



**Christmas Message** .....Dr. Andrew D. Chaney

**Carol Sing** (insert)  
*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*  
*It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*  
*Away in a Manger*  
*The First Noël*  
*Angels We Have Heard on High*  
*O Little Town of Bethlehem*  
*Silent Night, Holy Night*

**Benediction**

**Hymn** "Joy to the World" .....(insert)

**Postlude** *Bring a Torch, Jeannette, Isabella*.....Arr. K. Chapman

*The Christmas Eve music is a gift from the O'Neill family,  
in loving memory of Pat.*

We thank the senior high girls for being our  
Angel Candlelighters tonight.

**Christmas Eve Seating**

Come to the Sanctuary early and enjoy the sights,  
sounds and fellowship of this joyous season.  
We want to make room for all who come to worship  
at our Christmas Eve services.  
Each person arriving early for a service is welcome  
to save two (2) additional seats until  
ten (10) minutes before the start of the service.

Tamaron Conseur, M. M.  
Asst. Dir. of Choirs

Dr. Thomas Alm  
Guest Organist

Kelli Harrington, M. M.  
Asst. Dir. of Rejoice and  
Bell Choirs

**A Stephen Ministry Congregation**

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**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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**Calendar**  
Dec. 25-One service at 10:00 am  
(Schmidt Chapel)  
Dec. 26-Church offices closed  
Dec. 27-9:30 am, Day-by-Day  
Dec. 28-7:00 am, Men's Coffee  
Jan. 1-On service at 10:00 am  
(Schmidt Chapel)

our KUC family for over six years.  
Please join us after the 10:30 service  
on Sunday, January 8 for a celebratory  
send-off.

**FIRST WEDNESDAYS:** Join us on  
January 4. We are delighted that Paul  
Kasriel, chief economist for the North-  
ern Trust, will join us again to review  
the current state of the economy. Please  
RSVP to the church by December 30.

**CELEBRATORY SEND-OFF FOR  
REV. JANE LIONBERGER, SUNDAY,  
JANUARY 8, 2012.** Rev. Lionberger  
has lovingly and faithfully served

**KUC WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY,**  
If you have ever thought about par-  
ticipating in our Women's Bible study,  
now is the perfect time to sign up! We  
are starting a new 9-week session on

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# ANNOUNCEMENTS

(CONTINUED)

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January 11. Come listen, study, share and grow in fellowship as we explore the Book of Daniel together. Please email/call Traci Groff with any questions for our Wednesday afternoon group as well as for any interest in a possible evening group, [tracigroff@comcast.net](mailto:tracigroff@comcast.net), (847) 486-8248.

**“LOVE IN THE TIME OF BLACKBERRY”:** Come to this Alison Tobey Smart Memorial Fund presentation by Dr. Cheryl Rampage, Senior Vice-President for Programs and Academic Affairs at The Family Institute of Northwestern University. Learn how technology has impacted our closest relationships. The presentation will be on Wednesday, January 18, 2012, 7:00-9:00 pm at KUC. Bring a friend!

**SAVE THE DATES:**

**WINTER WARM-UP SUPPER,** Sunday, Jan. 22, 5 pm is our annual Winter Warm-Up Soup Supper. This is a fundraiser for the high school mission trip to New Orleans. Tickets are \$8 per person or \$20 per family.

**SUNDAY SCHOOL PARENT SOCIAL, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2012.** “Tables for Eight” potluck style dinners for Sunday School parents. Please RSVP to Laura McColl to attend or to host ([m.mccoll@sbcglobal.net](mailto:m.mccoll@sbcglobal.net)/847-251-4663.)

**KUC TALENT AND ART SHOW, SUNDAY, FEB. 26.** To sign up to perform your talent or tell a joke, show your art work or be part of the committee, contact Sallie Smith at [slsy2k@yahoo.com](mailto:slsy2k@yahoo.com) or 847-251-0900.

**“LISTENING TO YOUR LIFE”, FREDERICK BUECHNER:**

“Whether he was born in 4 B.C. or A.D. 6, in Bethlehem or Nazareth, whether there were multitudes of the heavenly host to hymn the glory of it or just Mary and her husband--when the child was born, the whole course of human history was changed. That is a truth as unassailable as any truth. Art, music, literature, Western culture itself with all its institutions and Western man’s whole understanding of himself and his world--it is impossible to conceive of how differently things would have turned out if that birth had not happened whenever,

wherever, however it did. And there is a truth beyond that: for millions of people who have lived since, the birth of Jesus made possible not just a new way of understanding life but a new way of living it.

For better or worse, it is a truth that, for twenty centuries, there have been untold numbers of men and women who, in untold numbers of ways, have been so grasped by the child who was born, so caught up in the message he taught and the life he lived, that they found themselves profoundly changed by their relationship with him. And they have gone on proclaiming, as the writers of the Gospels proclaimed before them, that through the birth of Jesus a life-giving power was released into the world which to their minds could have been no less than the power of God himself. This is the central truth that Matthew and Luke are trying to convey in their accounts of the Nativity. And it was a truth which no language or legend seemed too extravagant to convey. What the birth *meant*--meant to them, to the world--was the truth that mattered to them most and, when all is said and done, perhaps the only truth that matters to anyone.” (*Listening to Your Life, Daily Meditations with Frederick Buechner*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1992, pp. 338-339)

**Preaching Schedule**

Dec. 25-Rev. Garcia, only one service at 10:00 am  
Jan. 1-Rev. Lionberger, only one service at 10:00 am  
Jan. 8-Rev. Lionberger  
Jan. 15-Dr. Chaney

Please turn off all electronic devices while attending services. Thank you.

*The Care Guild Leader for December is Sallie Smith. To volunteer or to let us know where help is needed, please call the Care Guild number at (847) 853-3534 or email [careguild@kuc.org](mailto:careguild@kuc.org).*

Dr. Andrew D. Chaney "Prepare for Christmas" Matthew 3:1-3

*"In those days, John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, 'The voice of one crying out, in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"*

Maybe you saw the recent cartoon with a middle-aged conservative-looking couple, the husband opening a small present on Christmas morning as his wife watches, she's holding a cup of coffee, and she proudly says something like, "I had to mace two other shoppers to buy that." Can you believe the fanaticism of this year's Black Friday shopping? Some people could not resist the competitive urge to climb over others using any means possible to get that deal. One person interviewed outside a store said, "Yes, you are right, I could wait until Cyber-Monday and get the same deal ordering it right from my home on the internet. But where is the fun in that?" That person has it all wrong. It is proven that the Black Friday version of Pamplona's running of the bulls leads to people getting hurt.

There is a wrong way to prepare for Christmas. A rushed, out of control approach can diminish or even eliminate the reflection and contemplation that Christmas should bring. Did you ever hear the story about Adlai Stevenson's Christmas rush? When he was working in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, he wrote a marketing agreement for the walnut industry. He was thanked with a sack full of packages of walnuts. Since he had not done his Christmas shopping, he had his staff send these packages of walnuts to all of his Washington friends. Imagine his embarrassment when he opened a package of walnuts to read a little card saying, "Merry Christmas from the walnut industry to Adlai Stevenson." On Hilton Head Island there is a Christmas shop with a year-round countdown to Christmas day, making everyone feel as if time is running out. Have you ever felt the pressure of Christmas day looming on the horizon? Others notice it easily.

A woman and her young daughter went out Christmas shopping on Black Friday right after Thanksgiving Day. The mall was, as you might expect, packed. They skipped lunch because the mother wanted to stay on schedule, but as the day wore on, she became more irritable. Her feet hurt. Her patience

wore thin. When they left the last store, the woman turned to her daughter, exasperated, and said, "Did you see the look that salesman gave me?" The little girl replied, "Mommy, he didn't give it to you; you had it when you went in there."

Why do we begin to feel that way? How do we get that competitive, pressurized feeling? The book *Unplug the Christmas Machine* discusses how this happens. There is a seductive psychology in our culture each Christmas: "The Christmas Machine has this power over us because it knows how to woo us; it speaks to the deepest, profoundest, and most sacred desires of the human heart. If it appeared as a monster, we would rise up and stop it. But the commercial messages of Christmas appear as promises that bring tears to our eyes. Look at the bounty we are promised by the December magazines and the glowing Christmas commercials: Our families will be together and happy... Our children will be well-behaved and grateful...Our wives will be beautiful and nurturing...Our husbands will be kind, generous, and appreciative...We will have enough money...We will have enough time...We will have fun... We will be warm...We will be safe... We will be truly loved. No wonder we stop, we listen, and we want to believe. The problem comes when we buy into the notion that what we long for can be procured by the buying and selling of goods...[we believe] that if we buy and receive more Christmas presents, our inner lives will be fuller, and we will finally be safe [and satisfied] in the world...The key to unplugging the machine is knowing what you really want."

At the core of unplugging the Christmas machine is managing expectations. We set ourselves up for what should happen at Christmas, what we should feel, believe, and experience, and what others should feel, and believe, and experience. Some of our expectations are valid, normal, and healthy, and some may be totally unreasonable. I once read that each one of us has a subconscious list in our minds that we address during the Christmas

season, as if deep down we are trying to satisfy that list. Some of the things are possible, such as watching a Christmas movie like "It's a Wonderful Life," or watching a televised special, or singing or hearing a favorite hymn or song, or eating foods or drinks filled with meaning (maybe foods associated with a loved one, childhood, or a treasured memory), or celebrating at a holiday party or event, or visiting relatives. These are examples of expectations that we may be checking off.

But there are other expectations that we cannot fulfill. Not being able to participate in a Christmas tradition, like looking to re-create a feeling around the dinner table with a loved one that is estranged, or has passed away, or is far away, can turn a Christmas upside down. We may have a deep need to feel connected, and when this cannot happen, we feel devastated and let-down. Expectation, below the surface but so very powerful, makes Christmas feel like Christmas.

A first step toward preparing for Christmas properly may be becoming aware of these expectations that "make Christmas feel like Christmas." What exactly are you looking for to happen that makes the magic of Christmas? How can you cope if these expectations are destined to fail? What can be done to make Christmas meaningful and joyful rather than discouraging and blue? An intentional process of self-reflection will reveal these expectations. Suddenly, a steadiness will emerge. Realistic goals become clear. The frantic preparation for the Christmas season can be reigned in. The amount of tasks may not decrease, but the attitude of preparation will be tempered and less stressful.

The reason why this time of self-reflection is necessary in preparing for Christmas is because, after we do all of the things that need to be done, such as purchase and wrap whatever presents we give, we are faced with the balance of the stress of preparation on one side and the joy of Christmas on the other. On Christmas day, after the anticipation which we have prepared and planned for weeks has arrived, we hit that moment and are left to ponder that scale. What was all of the preparation about?

With three children, my family has a lot of stress in the Christmas season. My children tend to differ on where certain decorations should go, or how they should be displayed. My pre-schooler and first grader argued about the nativity set-up with only

the wise men and monopoly money present. Finally the original characters were restored and peace settled. But being left with just those wise men in the stable makes us pause. The wise men gave extravagant gifts to Jesus and their example sometimes ends up overwhelming the Christmas story. How do we get the rest of the story back into place?

Jesus would say that the wise men's gifts are an important part of the celebration of Christmas, but that the best gifts of all cannot be sold or bought. The best gifts come from ourselves, the gifts of care, love, compassion, kindness, generosity. It reminds me of the little boy who attended his first symphony and watched the musician playing the cymbals. He loved the wait until finally the cymbals would clash. After the concert the boy asked the musician, "Sir, how much do you have to know to play them?" and the musician replied, "You don't have to know much, you just have to know when!" Sometimes only one thing has to be present in order to make everything else fit together. When it is not there, the whole picture feels incomplete.

Being aware of our expectations is a good way to prevent the Christmas blues. But the best way to prepare for Christmas is to remind ourselves of the one part that needs to be present in order for everything to fit together. It is the message of John the Baptist of our Scripture today that prepares everyone for the birth of Jesus: Repent. "Repent," he proclaims, "turn around," "turn away," "give up" all that is not good and gracious, turn toward God and God's ways. Paul Tournier's book *The Meaning of Gifts* reminds us of what our giving and receiving are all about—that what we're all looking for—children, youth, and adults of all ages—is the gift of love, love freely given, unconditional, deeply felt, and effectively communicated. Turning our lives again towards God is the best way to receive God's love at Christmas time. During *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Charlie Brown confesses "I think there must be something wrong with me, Linus. Christmas is coming, but I'm not happy. I don't feel the way I'm supposed to feel."

As we busily prepare for Christmas, we may be feeling that same way, too. We may sense that something is missing that completes the picture. Yet even the wise men were led to the Christ child. A star leads them. They do not get there by having the biggest search party; they

certainly don't get there by having perfectly-behaved camels or seasonally-appropriate robes. It's not what they do to prepare, it's what God does. This Christmas season, make your expectations clear. That will take some pressure off. Just like those wise men, God will send you a sign, maybe a star in the sky, maybe something else, that will lead you. Let that symbol be a cymbal clashing to you, that it is not what you do to prepare, it is what God does and has done. God has sent Jesus into the world, not because of who you are or what you have done but because of who God is and because of what God is doing. The best way to prepare for Christmas is with God's love for you, a gift that has already been given to you 2000 years ago in Bethlehem.

There is no way to avoid the busy-ness of the time leading up to Christmas. There may always be too much eating, drinking, baking, and buying, and feeling tired. With all the hopes, expectations, traditions, obligations, dreams, and fantasies that surround Christmas, it is easy to see why this time feels reduced to too much of almost everything with no room left for what truly matters. Today, is an opportunity to let go of the harried rushing and relax in the presence of God and loved ones and, for a time, receive a gift instead of trying to give one. May this gift help transform the rest of your Christmas activities so that they will take on some of the qualities of the sacred and holy that are at the heart of what Christmas is really all about. Amen.

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