK IV**—December 23rd — **ALL CHURCH BRUNCH AND CHILDREN’S CHRISTMAS PROGRAM** in Fellowship Hall

---

**Mariners' Sunday School**

New topic beginning Sunday, Dec. 2:

"Living Our Religion: Ethics as if They Mattered"

Taught by Bob Wauzzinski

9:45am • Fellowship Hall

Christian ethics has to do with applying Biblical principles to real-life issues.

Central to the need to be ethical will be an understanding of justice and freedom. We will apply a variety of principles to such practical issues as marriage, family, and friendships, euthanasia (literally life and death issues), abortion, equality and discrimination, economic justice, criminal punishment, environmental concerns, biological engineering, issues of war and peace, world poverty and globalization, and selected additional topics. Finally, we will look at various secular ethical belief systems and how they compete with Christianity for our devotion.

In focusing on real-life issues, this course will be practical.