



The Taftsville Chapel Current

God calls us as followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as a community of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to our world.

Jan Collins, Editor; Carie Good, Janet North & Virginia Schlabach, Newsletter Staff

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"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." *John 3:8*

The Jesse Tree

The season of Advent, starting four Sundays before Christmas, has been set aside as a time of preparation for Christmas since at least the last half of the 6th century. The word Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming". It is a season of waiting, a time of anticipation and preparation for the coming of Jesus. As Christians, we want our focus to be on Jesus, not on the commercialism or busyness of getting ready for a Christmas event. There are many ways we might prepare for Christmas. One way is with a Jesse Tree.

What is a Jesse Tree? It is a tree branch decorated with symbols representing the stories of people in Jesus' family tree. In the New Testament the lineage of Jesus is traced by two of the Gospel writers, Matthew and Luke. Luke describes the "generations of Christ" all the way back to Adam. Matthew's gospel opens with the words: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, descendant of David, descendant of Abraham." With this beginning Matthew makes clear Jesus' whole lineage: He is of God's chosen people by his descent from Abraham, and he is the "shoot of Jesse" by his descent from Jesse's son, King David. In Isaiah 11:1 we read, "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." That's where the idea of using a Jesse Tree to celebrate Advent comes from.

The Jesse Tree has been depicted in almost every medium of Christian art. It has been the subject of many stained glass windows and illuminated manuscripts. It is found in wall paintings, architectural carvings, funerary monuments, floor tiles and tapestry. These pictorial representations of the Jesse Tree show a symbolic tree or vine with spreading branches to represent the genealogy in accordance with Isaiah's prophecy. The most typical form of the Jesse Tree in medieval art is to show the figure of Jesse, often larger than all the rest, reclining or sleeping (perhaps by analogy to Adam when his rib was taken) at the foot of the pictorial space. From his side or his navel springs the trunk of a tree or vine that ascends upward, branching to either side. On the branches, usually surrounded by scrolling tendrils of foliage, are figures representing the ancestors of Christ. The trunk generally ascends vertically to Mary and then Christ at the top. (During the medieval era, this symbol of the tree as an expression of lineage was adopted into common usage, and that's where we get our idea of the Family Tree!)



This fresco was created by Bros. Steve Erspamer and Tom Suda and Anand the mason at Nirmal Deep in India. The fresco depicts the Tree of Jesse and is nearly 30' high, covering an entire wall of the novitiate chapel. Photo courtesy of Bro. Sukrit Tirkey, SM

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The Jesse Tree was the only prophecy in the Old Testament to be so literally and frequently illustrated, and so came also to stand for the Prophets, and their foretelling of Christ, in general. In recent years the Jesse Tree has taken on a new significance as a mode of celebrating the Advent Season. A small tree or bare branch serves as the Tree, and each day of Advent a new "ornament" or pictorial symbol is hung. Each ornament is a symbol for some aspect of the Biblical story, both Old and New Testaments, including the Messianic prophecies. Before a symbol is hung on the branch, a Bible passage or a story from a story Bible is typically read.

We have spent some laborious weeks together doing hard theology in the book of Romans. This Advent season at Taftsville our worship focus will shift to something more reflective and devotional. As we enjoy the symbolism of the ornaments on the Jesse Tree, we will be connected to the whole story of the advent of Jesus. We will be reminded that in the coming of Jesus into the world, God had us in mind all along, looking forward to a redeemed relationship with us, His children.

The first Sunday of Advent, we will reflect on the Incarnation, God the Word taking on humble flesh. On the second Sunday, we will remember the Annunciation, to Mary, to Elizabeth, to the shepherds. Even as they were presented with the mystery of God that was prepared before the ages, their human response was what God used to bring forth His Son. For the third Sunday, we will consider that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the house of Bread, even as Jesus is the Bread of Life. On the fourth Sunday, the reality of Jesus - his actual coming into the world - brings us hope. And not hope for this life only, but hope for the fullness of the Kingdom of the Messiah.

It is my prayer that you will have a meaningful, peaceful and joy-filled advent season.

- *Carie Good*

Our Sister Church—New Beginnings Fellowship



Pastor Jon Moore of New Beginnings writes to us:

I first want to say how much of a joy it was to have your congregation here this weekend [November 10-11]. I pray that it was uplifting to each of you as it was to our congregation.

I shared with our council about my conversation with your congregation and your interest in helping us. We are grateful for the helping hand that you have extended towards our church but we also feel led to be a servant to your church as well. Please feel free to discuss with your church leaders on how we may share our gifts and talents with you that we may prepare ourselves for it.

I ask that you keep Sister Nancy Hill from Fort Wayne, Indiana in your prayers. On Wednesday, they had to amputate her left leg above the knee but there were some complications. As of this morning she is still unconscious and on a ventilator. Also, my mother found out this morning that she has bronchitis. Sister Karen Anderson came home from the hospital yesterday, and I pray she may be able to come to church next Sunday.

Tell everyone I said hello.

Yours in Christ,

Jon & Felicia Moore



New Beginnings Weekend Trip

On November 10th and 11th a small group of Taftsville worshippers meandered down to our sister church, New Beginnings in Bristol, Pennsylvania. Seven of us packed (Ted and Eli, Carol and Krysta, Roy, Laura, and me) into a 12-person van, leaving only enough room for a mouse. (As a group, apparently we don't travel light!) Eight hours later, thanks to good directions from Randy, we found ourselves in Bristol in time for Pastor Jon's "cook's tour" of their church. That is where we met up with Randy and Carie who had arrived from the church conference.

Pastor Jon is passionate about the children in his neighborhood. He explained about their Weed and Seed program to offer kids an alternative to crime and drugs. They have an extensive library and four computers in a small room in their basement for use by children as well as others. Roy asked if Pastor Jon would create a wish list of supplies they might be able to use in their programs with the idea that perhaps we could, as a community, share our resources with them. Pastor Jon did ask for prayers for more members to become involved in their church. Perhaps we can keep that in mind as we say our words to God.

The colorful basement also has a room with long tables and wooden chairs set up for activities, including our community meal. There is a small kitchen and an office as well. After the tour, several of the church community members joined us for a meal of pizza and soda. All treated us very kindly and considerately.

New Beginnings is a small, spirited community of believers who revel in God's love and glory. Before the Sunday sermon, they have a time for testimonies at which time folks are invited to share God's working in their lives. A few of us stood and confessed the miracles God worked in our lives that weekend. It was a very moving experience requiring more explanation than room permits here. During the sermon, Lana and another woman used the overhead projector to help us with words to their songs as they had done on their visit to Vermont. Ted passed out our



hymnals as our Carol did a fine job of leading the community in a few of our favorites. We had time for prayer and sharing and honoring a couple of members of their community for contributions and birthdays.

While we were participating up stairs, some women were preparing a huge array of food downstairs for the noon meal. We packed in and ate our fill, sharing good company, laughter, and conversation. We left around 2p.m. for the long trek home arriving safe and tired around 10p.m. We were gifted memorable moments from the weekend and hope to continue this relationship with our sister community.

- Amena Reess

Household of the Month for December

Each month we will feature a family/person along with some of their favorite Bible verses/passages or stories. Richard Glick is the photographer and is collecting these photos to compile into a pictorial directory – coming in the future.



Nancy and Russell Pejouhy

Favorite Verses:

Russell—Romans 8:35-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nancy—Matthew 22:37-40

"You shall love the Lord Your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Reess Wedding

Jake and I were joined by a circle of close friends to witness our second wedding held at Taftsville Chapel on October 4th. After initially saying our vows twenty-one years ago on October 4th, 1986 on our land in Hartland Four Corners, it felt right to begin again – to enliven and refresh.

The theme was "KISS" for "Keep it simple, silly!" Jake is not much for pomp and circumstance, and I am very much for Jake! Along with our initial theme, we added, "Traditional Mennonite meets Rocker-Biker Dude" to recognize our individuality.

In the Mennonite tradition of community, we asked each person to take part. We invited our witnesses to come prepared to share a few words of kindness and support "in celebration of the evolution of our love." We also asked our friends to participate in the Mennonite Declaration of Intent by answering "We will" to Randy's question of "Will you do all in your power to support and uphold this marriage?"

In addition to being enthusiastically involved in the above, Mary F. took pictures; Glenn carried stuff for Mary F.; Charley V. laid down the threshold so we could step over into our new beginning; Mary V. held GiGi, the wonder dog; Lenora made the flower arrangement and worked the music CD; David made sure Lenora had everything in place; Mark gave an awesome toast at the reception; Carie read I Corinthians 13: 4-8; and Randy did what he does best. None of this would be held in loving memory without a very warm-hearted thank you to our own Dennis for contributing videotaping! Thank you!



We all had fun at both the ceremony and dinner/reception, held at Firestone's Restaurant in Quechee. A new beginning indeed. God does bless us in so many ways. Thanks be to God!

-Amena Reess

New Additions to the Library:

- **Two compilations of seasonal writings from contemporary Christian Writers:**
 - 1) *Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas*
 - 2) *Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter*
- *Show Me The Way: Daily Lenten Readings by Henri Nouwen*

"Share the forty days Lenten path with spiritual master Henri Nouwen, from the solemn beginning of Ash Wednesday to the joyous climax of Easter. This collection of daily scripture readings, meditations, and original prayers is perfect for lent, and for your walk with God all year round."
- *A Year with C.S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*

"...Ruminating on such themes as the nature of love, the existence of miracles, overcoming a devastating loss, and discovering a profound faith, Lewis offers unflinchingly honest insight for each day of the year."
- *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy* Donald Kraybill, Steven Nott, David Weaver-Zercher
"The remarkable response of the Amish community to the horrific shooting of ten schoolgirls at Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, in October. Zook stunned the larger world. Amish Grace tells the incredible story of this community's reaction to this senseless shooting and explores its profoundly countercultural practice of forgiveness."

- Monica Esch, Librarian

Candlelighters Update by Ruth Ann Glick

If you are a female at Taftsville and you want to let the Light of Jesus shine in your neighborhood communities and around the world, then YOU are already a Candlelighter!

Our first project this winter will be making Newborn Kits for Mennonite Central Committee. MCC distributes these kits to hospitals, clinics and refugee camps. A printed list of items will be available at church, and we will be receiving the individual baby items each Sunday during Advent. Later, we will assemble them into bundles. I look forward to shopping for some cute little baby clothes.

In the past we have pieced and tied comforters for MCC as well as making bags for their health kits, sewing kits, and school kits. Imagine not having the resources to buy these basic supplies. There are many other possible Candlelighters projects including local ones. I need help with ideas though. Would you enjoy just going out for lunch or dinner together, or going on a field trip? Please share your ideas with Mary Guntz or Ruth Ann.

Library Report by Carie Good

Monica Esch, our librarian, has spent some wonderful time developing ideas and themes for Advent this year. She has used several books from the church library for meditation and inspiration. One is a new addition, which she kindly shared with Randy and me before putting it on the library shelf :)

Watch for the Light, Readings for Advent and Christmas is a packed little volume, filled with selections of writings from Thomas Merton, C.S.Lewis, Brennan Manning, Annie Dillard, Kathleen Norris, Philip Yancey, John Howard Yoder and many, many more.

I couldn't put it down. I discovered, as the introduction suggested I might, that "The love that descended to Bethlehem is not the easy sympathy of a [kind-hearted]God, but a burning fire whose light chases away every shadow, floods every corner, and turns midnight into noon."

I was transported from the edges of space ("The senior angel pointed to a small and rather insignificant sphere turning slowly on its axis." from *The Visited Planet* by J.B.Phillips via Philip Yancey) to the smelly muck of the stable ("What is the world but an immense stable where men produce filth and wallow in it?" from *Ox and Ass* by Giovanni Papini).

I was moved to consider the condition of my own heart concerning piety ("The sadness of not being perfect, the discovery that you really are sinful, is a feeling much too human, even borders on idolatry" from *Shipwrecked at the Stable* by Brennan Manning), and pride ("I suggest we are better givers than getters, not because we are generous people but because we are proud, arrogant people. The Christmas story is not about how blessed it is to be givers but about how essential it is to see ourselves as receivers" from *The God we Hardly Knew* by William Willimon).

I was comforted by words of waiting with hope ("Wherever the Christmas Child is born in a heart, wherever Jesus begins his earthly life anew - that is where the life of God's love and of God's peace dawns again." from *Christmas Joy* by Emmy Arnold) and words of waiting with promise ("Our whole life, however, is Advent - that is, a time of waiting for ...a new heaven and a new earth... Learn to wait, because he has promised to come." from *The Coming of Jesus in Our Midst* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.)

I wish I could say "run out right now to the Taftsville Chapel library and check out this book for your Christmas devotional" but you won't find it. Sorry - it's still at our house. Randy is reading it now, and taking time to meditate on the daily entries. But put it on your reading list, perhaps for next Advent. However, whenever you do check it out, it will inspire you at *any* time of the year.



For the younger children's class, the theme of many of the Bible stories during the fall Sunday school quarter was peace making. In September the children decorated cloth blocks for peace pillows. Each child included the word PEACE and his or her name along with designs that represented peace.



Virginia sewed and stuffed the pillows, which will remain in the cozy story corner of the classroom till the Sunday school year ends in May. The pillows are to hug during story time or to trade from time to time with someone else as a symbol of friendship or peace making.

Pictures show the children making their designs and Micah, Lena, and Addison hugging their finished pillows.



Thanks to Elinor Shattuck, Fred Schlabach, Janet North, Karen Cox, Jessica Reitz, Mary Guntz, and Carneleta Beidler for telling stories, leading music, and coordinating the activity times - and to the parents who have given support and encouragement.

Thanks, too, to Jan Collins for her creative teaching of the **Junior Youth class**, who have enjoyed learning and discussing the Ten Commandments and listening to weekly chapters from Henry's Red Sea, the story of Russian Mennonite refugees after World War II

The Sunday before Thanksgiving, in addition to our special offering of \$1,440.00 to be given for fuel assistance to those in our community that need it, the congregation donated food for *The Haven's* food shelf. Josiah and Micah decorated 4 cartons during Sunday School, which were all filled to the brim! —

For the Advent/Christmas season — Karen and Janet have been teaching the children a special Christmas song to share during worship, and this month Jessica plans to share stories of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. In December all children, pre-school through junior high, will spend part of their class time making symbolic ornaments for the Jesse Tree. Here is the list of ornaments and what they symbolize:

Dec. 2 - apple or fruit tree = Adam & Eve; dove = God;
field of stars = Abraham

Dec. 9 - shepherd's crook or harp = David;
mother & child = Elizabeth; pencil & tablet = Zechariah

Dec. 16 - ram = Isaac; coat = Joseph; lamb = Israelites

Dec. 23 - white lily = Mary; ladder = Jacob; baby in manger = Jesus

- Virginia Schlabach



Do you remember when...

35 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

December 17, 1972

Discussion regarding plans for the Christmas season resulted in dropping caroling for this year. Instead, we will make an effort to involve family participation in giving individual gifts and friendship to the lonely and forgotten people of our nursing homes and communities.

30 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

December 6, 1977

In the Church Council notes: "Since Christmas is a time for keeping secrets, we don't have much to report to you this time around!"

15 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

December 31, 1992

At the first annual Self-Help Sale the total sales of crafts was \$10,164.

CHRISTMAS QUIZ

The Bible stories about Jesus' birth leave a lot to our imagination. From early times people have added to the bare facts found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, and fact and tradition have become mixed together. If you knew only what the Bible tells, how would you answer these questions?

- What did Mary ride on the journey to Bethlehem?
- How soon after Mary and Joseph reached Bethlehem was Jesus born?
- What was the weather like?
- What sort of building was Jesus born in?
- What part did the innkeeper play in the story?
- What animals were gathered around the manger?
- How many wise men were there?
- How soon after Jesus' birth did they arrive?
- How did the wise men travel?

Read again the Christmas story in Matthew 2 and Luke 2:1-20. You may get a surprise when you check the answers! (Please note that some Bible versions call the wise men "magi" or "astrologers".) - *V. Schlabach*

Fall Workday 2007...



Russell, Hannah and Micah cleaning and determined to get those flies and bugs out!

Good Food & Conversation at Harvest Potluck...



Kevin, Karen, Marilyn & Virginia

Send your contributions for
"The Taftsville Chapel Current" to:

janice.g.collins@valley.net

OR slip a note in my church mailbox

OR contact a Newsletter Staff Member:

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