

HOLMES HERALD

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Christmas Carols (inserts)

Please join us on Sunday mornings for...

DECEMBER 2024

Adult Forum: 9:15 AM
Children's Sunday School: 10:30 AM

Traditional worship service: 10:30 AM





Christmas Eve

Christmas Eve Worship

It has been a long standing tradition at Holmes Church to celebrate the eve of our Savior's birth. This year, we will be holding a Family

Candlelight/Communion service at 7:00pm.

Please join us for this beautiful and meaningful intergenerational service.

As you celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, may you feel renewed hope, tremendous peace, profound joy and the awesome love of God.

Special RSHIP SCHEDULE

Last & First Worship

Our last Lord's Day worship of this year is Sunday, December 29th. As is our

normal custom, worship will start at 10am instead of 10:30am and the service will be informal.



It is a tradition in our congregation to begin the new year with communion. On January 5, 2025 please join us at the Lord's table at 10:30 am.

Ten Wonderful Christmas Truths

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,

and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

1. God is with us.

This is the first and greatest truth of Christmas. God is with us. The Bible says, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). We do not work our way to God but in Christ, God comes to us. If you've ever felt like God is indifferent or uncaring toward you, remember the story of Christmas. Remember that God pursued you in Christ, and He continues to do so. We do not worship a distant God but rather a dwelling God – the God who makes His home among us, the God who is Immanuel, the God who is with us!

"Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us'" (Matthew 1:23 NLT).

Prayer: Lord, thank you for always being with me. You promise to never leave me or forsake me. When I am tempted to doubt your presence, remind me that in Christ, you came to me. In Jesus name, amen.

2. God has not forgotten us.

When Christ came, the people of God had not heard a word from the Lord in centuries. In fact, the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, was written around 440-400 B.C. The people were longing to hear from God, waiting for Him to fulfill His promises. In such moments of waiting, it's often tempting to think that God has forgotten us.

The songs surrounding the birth of Christ in Luke 1 echo the sentiment that God has not forgotten His people. Mary sings, "He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy" (Luke 1:54 NKJV). The prophet Zechariah sings, "He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant—the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham" (Luke 1:72–73 NLT).

God "remembered" His mercy, covenant, and promises. When the Bible says that God "remembers" ... it does not merely mean something is brought to God's attention or that He forgot something. It means to fix your attention on something and act on it. In the Christmas story, then, we see God turning His attention to His promises and acting on them to fulfill His Word. We see God, in mercy, fixing His attention on us and acting on our behalf by sending Christ to save us. So be encouraged – God has not forgotten you!

"Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for the child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you! See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:15–16 NLT). Prayer: Lord, thank you that you are always mindful of me. I am too often tempted to believe you have forgotten me. Help me to see your loving hand and providential care each day. In Jesus' name, amen.

God understands.

At Christmas, we remember that the Son of God became a man. He entered our world with all its brokenness, sin, and suffering. Jesus experienced the full range of human emotion and temptation and joys and sorrows and everything in between.

As the "man of sorrows" (Isaiah 53:3), Jesus understands our pain. He is not indifferent to our experiences and emotions – He knows them. He has experienced them. The Lord Jesus can truly say to each one of us, "I get it. I understand." So, whatever you're going through, know that you're not alone. God understands, and He invites you to come to Him to receive His grace and help in your weakness.

"This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most" (Hebrews 4:15–16 NLT).

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being able to both understand my weaknesses and yet be strong enough to help me through them. Thank you for your grace, and please help me overcome my trials and temptations. In Jesus name, amen.

Continued on page 3

4. God is immeasurably great and unexpectedly humble.

Christmas is a time to marvel in awe and gratitude at the lengths God has gone to show us His love and to save us. The Creator came to His creation. The God of Heaven came to earth. The infinite God became an infant son. The Lord, whose royal robe filled the temple of heaven (Isaiah 6:1), became a baby who was wrapped in swaddling cloths (Luke 2:7). The God of the universe, who is present everywhere, did not have a room to be born in. The Son of God left His throne in heaven, surrounded by the unceasing praise of angels, to come to earth where He would ultimately receive a crown of thorns and hear crowds shouting, "Crucify him!" (Mark 15:13).

At Christmas, we stand in awe at the majesty and humility of God. He came not in power to kings in a palace but in humility to ordinary shepherds in a small rural town of obscurity. The Lord comes to us not with angry fist, shouting from heaven, but with an open hand and helpless cry from a manger.

"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 2:7 ESV).

Prayer: Lord, you are infinite in power and yet you humbled yourself and became a man to seek and to save me. It will take all eternity to grasp your infinite love. What an amazing God you are! Thank you for your immeasurable, boundless love. In Jesus name, amen.

5. God is at work in the darkness.

Why did Jesus come? How would you answer that? Most people might say "to save us" or "to show God's love" or something similar. That's true. But the apostle John gives a rather unexpected and clear statement as to why Jesus came. He said, "the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8).

Immediately after the Fall, God made a promise. He told the serpent (the devil) that from the offspring of Eve would eventually come someone who would crush the head of the serpent (see Genesis 3:15). Known as the proto-evangelium, this is the first reference to the good news that the Savior would come to destroy the devil's work and redeem us.

Christmas, then, is a reminder that even in our broken world full of darkness, sin, and evil – God is still at work, bringing light to those in darkness.

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned" (Isaiah 9:2).

Prayer: Lord, thank you that no matter how dark things get, you are there. I always have hope. When I'm in the dark, confused and needing direction in my life, please show me the way to go. And help me be a light to others. In Jesus' name, amen.

6. God has good news of great joy for all people.

The angel announced to the shepherds "good news of great joy that will be for all people." (Luke 2:10 ESV), Good news. Great joy. For all people. That's the wonderful proclamation of Christmas in a nutshell.

The good news is that we have a Savior, Jesus Christ. And it is good news – not good advice or good teaching but good news. That means something happened. God came to us in the person of Jesus.

He came into our real world, in a real place, and really lived among us, and really died for our sins and really rose from the dead. And He really offers us the free gift of salvation. It's the best news!

And it is news for all people. No one is outside the reach of God's grace in Christ. All are welcome to come Jesus, no matter who you are, what you've done, or whatever your background – all are welcome to come to Jesus and receive His free gift of salvation. It is greatest gift that leads to the greatest joy – the joy of knowing Jesus, of living with hope, of being adopted into God's family, and knowing your future is secure in heaven.

"The angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10–11 ESV).

Prayer: Father, thank you for sending your Son to save me! Help me to always rejoice in my salvation – and give me the words and opportunity to tell others about the wonderful, free gift of salvation. In Jesus' name, amen,

FROM THE DEACONS



Dear Friends.

cherished Presbyterian tradition since the 1930's, the Christmas Joy Offering is a special mission collected during Advent that supports the unmet needs of families who have devoted their lives to the mission of the church. The offering is split equally between the Assistance Program of the **Pensions** Board of and the Presbyterian affiliated racial ethnic schools and colleges. Assistance Program of the Board of

Pensions provides many different individualized programs to ministers and church workers, both retired and current, when they are in need. The Board offers things such as income supplements, one time need offers for things such as hearing aids to continue ministry and for emergency needs.

Presbyterian affiliated racial ethnic schools and colleges receive the rest of the offering and use this to award scholarships to the students and help the schools with basic operating costs. This allows the students to pursue their education and the schools to stay current in these technologically evolving times. Our Joy Offering will be received on December 15th. Joy Offering envelope in your envelopes are in your envelope boxes. There are also envelopes in the church pews.

Holmes Church has a wonderful record of generous giving to the Christmas Joy Offering. Let's continue to give generously and in "Joy!"

Thank you for caring for others!

Peggy Walter Deacon, Special Missions



HAPPY BIRTHDAY:

Lee McFalls

4

- 5 Elizabeth Carpenter
- 15 Carol LoCastro
- 17 Isobel Beaston
- 20 Joe O'Donnell
- 29 Lynn Krautheim



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY:

26 Mr. & Mrs. John VanGeyten



Holiday Baskets

The adult forum will once again be sponsoring holiday baskets. The event, "Mission Sunday" is scheduled for Sunday, Dec 15th. In place of our traditional service,

we will gather in the Social Hall, to prepare the baskets and celebrate Jesus' birthday. A sign-up sheet and receptacle for donations will be placed in the narthex in the near future. We hope you will join in as we bless members of our church family and the community.

Christmas Music Program



WORSHIP

On Sunday, December 22nd, Holmes Church will hold a Christmas Music Program dedicated to the music of the Christmas season

music of the Christmas season starting at 10:30 am.. Please join us as soloists, the Chancel Choir, and the Bell Choir lead us in the glorious music of the season. A Christmas Tea will follow directly in the Social Hall. Please



join us and invite a friend.

ADVENT COMMUNION

We celebrate the beginning of the Advent Season on December 1st with the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Worship begins at 10:30 am. The "Good Samaritan" offering taken during this service is distributed equally to each of our missionaries as a Christmas gift from our Church family.

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7. God graciously gives and graciously saves.

We love seeing our friends and family and children excitedly open gifts with gratitude and joy, don't we? There's nothing like the feeling of seeing a loved one joyfully receive a gift you got them. And similarly, there's nothing like receiving a thoughtful, meaningful gift from a loved one.

Why do we give gifts on Christmas? Because we remember that God is a gracious giver. Consider the most famous passage in the Bible, John 3:16, in light of Christmas ... "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Our greatest need required the greatest gift. And the greatest gift God can give is Himself. That's what He did on Christmas. He gave us His one and only Son to save us from our sin. And just like any gift, the proper response to a gift is not the pay the gift-giver back – that'd be an insult! The proper response is to simply receive the gift with joy and gratitude. That's what God calls us to do with His free gift of salvation – to joyfully receive His Son.

"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Prayer: Father, thank you for the gift of your Son. There is no greater gift you could have given. As I give and receive gifts this Christmas, help me not lose sight of the greatest gift. In Jesus name, amen.

8. God always keeps His promises.

The accounts of Jesus' birth in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke show how Jesus' birth fulfilled many long-awaited promises to Abraham, David, and other prophets. You can hear echoes of the Old Testament throughout the Christmas story, and there are direct statements like this: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet" (Matthew 1:22).

We often struggle with waiting on God. We want Him to come through for us and fulfill His promises ... according to our schedule. After all, some of the promises fulfilled at Christmas were spoken of centuries beforehand. The apostle Peter encourages us, "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:8–9).

Christmas shows us that God is always faithful to fulfill His promises. While it may not be in our desired time or our desired way, God always comes through. When He does, it's always better than what we could have planned.

We can trust Him and His timing.

"He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago" (Luke 1:69–70 NLT).

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being a God I can trust. You are faithful to fulfill your promises. When I grow impatient, help me wait on you in faith and hope. In Jesus' name, Amen.

9. God is worthy of all praise.

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing! Joy to the World! Silent Night. O Holy Night. Away in a Manger. O Come, O Come Emmanuel. The list could go on. We love singing songs at Christmas, don't we? We sing because Christmas is a time to celebrate, a time to praise God for sending His Son.

You can't read the Christmas story without hearing the songs and praises of God's people. You can read Mary's song, known as the Magnificat, in Luke 1:46–55, or read Zechariah's song in Luke 1:67–79, or read of the multitude of angel's singing at Christ's birth in Luke 2:13–14. At the birth of Christ, the shepherds worshipped Jesus (Luke 2:20), as did the Magi (Matthew 2:11). When you consider all that God has given us in Christ, praise is the proper response. He is worthy of all our worship.

"On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11).



December has the Holmes Youth Group very busy. We start by helping with Hanging of the Greens on Dec 1st, helping with the Mission Sunday project on Dec 15th, Painting without a Twist on Monday, Dec 16th, Christmas Caroling on Dec 22nd, helping out with the Christmas Eve Service on Tuesday, December 24th, and helping with putting out over 150 luminaries for Christmas Eve night. Phew!! That's a lot! Bible discussion topics will be about the miraculous and joyous birth of Jesus Christ.

We are thankful for everyone in this church who supports this program and prays for our youth. It is ever so appreciated!

Mark and I pray that everyone has a very blessed and merry Christmas as well as a Happy New Year!

In Christ, Mark and Becky

Prayer: Lord, you are worthy of all my praise! Thank you for sending your Son, for your boundless grace and mercy, for your immeasurable love and faithfulness, and for your constant presence and precious promises. In Jesus name, amen.

10. Jesus is coming back to renew all things!

Advent is not just about looking back to Christ's birth in His first coming but also about looking forward to His second coming. Just as Israel awaited the coming of the Messiah, so we too await in eager anticipation for the Lord to return to make all things right and all things new. Consider the lyrics of the beloved Christmas hymn, Joy to the World, in light of the return of Christ.

"Joy to the world! / The Lord is come / Let earth receive her King! / Let every heart prepare Him room / And heaven and nature sing / And heaven and nature sing. / He rules the world with truth and grace / And makes the nations prove / The glories of His righteousness / And wonders of His love."

The repeated promise of the New Testament is that Jesus will come again as the King of Kings to reign over all the earth in righteousness, truth, and grace. We will dwell with Him forever, rejoice in the wonders of His love, and "He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever" (Revelation 21:4 NLT).

In our current world with so much fear, uncertainty, and confusion – this is the great and guaranteed hope we have in Christ!

"Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him" (Hebrews 9:28 NLT).

Prayer: Lord, thank you for giving me a living hope. Help me to live in light of eternity, looking forward to your coming and telling the world of the wonders of your love. In Jesus name, amen.

Beloved Christmas Carols and the True Stories behind Them

BY AMY GREEN

Christmas is full of the delightful sounds of the season, from jingle bells to the joyful holiday hymns we hear on the radio and sing in church. Their words are lovely and familiar... sometimes too familiar.

It's easy to know all the words and still miss the spirit of what we're singing. But what if we knew how these famous carols came about, what inspired their authors to first write down the words that lead us to reflect on the birth of Jesus and what that means?

Traditions like wish lists and making cookies for Santa are relatively new—it's only in the last hundred years that Christmas has shifted to being a holiday focused on presents and parties.

For thousands of years, Christmas was a quieter celebration, without an entire season dedicated to it, for most, a day to spend with family and a few weeks on the church calendar where the focus was on Christ coming to earth.

But from the very beginning, there were carols to sing in homes, neighborhoods, and churches to tell the story of the nativity.

Many of the carols we still sing and hear today go back for hundreds of years, and several of them were involved in fascinating times of history. Whether it's the Civil War origins of a father searching for his prodigal son or the songs that were sung during a brief truce in a war, the incredible backstories of these holiday hymns will change the way you worship this December.

As you read the powerful stories of the beginnings of a few of your favorite songs, remember that their messages of hope and healing are just as true for those of us singing them today.

The writers of these songs have some incredible stories to share that will lead us to be even more grateful for the joy of the baby born in Bethlehem so long ago.

"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

When Phillips Brooks, a rising young preacher and staunch abolitionist, was asked to give the funeral address for President Abraham Lincoln, he must have been daunted by the task, and sure that his eloquent eulogy would be the most famous lines he would ever pen.

He was wrong. Shortly afterward, exhausted from years of war and longing for rest, he took a sabbatical from preaching to visit the Holy Land, hoping to find peace.

There, as he visited still-insignificant Bethlehem and looked out at the landscape at night, the lines for a poem jumped to his mind: "O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, a silent star goes by."

Several years later, he came back to the poem and completed it. His organist, Lewis Redner, added the music. It was first performed by the children's choir in his church, and very quickly, the verse was included in hymnals as a seasonal favorite.

But one child, who wasn't yet born, would find special meaning in Brooks's song. Helen Keller, the famous educator who was born blind and deaf, met Brooks years later. He was the one who explained the gospel to her for the first time.

Through her teacher and translator, Anne Sullivan, she told Brooks, "I've always known there was a God, but until now I've never known his name."

The carol's third verse, though written years before Brooks had met Keller, captures perfectly the joy of salvation arriving to a deaf and blind child whose ears could not hear his coming, but whose heart had long recognized his presence: How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!

So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.

No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,

Where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in

"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"

By the mid-1800s, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was a household name, and his poems, like "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere" and "The Song of Hiawatha" were memorized and quoted all over America.

But in 1863, it had been many years since he'd written an original verse. Longfellow was weary after years of hardship. His beloved wife had died in a tragic fire, causing him to fall into a deep depression. That Christmas, he wrote in his journal: "How inexpressibly sad are all holidays."

A few years later, despite his deep conviction against violence, his oldest son, Charley, left this note in his house after stealing away to join the Union Army: "I have tried hard to resist the temptation of going without your leave but I cannot any longer."

Less than a year later, on December 1, 1863, Longfellow received a telegram that every parent during wartime dreaded: Charley had been injured in a skirmish with Confederate troops and was currently in a Virginia hospital. Knowing the poor conditions of battlefront medical stations, Longfellow immediately left his Boston home to search for his son.

After arriving, he spent three days searching the incoming wounded arriving at the train station, passing up and down the line of bleeding, bandaged men, limp on pallets packed into boxcars, until he finally saw a familiar face: Charley, the prodigal son, alive, but barely breathing.

After being rushed to medical care and stabilized, Charley was eventually allowed to return home to Boston. On Christmas Day, with his son still shivering with fever, possibly never to recover, Longfellow struggled with the terrible reality of the war that had torn his country apart... and began to write a poem.

With each line, he built a picture of darkness—and in the midst of it, hope.

And in despair I bowed my head;

"There is no peace on earth," I said;

"For hate is strong and mocks the song

Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:

"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;

The Wrong shall fail, the Right prevail,

With peace on earth, good-will to men."

Charley did eventually recover, and he and his father were reconciled, but this wartime Christmas poem-turned-song still rings out a story of the triumph of hope over despair even today.

"Silent Niaht"

The most recorded carol of all time had humble origins: it was written in a tiny village in Austria by Franz Xaver Gruber and Joseph Mohr, churchmen who wanted a simple song to perform for Christmas, since the organ had been damaged by flooding. It was performed with accompaniment by the guitar, and was later performed by aroups of traveling folk singers, spreading it around the world.

But perhaps the most famous place the carol has been sung was also the most unusual: the trenches of WWI. In December 1914, hostilities had died down between battles, as tense English, French, and German soldiers waited for the next bout of gunfire.

But on Christmas Eve, what they got instead was an unexpected ceasefire. In certain places along the line, enemy soliders ventured into no-man's land to play games, exchange gifts, smoke cigarettes, and celebrate together as best they could, knowing that in a few days they would resume fighting against each other again.

Many men recounted the beauty of the familiar Christmas carols that were sung among the soldiers: the Englishmen's "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," the French with their boisterous "Cantique de Noel," and "Silent Night" in its original German.

Stille Nacht! Heil'ge Nacht!

Alles schläft; einsam wacht.
Nur das traute hoch heilige Paar.
Holder Knab' im lockigen Haar,
Schlafe in himmlischer Ruh!
Schlafe in himmlischer Ruh!

Silent night! Holy night.
All is calm; all is bright.
Round yon virgin, mother and child.
Holy infant so tender and mild.
Sleep in heavenly peace,

Sleep in heavenly peace.

It was a song from a simpler time, first performed at a midnight mass on Christmas Eve in a small village church, sung a century later over the bloodied, disease-ridden trenches, in hopes that there would be another silent night again soon.



Holmes Presbyterian Church

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
9:15 AM Adult Forum 10:30 AM Children's Sunday School 10:30 AM Worship 6:00 PM Youth Group First Sunday of Advent	2 8:00 AM OTHG 12:00 PM Men's Bible Study	9:30 AM Knitting/Sewing 7:00 PM Chancel Choir	4:00 PM Crew 143	5 7:00 PM Men's Support Group	6 8:00 PMAA. Meeting	7
9:15 AM Adult Forum 10:30 AM Children's Sunday School 10:30 AM Worship 6:00 PM Youth Group	9 8:00 AM OTHG 12:00 PM Men's Bible Study 7:00 PM Session/Deacons	9:30 AM Knitting/Sewing 7:00 PM Chancel Choir	11 4:00 PM Crew 143	12 7:00 PM Men's Support Group	13 8:00 PMAA. Meeting	14
9:15 AM Adult Forum 10:30 AM Worship 6:00 PM Youth Group Deacons Christmas outreach ends CHRISTMAS BASKETS	8:00 AM OTHG 12:00 PM Men's Bible Study 5:30 PM Painting without a twist/cookie walk	9:30 AM Knitting/Sewing 7:00 PM Chancel Choir	18 4:00 PM Crew 143	19 7:00 PM Men's Support Group	20 8:00 PMA.A. Meeting	21 Winter begins
9:15 AM Adult Forum 10:30 AM Children's Sunday School 10:30 AM Worship 6:00 PM Youth Group MUSIC WORSHIP SERVICE	8:00 AM OTHG 12:00 PM Men's Bible Study	9:30 AM Knitting/Sewing 7:00 PM Family candlelight service	4:00 PM Crew 143 Merry Christmas	26 7:00 PM Men's Support Group	27 8:00 PMAA. Meeting	28
9:15 AM Adult Forum 10:30 AM Children's Sunday School 10:30 AM Worship 6:00 PM Youth Group	8:00 AM OTHG 12:00 PM Men's Bible Study	31 9:30 AM Knitting/Sewing New Year's Eve	3 4 10 11 17 18	Nov 2024 T W T F S 1 2 5 6 7 8 9 12 13 14 15 16 19 20 21 22 23 26 27 28 29 30	S M T W T 1 2 5 6 7 8 9 1 12 13 14 15 16 1 19 20 21 22 23 2 26 27 28 29 30 3	3 4 0 11 7 18 4 25