



The LINK

Volume 12 | December 2021

Through Stained Glass: Advent

*Every year we celebrate the holy season
of Advent. Every year we pray those
beautiful prayers of longing and waiting, and
sing those lovely songs of hope and promise.
Every year we roll up all our needs
and yearnings and faithful expectation into
one word: "Come!"*

~Karl Rahner

Advent is the most wonderful time of the year! At least, I think so. As the days grow shorter here in the northern hemisphere and the nights colder, we are invited not only in the liturgical year, but also in the winter season to turn inward. The season of Advent makes space for us to listen to our hearts, see our lives and those who share life with us for the fathomless mystery that they are, to be at **play** in creation, and to **fill** up our lives with the fullness of God's love that permeates through the world. Advent is the season we turn inward to hear God's "yes" to us!

What is Advent? As the beginning of the Church's liturgical year, Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas Day. It is a time of waiting, expectation, hope, and renewal, as we prepare for the wonder and mystery of the Incarnation at Christmas. From the Latin *adventus*, the word "advent" means "coming," and we sense that something extraordinary is about to happen—will we be ready?

Perhaps you are confused about what *exactly* it is we celebrate during this season. Wasn't Jesus the Christ already born? Yes, this is true. The incarnation is

an accomplished fact. So, why are we preparing for his coming? Especially since Jesus said we don't know when that time will be. We celebrate Advent and Christmas, along with all the other seasons, because reenacting the events of our faith grounds us in their meaning in a way that nothing else can. Every Sunday is a celebration of the risen Christ with us. Every relationship celebrates the presence of the Holy Three with us. But as former pastor Bruce Allison put it, "We soon lose the full meaning of that unless we celebrate in a special way." Advent is when we get ready and remember our roles as midwives to another world being possible.

Advent is a time for listening. When we longingly listen, leaning into the stories within and around us, we begin to see the world differently. Advent is a time to see the birth of Christ in our midst. On communion Sundays, we profess the mystery of our faith is that Christ has died, Christ has come, and Christ will come again. This season is the one that begins our year and our lives in Christ! The season invites us to play with Christ in creation. It is a season that beckons our imagination to say 'yes' to the healing balms offered to us by, with, and for creation. Advent is our time of getting ready, of reflection, of thoughtful preparation. It is a season to fill up on the promise of God—that They are with us always!

Friends, I love this time of the year! It is the season that says to us, "Are you ready to begin again?" As we begin this new liturgical year, it is my deepest longing to listen for the sounds of peace in the world; to see signs of hope in life; to play each day with joy; to let the promise of Advent fill my heart with Love's "yes!"

May Christ come to you in a thousand different ways this season. May you see the Christ in unexpected places and people. May this Advent season soften all of us around the edges!

Peace,
Adam

Ministry of the Hands

LINCOLN LOGAN FOOD PANTRY

October 2021 Monthly Distribution Report:

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|--------------------|-----|
| Individuals served | 701 |
| Children served | 178 |
| Households served | 139 |

October saw an increase with customers to the Food Pantry compared to September numbers. We are seeing both returning customers (that haven't been here in 3-6 months) and new customer registrations. There continues to be a need to provide food to food-insecure families. Some days in November, we have served 35-45 families!

Thank you to Logan County residents and churches sending monetary donations to the Food Pantry. We have purchased hams and turkeys for distribution to families for November and December.

Customers are very grateful, thanking the volunteers for their efforts. All these kind words go to churches and individual donations, too. "Thanks again!" say Rick Releford and Norm Newhouse.

Donation focus for the month of December is Dish Soap.

NEWS FROM THE MISSION AND OUTREACH TEAM

The Angel Tree giving project for the Christian Village is back again this year! The tree will be set up in the back of the Sanctuary. If you would like to participate, you can take a tag or two from the tree and purchase a Christmas gift for one of the residents at the Christian Village. Gifts will need to be returned to the church no later than Sunday, December 19.

Other projects are continuing this month. Monetary donations are being taken to buy gifts for students at Kemmerer Village (these can be given directly to Ken or Debbie Schweitzer), the Head Start Christmas project, Food for Thought, card collection for the inmates at Logan Correctional Center, and Food Pantry donations (need for December is Dish Soap).

If you would like to participate in any of these projects, let Paul, Cherie, or Cathy M. know.

Ministry of the Heart

FELLOWSHIP, WORSHIP & SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Advent began on November 28, with the choir and youth leading worship in a journey through the liturgical year. With that service, we began our four-week Advent anticipation that leads us to Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus. Here are a few things to expect during the month of December:

- On **December 12**, following worship, we will meet in the CE Building to fill gift bags for children at Head Start. Anyone who would like to participate is invited, and we extend a special invitation to our youth. This is a great opportunity for them to get involved in the mission activities of the church. Stay tuned in January for another special mission activity for our youth!
- **December 12** is also the deadline to sign up for poinsettias. They are \$15 each and may be purchased in honor, or memory, of a loved one. The poinsettias will be used to decorate the Sanctuary on Christmas Eve and Sunday worship on December 26, after which you are welcome to take them home.
- After worship on December 19, children and youth are invited to make candy houses in the CE Building, while adults will be making luminaries for the sidewalks on Pekin and Ottawa Streets. **We are collecting half-gallon and 32-ounce milk/juice/broth cartons AND half-gallon and gallon plastic milk jugs** for these projects. Kids! Please let Cathy Maciariello know by December 12 if you would like to make a candy house!
- We are also looking for families or individuals who would like to take charge of lighting the luminaries on December 24, 25, and 26. If you would like to sign up for one of these dates, please contact Ken Schweitzer.
- We have two special services planned for December. Our traditional **Blue Christmas or "Longest Night" service will be in the Parlor at 7 p.m. on December 21**. This is one of our most popular and moving special services, a time to slow down and recognize how the Christmas season can be a difficult time for some folks. It is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the healing power of

God's love. Our **Christmas Eve candlelight service will be on December 24 at 7 p.m.** We are so excited to be back in the Sanctuary this year.

- We invite you to take one of the Advent meditation books from the office. *Advent in Plain Sight* offers an exploration of ordinary objects and provides meditations to guide you in daily prayer and reflection throughout Advent.

Finally, don't forget to check out the bulletin board in the Parlor. Thanks to Becca Brant, for her work in designing and organizing the creation of our "Welcome Back Adam" message, and thanks to everyone who contributed artwork for the bulletin board! (see photo on page 8).

Worship Assistants are integral to our worship services at First Presbyterian Church. If you would like to serve as a Worship Assistant in 2022, please let Chris Thomas know by December 20. She can be reached at 217-732-6141 or at office@preslincoln.org.

The Ministry of the Heart Team would also like to invite new members interested in serving on **Worship & Spiritual Formation or Fellowship** in 2022. If you would like to join us, please contact Keith Leesman or Cathy Maciariello.

Ministry of our Resources

ADMINISTRATION TEAM

The Session will finalize our 2022 budget this month for approval at the Annual Congregational Meeting in January.

At the end of October, we mailed everyone in our directory our 2022 pledge cards. Knowing your pledges, enables us to plan for the important work we do for everything from paying the bills to supporting the many local mission efforts in our community. "Thank you," to all who have already sent in your pledge cards. If you ever have any questions about tithing at First Presbyterian Church, please reach out to Adam for guidance. Thank you for continuing to show your faith with your pledges and offerings. We are equally grateful to all who prefer to give as you are able, and to those giving their time, making so many of our mission efforts possible. May it continue to serve in ministry to all who enter our church doors and to the many others who need support in our community.

OCTOBER SESSION MEETING

The Session met November 9. In addition to reviewing the reports and activities of the three Ministry teams (described elsewhere in the LINK), the Session spent considerable time discussing the pandemic responses currently in place for First Presbyterian Church. One change was made. Effective November 19, light refreshments may be served in the building. Light refreshments include cookies, snack items, cake, beverages, and other similar foods. Potlucks and other forms of a complete meal are not light refreshments. At each meeting, the Session continues to examine the strategies in place at the Church in response to Covid 19. Adding, subtracting, or otherwise modifying the strategies may occur as the rate of infections change.

ADAM'S DAYS OFF

Please remember that Adam's days off are Friday and Saturday. If you email, call, or text Adam on one of those days, he will not respond until Monday...unless you let him know that your reason for contact is an emergency.

FELLOWSHIP IS THE SHARING OF CULTURES, HISTORY, AND HUMAN INTERACTIONS.

Diana Gabaldon is a novelist and professor who is best known for the *Outlander* series of novels. She is of Mexican and English descent, grew up in Arizona, and received her degrees in zoology, marine biology, and behavioral ecology from institutions in Arizona and California. She wrote articles reviewing software, and technical articles for computer publications, as well as popular-science articles and Disney comics prior to writing full-time. Her diversity is reflected in the first book of the series, *Outlander*.

Claire Randall has been an army nurse during WWII, while her husband, Frank, serves in the war. She appears somewhat pale and fragile on the outside, but inside she longs to renew her relationship with her husband and build a life and family together. The intensity of these desires may reflect the fact that she was orphaned at age five and raised by her loving, adventuresome uncle, who instilled a sense of survival in her.

The couple are enjoying life in Scotland, prior to Frank's joining the faculty of an English university. His interest in his Scottish heritage becomes an exploration of history and legends. It is on one of these trips that Claire simply walks through standing stones and reappears in the same place, but the year is 1743. Accept this as truth, then read on.

Claire awakens and believes she has somehow walked onto the set of a film and the people she meets are in costume. She realizes quickly that she is now in Scotland at a time when brutal conflicts, warring clans, and struggles for survival abound. She is attacked by Jonathan Randall, Frank's ancestor, who is a Captain and tries to force himself upon her. Jamie Frazier joins the story as her rescuer. He and his uncles take Claire to their home, though many suspect she is an English traitor due to her accent and odd clothing. At Castle Leoch, the members of the clan take a liking to her, slowly.

Claire initially plans ways to escape and return to Frank and their life, but there doesn't seem to be a way to make this happen. Instead, she stays and she and Jamie marry, an idea hatched by his uncles to protect them from Captain Randall, who accuses them of crimes against him and Scotland. Both are innocent. However, Jamie is captured and locked in Wentworth prison. A daring rescue succeeds, and Claire takes Jamie to an abbey in France, where she helps him heal physically and emotionally from the brutal treatment he received while imprisoned.

Outlander closes with the couple developing a true and loving relationship, with a new beginning and what will be a family and new adventures to follow.

Readers of adventure, historical fiction, mystery, romance, and fantasy may all enjoy this book. It is lengthy (850+ pages), but well worth the time. To enjoy it fully, believe in the magic of the standing stones and several coincidences in the childhoods' of several characters. This is an adult selection, because of the brutality of the time in history and the rather explicit passions described. *Outlander* is a book that encourages introspection and conversation.

Remember, you are loved.

*A book report from the Sabbatical reading list by
Mary McLaughlin.*

Advent At Home

One way to make Advent more meaningful, is to incorporate some of our communal practices at home. Below is an Advent candle liturgy written by Marin C. Tirabassi, a minister in the United Church of Christ. The beauty of this liturgy is that she wrote it in conversation with some of Howard Thurman's work, specifically two poems from his work titled, "Mood of Christmas."

First Sunday in Advent

I light one candle here for hope and it is like a small lamp, lighting a bedside table with open book, after a long day, the glow of heart monitor in ICU, a headlamp for a hiker on an unfamiliar trail, or a miner down a shaft, a toddler's paw-patrol nightlight, or early-morning oven in a bakery.

We light one candle, so we will remember to notice this week's ordinary lights of hope.

For ordinary and available to all is the hope of Advent.

**I will light Candles this Christmas,
Candles of joy despite all the sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all year long.** (Howard Thurman)

Second Sunday in Advent

I light two candles this week to illuminate peace.

For as God lights both gentle dawn and a slash of lightning strike, we affirm all the ways we seek peace—kind persuasion with eye contact, and a justice march with big signs, a silent vigil of prayer and fasting, and the gift of food, toys, or dignity for the most vulnerable, our quiet visits to therapist or recovery group, and loud demands to change gun laws.

We light two candles, so we will listen to the angel mandate of "Peace on Earth."

For ordinary, available, gentle and brave, are the hope and peace of Advent.

**I will light Candles this Christmas,
Candles of joy despite all the sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all year long.** (Howard Thurman)

Third Sunday in Advent

I will light three candles to sparkle with joy. For God lights constellations and the tips of angel wings light years far away, and light years as near as breath.

We light (and help to blow out) ninety-five candles on a birthday cake, the high circle of a Ferris wheel, the smile of a pumpkin, marshmallow of a s'more, branches of a Christmas tree, and the luminarias that say —this is a home/church that welcomes all, every age, race, education, ability, orientation, ethnic origin, gender identity, job status, old friend or stranger becoming new one, those who claim their history and their identity, others who close their lips to listen and feel the joy in their hearts.

We raise three candles, and know we cannot do it by ourselves, for each of us have only two hands.

For ordinary, available, gentle, brave, and with wide-open doors, is the hope, peace and joy of Advent.

**I will light Candles this Christmas,
Candles of joy despite all the sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all year long.** (Howard Thurman)

Fourth Sunday in Advent

I will light four candles and I will be willing to light every taper in my life, for love asks for all that is needed and then ... for everything else, for this is how incarnation happens, how God comes.

We light four candles or a hundred or a thousand more, whatever it takes to remind ourselves to live in love.

As ordinary and gentle as the holy welcome that turns the world upside down, comes hope, peace, joy, and love to illuminate our Advent.

**I will light Candles this Christmas,
Candles of joy despite all the sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all year long.** (Howard Thurman)

Christmas Eve – the Lighting of the Christ Candle

We have gathered at this wreath all this Advent season to light candles.

We claim that Emmanuel, God with us, is Light and Darkness in a world that must work and rest, be generous and self-careful, experience tears and laughter, in order to share both the hurt and humor of others from the deep place of knowing it.

Let us light these candles on this holy night.

I light the candle of hope, and hopelessness cannot hide.

I light the candle of peace, and expose hatred as fear turned inside out.

I light the candle of joy, and everyone is welcome with a smile, a moment of beauty or wonder.

I light the candle of love, and hands are clasped around the world.

THIS IS CHRISTMAS

**The evergreen singing aloud its poem of constant renewal,
The festive mood spreading lilted magic everywhere,
The gifts of recollection calling to heart the graces of life,
The star in the sky calling to mind the wisdom of hope,
The warmth of candlelight glowing against the darkness,
The birth of a child linking past to future,
The symbol of love absorbing all violence
THIS IS CHRISTMAS (Howard Thurman)**

O Holy God, we light the Christ candle. It shines on smiles and tears. It shines into the lives of everyone. It shines and we remember the story. It shines around angels who sing for the most vulnerable, and guides the long traveling of those from far away.

It shines on a manger, a child and parents, with animals gathered all around. It shines on here and now people just like Bethlehem long ago.

It can never be extinguished, because, Christ, you are tonight's candle, and we promise—to lift our wicks to tomorrow's flame.

Amen.

The LINK

First Presbyterian Church
301 Pekin St.
Lincoln, IL 62656

www.preslincoln.org
office@preslincoln.org
217-732-6141

STAFF

Rev. Adam Quine, MDiv, MAS
Zack Embery, Associate to
Technological Ministry
David Young, Music Director
Chet Lord-Remmert, Organist
Bill Opper, Clerk of Session
Mel Anderson, Treasurer
Christine Thomas, Admin. Asst.

