

January, 2005

the **Visitor...**

. . . bringing into your home the news and ministries of
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Vallejo

from the pastor's keyboard

It has been a season of stars and hidden royalty. We have dreamed and prayed and sung among the stars. We have heard stories about a young woman and man, troubled by angelic visitors and divine intervention in their lives. We have considered the mystery of the incarnation—God with us, not just among us but in us and though us and with us. We have hummed the rhythm of camels rocking and rolling through the desert night, bridles jingling, stones rolling out from beneath the large, careful, determined feet. We look forward to the visit of priestly sages from the East, traveling not by map but by prophecy, guided not by directions but by the light of a faroff, silent star.

Imagine the Magi, entering that darkened courtyard, drawing up to the rude stable or cave, whispering to themselves, "is this the place, can this be the place?" The star, their guide through all the dark nights, shining directly overhead seems to affirm. They dismount, spurs jingling, silks rustling, booted feet muffled by the straw, as they crowd into that shabby structure, perhaps jostled cheek by jowl against donkey, cow, ox, sheep, shepherd. Or perhaps the other witnesses to the incarnation of the divine, to Emmanuel, God with us, had gone home, dazzled and amazed, most of all puzzled, leaving the stable to the pondering of the wise. What did they think, when they saw that fragile, vulnerable little boy baby, perhaps lying in the straw in a manger, perhaps suckled at his mother's breast, seemingly helpless, hopelessly humble? Could they possibly have seen there in that odorous darkness the truth? Could they have seen in that straw the numberless souls waiting to find hope and fulfillment? Could they have seen in that child being comforted the millions upon millions who would, in their turn, be comforted in the inexplicable and tender embrace of God with Us? Could they possibly have seen kingship beyond all earthly princes and principalities in an infant holding court in a stable? Yes. They did. They may not have understood, no matter

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how wise they were, they most likely did not understand. But the star had brought them, the voice of God had whispered to them, and they knelt there in that straw, on a dirt floor, in the cold, and worshipped him. And they took out their gifts of undiluted joy and infinite surprise, and laid their treasures of reverence, joy, and sacrifice at his tiny feet.

Thus we are the Magi people. People who seek wisdom and fulfillment in the promises of God. People who look to the star as the beacon in the darkness of worldly power and domination, of greed and false promises and an endless parade of false prophets who would be kings. We will never finish unwrapping the gifts of the original Magi. We should never cease laying our own in the manger of promise. Instead of thinking of Advent as ended, with Christmas over until next year, let us greet this new year by thinking of it as always filled with the coming of the Messiah. Instead of thinking of advent and Christmas as accomplished and done and well done, but now over, let us paradoxically wait for the coming of hope as we yet celebrate that hope has come and is with us still and always all year. Let us think of this entire year to come as our journey through the beauty and peril of the deserts ahead, following our star, the star given us by God, seeking always for those little ones who need warmth and comfort and hope. Let us see it as our pilgrimage, a journey to the center, to the place of meaning, to the manger where kings bring their gifts and human hearts are wrapped in swaddling cloths.

Shalom,

Pastor Judith

thanks from the pastor

I am writing to thank everyone in the congregation for the gifts I have received this year among you. I finally (FINALLY) used my gift certificate from last year's birthday. Fred and I went north on Highway 101 to Hopland (a wide place in the road among gorgeous trees and rocks and nature) to the Hopland Inn, a wonderful hotel. We enjoyed a library of books in front of a roaring fire, and as we were the only visitors last Wednesday night, we truly felt like the lord and lady of the manor. It was a much needed and much appreciated and enjoyed mini-vacation, and both Fred and I loved every minute. I also am very thankful for all my gift certificates, for Bookshop Benicia (when you see me with my nose in a book instead of working, you can thank yourselves), and for the local restaurants. Those will be a big treat! But more than these, I thank each and every one of you for sharing your life with me, for coming to church and singing and praying and praising God with me. My life is enriched beyond measure by the gifts of your grace. May this new year be blessed with peace and joy and hope, and above all, love, for all of you. Into the midst of life, God comes! Alleluia and Amen.

Judith

moderator's musings

This time of year, I like to read novels and watch made-for-tv movies on the Christmas theme. And so I dig out books that have been put away - some old favorites - saved to be reread during the "long winter months." The short story "If You Believe" by Elizabeth Ann Michaels is such a favorite. Lady Jenna, the protagonist, clearly believes that miracles take place at Christmas. In the story, she is asked, "What do you know of faith, hope and charity?" She responds: "Faith is what makes us human. The faith we place in others, in our ideals, and in God makes up the basis for all the good in life. We trust, we live, we love because of faith. Hope takes up where faith leaves off. It is a baby's first step and a dying man's final breath. Hope is the promise of tomorrow, the impetus for life. Charity is the best mankind has to offer. Like love, it is a gift from the heart."

This year, I was touched not by the theme as I reread the story, but rather I was moved by the writer's definition of faith, hope and charity and the meaning it has for me regarding the life of our church.

We recently passed a budget we know is a faith budget. We have faith that God is leading us and wants FCC to be an active, viable congregation, reaching out with love to those "out there" who need a church home. We have faith in our mission and in our belief of inclusiveness. Our hope is not just to survive, but to grow in every sense of the word - in spirit, in love, in caring, in outreach - and we exhibit this hope in so many ways. Hope is what keeps us going at First Christian Church. And charity is the way we make it all happen. It's by giving in all ways that we can from our hearts to the church and its mission that we embrace and love.

Perhaps we are foolish to pass such a large budget (for times are hard, and there are so few of us to support it). But I don't think so. As we move into this new year, I think of each one of you and all the gifts you possess and are willing to share with each other and with the church and I know that our efforts will be rewarded by the God who guides us and loves us and is always with us . . . "If You Believe."

Peace,
Helen

see you at our Epiphany dinner

Our annual Epiphany dinner will be held on January 9th (the Sunday after Epiphany) right after worship in the fellowship hall. Listen for details in church. The Epiphany dinner is our chance to welcome those church members who have joined since we last gathered to recognize our newest members (as we did last Pentecost). Please plan to be there for a day of congregational fellowship and renewal in the new year.

faire report

This year's Global Holiday Faire was the biggest yet - in terms of money raised, organizations supported, choirs singing, and amount of Christmas cheer we enjoyed! The amount of funds we raised to send to each nonprofit organization is listed in the accompanying chart, along with the overall total. We actually brought in some further funds, which we use to pay for the faire's expenses (approximately \$350). This year's totals of both the funds raised and the funds contributed topped last year's amounts.

We featured 19 organizations at the faire, 18 of which we were raising money for (Valcore's was a table of information and samples of environmentally-friendly products - they did not have items for sale). Unfortunately, although people took materials and literature at the World Concern table, that organization failed to receive any contributions. In fact, at this year's faire, alternative giving was down, even though overall spending at the faire was up; clearly, we have some work to do for next year.

Still, in all it was a terrific and rewarding day. We used some innovative tableware (utensils made from wheat, plates and cups of sugar cane fiber, and 100% recycled paper napkins) - all renewable, all environmentally sound products, and we invite you to learn more about them. The fellowship hall looked as festive as it ever has; Santa's appearance brightened many young faces (and more than a few old ones, too!); and we received the touching gift of music from the developmentally disabled Milestones of Development Gospel Choir. Factor in the children's choir from St. Vincent's and the choirs from Holy Family Parish and First Presbyterian Church, and it made for a beautiful day of music.

We could not have accomplished all we did without the help of our friends at those other churches, of course. But our biggest thanks go to each and every one of you who contributed so much in whatever way you did: making gifts to sell, donating others, buying still more; setting up, pricing, arranging; staffing the tables, working the kitchen, lending a hand wherever it was needed. We can't thank you all enough for your support, this year and every year, and we look forward to building on this year's effort with even more success at next year's 8th Annual Global Holiday Faire!

American Refugee Committee	253.79
The Breakfast Club	337.35
Christian Help Center	142.30
Christian Veterinary Mission	60.00
Concern America	527.00
CWS - Tools of Hope	30.00
DePaul Women's Center	253.79
Friends Outside	253.79
Habitat For Humanity	60.00
Heartbeats	546.11
Heifer Project International	610.45
Loma Vista Farm	331.00
Milestones of Development	325.00
Pax Christi	300.00
SERRV	1076.00
Solano Peace And Justice	199.00
Street Children of Nairobi	405.00
Total	5710.58

within the church family

Christmas program delights congregation, friends

The Christmas season always can bring the best in yourselves, if you let it. The Christmas party did just that, brought out the best in people. How can one thank a person for doing their best. There's only one word which can describe the joy I had with the party and play, and that is "awesome." It always brings joy and love to my heart to see people come together for one cause, to show the spirit of Christmas, the birth of our Christ.

Nikolas, Rob, Hunter, Nikolas, Angel, Shawna, Christina, and Amber, you did it, you practiced and you were awesome. Beth and Judith, what talent in designing and painting the set. Andrea, Shawna, Angel, Glenda, Doug and Fred, without your help we couldn't have completed the cave and wall. Heather, coming in at the last minute shows me that you have the spirit. Mandy, Diane, Jean, Mechelle and Andrea; thanks for bringing the kids to practice, without this, we would not have had a show. Allison, your love of the theatre helped show the kids how fun the stage could be.

I know I will miss someone and for that I apologize, but thank you everyone for making this a Christmas of joy and love.

Carl Cordes

cat in need of good home

Looking for adoration, companionship, and devotion? "Buzz Lightfur" is an abandoned neighborhood cat who desperately needs the warmth of a loving home. He is an unneutered male, cream-colored with hints of orange, and approximately two-three years of age.

Buzz is considered a special needs cat. A trip to the vet determined him to be free of feline leukemia, but he does show positive for feline immunodeficiency virus. The positive test may be the result of an earlier vaccination lingering in his system or the actual FIV. There is no way to determine this.

This sweetheart needs a home without any other cats or a home with another FIV cat. Unfortunately we have three of our own and cannot risk adding him to our family. He would need to be an indoor companion.

If you are interested, please contact Sonya at 647-1022 or email auntsonya@aol.com.

news & notes

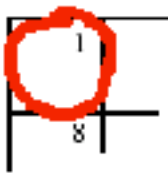
The December peace prayer service raised \$34, half of which we sent to Pax Christi. Join us for January's service - January 3rd at 7 p.m. in the sanctuary.

We missed Larry and Gail's anniversary in December's listing of special dates. Their anniversary is December 21st, so a belated Happy Anniversary to you both! Please make the correction in your directory.

Carl Pearson recently announced he is getting married! Congratulations Carl, and we wish you the best.

It was great to see so many friends and family attending our Christmas program in support of the Just Kidders' big dramatic debut, "The Bethlehem Gang." Please invite them back anytime to join us for worship and other special events.

If anyone has copies of pictures from the Christmas lunch and program, please bring them to church and share them with the rest of the congregation.



mark your calendars

January

- 3 - Peace Prayer Service. 7:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary.
- 8 - Program Council. 10:00 a.m.
- 8 - Admin Council. 12:00 p.m.
- 9 - Epiphany Dinner. After worship in the Fellowship Hall.