



THE *Pillar*
BRECKSVILLE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

DECEMBER 2023

Peace
Hope 
Love
& Joy

TO BE LOVING, SERVING, AND ACCEPTING
OF ALL PEOPLE
WITH GOD'S LIFE-CHANGING POWER
AND GRACE

Pastor's Ponderings.....

Christmas is not Jesus' birthday. I mean, it might be, but the probability is about one in 365. We don't have Jesus' birth certificate. Christmas does celebrate the birth of Jesus, an event we call the incarnation, when "the Word became flesh and lived among us."¹

So, why December 25 instead of some other random date? It all has to do with one of my favorite topics – astronomy. Earth's axial tilt offers a powerful symbol of the meaning of Christ's incarnation. For those of us in the northern hemisphere, the nights are getting longer. Light decreases; darkness increases. In ancient times, this was a fearsome night lit by ceremonial bonfires. The winter solstice happens December 21 – the longest night. The Sun changes course and heads north again. By December 24 the change is perceptible as darkness decreases and light increases. On Christmas Eve, we'll see a minute more of daylight than we did on the solstice.

Ah, what would we do without astronomers? The natural cycle of the seasons becomes a metaphor of spiritual enlightenment. Scripture tells us, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."² "Jesus is the light of the world."³ "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."⁴ The increasing light of the solstice led the early Christians to celebrate the birth of Jesus on December 25.

But wait! There's more Christmas astronomy! In preparation for Christmas, manger scenes around our planet include a star. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that magi (wise ones) observed a star, inspiring them to seek to Jesus. Over the years, astrophysicists have considered various hypotheses regarding what kind of celestial event this might have been.

¹ John 1:14

² John 1:5

³ John 9:5

⁴ Isaiah 9:4

Pastor's Ponderings (*continued*)

The Greek word for “star” (ἀστέρα / astera) could have meant just about anything seen in the sky, and shouldn’t be limited by our modern understanding of the word.

Some have thought it could have been a supernova, that is, an exploding star. On July 4, 1054 A.D., a supernova was so bright you could see it in the daytime for three weeks! That event left behind a beautiful expanding heap of rubble and plasma known as the Crab Nebula, which you can see with a decent backyard telescope. All supernovae younger than 5,000 years are identifiable by their powerful radio and X-ray emissions. But none of them date from 2000 years ago. So the Star of Bethlehem could not have been a supernova.

There was, however, a very spectacular conjunction on June 17, in the year 2 B.C.



Jupiter and Venus are the two brightest objects in the night sky (other than the Moon). That night, Jupiter and Venus appeared within 0.007 of one degree! To the naked eye that would appear as one astonishingly bright and beautiful “star”. Modern astrophysicists think this planetary conjunction in the constellation Leo could be the event described in Matthew.

Shepherds, magi, oxen, even the planets in the heavens, and all creation converge to direct our attention and wonder to the birth of Jesus, the light of the world. This Christmas, wonder at the beauty of the seasons as Earth and sky share a primordial symbol of the meaning of Jesus’ birth.

Please note on Christmas Eve there will be one service only, at 10 am.



FROM THE MINISTRIES OF BUCC

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

IT'S PAGEANT SEASON! Attention all families with young children: the Christmas Pageant will be on Sunday, December 17th this year. It will be like last year, in that minimal practice is required – and we have enough costumes for all! Please consider taking this opportunity for your child(ren) to participate in a much-loved holiday tradition – questions for Miss Mindy can be emailed to: buccoffice23@gmail.com. Thank you!

FINANCE

STATEMENT OF CASH AVAILABLE AS OF OCTOBER 31ST:

10/31/23

Sources of Cash

PNC Bank	18,694
US Bank	4,961
First Federal of Lakewood	<u>59,592</u>
	83,248

Liquid Cash

Certificate of Deposit	<u>60,642</u>
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Cash Balance

143,890

Spendable Endowment – Market Value	89,645
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Restricted Endowment – Market Value	61,707
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Stock Bequest – Market Value	<u>84,116</u>
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Equity Value

235,469

Total Financial Assets

379,358

Less:

Restricted Endowments	61,707
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Current Liabilities – Budgeted Expenses	<u>13,342</u>
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75,049

Net Financial Assets Available

304,309

Budgeted Deficit (Revised)

(69,897)

Available Cash / Deficit Years

4.4 Years

Forty-six pledges were received on Stewardship Sunday, for a total of \$169,364. Many thanks to all who have come forward.

In the coming years, BUCC will not be ordering boxed sets of envelopes. Feel free to take a couple of green envelopes from the pews. More people are having their contributions sent directly from their banks or are using PayPal. Others are having a one-time contribution sent from their IRAs.

On a side note, this might be a good time to talk to an attorney or someone in the Finance Ministry about including BUCC in your will and/or estate plans.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Hopefully you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving! We appreciate all who have made their pledges to BUCC and took part in the Stewardship Turkey dinner. Please now consider how you can share your time and talent on one of our ministries, or by helping out during our Sunday Services or in some other way. BUCC is a Congregational church that functions when the whole congregation pitches in! Just fill in a blue form (on the small table with the bulletins) and leave it in the church office, email (buccoffice23@gmail.com), or leave a message (440-526-4364) for Bridget Sproul on the Leadership Development Ministry. Thank you!

OUR CHURCH'S WIDER MISSION (OCWM)

On Sunday December 3rd, BUCC is hosting the Hunger Meal at Inglesia Emmanuel, located at 3388 West 41st St. in Cleveland. This is an opportunity to help with serving and talking with the people who come for the meal we prepare. Our presence at the meal is a visible reminder of BUCC in the community. We will announce the time and we also invite you to bring baked goods for dessert, to BUCC before the service on Dec. 3rd, so we can take them to the meal later.

In 2024 our activities will include raising awareness of ways in which we can take action to support the issues that the United Church of Christ asks congregations to promote, such as racial justice, inclusivity, and environmental action. We invite you to consider joining our ministry and bring your ideas, time, and talents to promoting our church's wider

OCWM (*continued*)

mission. You can talk with Co-chairs Rob Grow or Diane Gressley about coming to our meeting in January.

THE CHRISTMAS FUND FOR THE VETERANS OF THE CROSS & THE EMERGENCY FUND

“Grace upon Grace.” - John 1:16

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

“Grace upon grace” is a reminder of the great gifts of God to us, and an expression of our grateful response to that fullness. Your gifts to the Christmas Fund allow the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance to provide grace, hope, and joy through financial relief to UCC pastors, lay church leaders, and their families. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. Thank you!

SPIRITUAL LIFE

SOUNDS OF THE SEASON - On Sunday December 10th at our 10 am service, BUCC’s adult choir will present this year’s Christmas cantata. Written and arranged by Mary McDonald and Joel Raney, ***Sing Christmas*** contains a wonderful variety of contemporary and traditional music telling the ancient story of Jesus’ birth. Accompanying the choir will be two flutes, two trumpets, trombone, violin, and percussion. The choir will also be joined by seasonal choir members and narrators. Plan on joining us for this annual BUCC event.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE - Because Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday, we’ll begin the December 24th 10:00 am service as the fourth Sunday in Advent. Mid-service, we will transition to our Christmas Eve service (2 for 1!). **THIS WILL BE THE ONLY SERVICE ON DEC. 24th.**

Be sure to join us throughout the month of December as we celebrate the 2023 Advent theme, “The Gift of Being Present.” We trust that the childlike wonder of the season will be instilled in your hearts the entire

month long. Wishing you a season that's joyful and bright with the light of God's love.

THE UN-HANGING OF THE GREENS - PLEASE mark your calendar for Sunday, December 31st, following worship, so we can take down Christmas decorations in preparation for Epiphany. The more folks who participate, the faster it goes! We are beyond grateful for your willing hearts and hands.

HELP A CHRISTMAS TREE OUT! A couple of years ago, we were able to replace our well-worn tree with a newer, gently used tree that was pre-lit. Because it's in sections (instead of individual branches) it is much faster/easier for us to put up. The challenge -- we have nothing to store it in! As a result, it is getting rather beat up quickly in the haul up and down the attic stairs. But you might be able to help a tree out!

We are looking for large (4 foot long and bigger) storage bins or bags that we can store the tree in when it is not being used. Can you help a tree out? If so, just bring in the bin or bag and drop it off at the office. Thank you!

STAFF/CONGREGATION RELATIONS (SCR)

BUCC NURSERY – If you love little children and want to share some of your time with our infants and toddlers, please consider signing up on Breeze to be a Nursery Assistant on Sundays during the church service. We are blessed that our own Amelia Elting has volunteered to be our Nursery Attendant until we can hire a permanent staff member to fill the position. We will be exploring the feasibility of hiring an attendant in the first quarter of 2024. While Amelia is very capable, she may require a helping hand on occasion, so we are looking for several volunteers who are willing to check in with her prior to the start of the service to see if she needs help.

If you are a parent of an infant or toddler, check in with Amelia prior to the start of service, if you want to utilize the nursery. You will find Amelia in the Nursery or in Ms. Mindy's classroom. We ask parents of Nursery children to please fill out a Nursery information form – they are in the Nursery, in a binder near the door. We also ask that you be available by text if our Nursery Attendant needs you to return to the nursery for any reason. Thank you! -- Evie Novak, SCR

Announcements:

THANK YOU! Many thanks to everyone who helped make the October 29th free concert a tremendous success: ushers, greeters, counters, all who contributed food, setup and cleanup crews, Sam Alai and his helpers for preparing the sanctuary and Pilgrim Hall, Sue Stenzel for coordinating the reception, and of course, the Chorale and Concert Band from Tri-C's Western Campus. Our concert series provides an excellent opportunity for outreach to the wider NE Ohio community, and serves well our congregation's mission of welcome and hospitality. Much appreciation to everyone for your contributions! - Dave D.



THE BRECKSVILLE BROADVIEW HEIGHTS COMMUNITY CHORUS will present *The Many Moods of Christmas* on Sunday, December 3rd at 4:00 pm, at the Brecksville United Methodist Church. The concert is open to the public and a free will offering will be received. This promises to be an inspiring holiday musical event, so let's try to support our local Community Chorus on December 3rd.



MINDFULNESS & MEDITATION – There will be no meditation group on December 20th and 27th, due to the holidays.



FLOWERS in the chancel area add a special touch to our Sunday morning worship. I have been organizing this effort for 12 years and will be giving up my time as "chair" of this committee on December 31, 2023. I would like to pass the baton to someone else. It involves having someone bring in flowers on Sundays and also putting the appropriate seasonal wreaths on the four doors entering the church.

Please contact Betsey Wilson at buccoffice23@gmail.com.

Thank you , Janet Renovetz



**Happy, Happy DECEMBER Birthdays* to the following
BUCC Members! Please share in their joy and wish them a
Happy Birthday!**

Jon	Thompson	December 04
Kevin	Smith	December 06
Betty	Einhart	December 12
Grace	Hunt	December 13
Jim	Duffy	December 20
Naomi	Klonowski	December 20
Bob	Chandler	December 21
Lauren	Martinez	December 21
Linda	Kriynovich	December 25
Dan	Stewart	December 28
Amy	Coyer-Westerberg	December 29

***If you have a DECEMBER birthday and are not included above, please contact the church office so we can add you to the BUCC Birthday List!**



CALENDAR

DECEMBER 2023

Fri., DECEMBER 1
OFFICE CLOSED

Sat., DECEMBER 2

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3
10am Worship Service
11:30am Membership
3pm Hunger Meal

Mon., DECEMBER 4
7pm Facilities

Tue., DECEMBER 5
8:15am "Holy Grounds"
(Brecksville Panera)
6:30pm AA in Pilgrim Hall
7pm Spiritual Life

Wed., DECEMBER 6
11am Mindfulness &
Meditation
6pm SCR
7pm Stewardship

Thu., DECEMBER 7
5:30pm Youth Choir
7pm Seasonal Choir
8pm Adult Choir

Fri., DECEMBER 8
OFFICE CLOSED

Sat., DECEMBER 9

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10
CANTATA

10am Worship Service
11:30am OCWM

Mon., DECEMBER 11

Tue., DECEMBER 12
8:15am "Holy Grounds"
(Brecksville Panera)
6:30pm AA in Pilgrim Hall

Wed., DECEMBER 13
11am Mindfulness &
Meditation
7pm Council

Thu., DECEMBER 14

Fri., DECEMBER 15
PILLAR DEADLINE
OFFICE CLOSED

Sat., DECEMBER 16

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17
PAGEANT

10am Worship Service

Mon., DECEMBER 18

Tue., DECEMBER 19
8:15am "Holy Grounds"
(Brecksville Panera)
6:30pm AA in Pilgrim Hall
7pm Communications

Wed., DECEMBER 20

Thu., DECEMBER 21

Fri., DECEMBER 22
OFFICE CLOSED

Sat., DECEMBER 23

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24
10am Worship Service

Mon., DECEMBER 25
CHRISTMAS DAY

Tue., DECEMBER 26
6:30pm AA in Pilgrim Hall

Wed., DECEMBER 27

Thu., DECEMBER 28

Fri., DECEMBER 29
OFFICE CLOSED

Sat., DECEMBER 30

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31
10am Worship Service



PARTICIPANTS IN WORSHIP

DECEMBER 3, 2023

Head Usher: Jill Zedan
Ushers: Evelyn Seager
Heidi Spangler
Lay Reader: Jon Thompson
Greeter: Lori Molesky
Counters: Marge Culver
TBD
Nursery Asst.: TBD
Acolyte: TBD
A/V: Fred Pedersen
Flowers: Annette Pedersen
Snack: Lois Lorenzo
Setup/Serve: Lois Lorenzo
Cleanup: TBD
Snow Herder: TBD

DECEMBER 17, 2023

Head Usher: Jill Zedan
Ushers: Evelyn Seager
Sue Stenzel
Lay Reader: Jackie Cassara
Greeter: Lori Molesky
Counters: Marge Culver
Janet Renovetz
Nursery Asst.: TBD
Acolyte: TBD
A/V: Jim Duffy
Flowers: Janet Renovetz
Snack: TBD
Setup/Serve: TBD
Cleanup: TBD
Snow Herder: TBD

DECEMBER 10, 2023

Head Usher: TBD
Ushers: Evelyn Seager
Heidi Spangler
Lay Reader: Jim Duffy
Greeter: Jon Thompson
Counters: Marge Culver
Jeff Thompson
Nursery Asst.: TBD
A/V: Annette Pedersen
Flowers: TBD
Snack: Sue Stenzel
Setup/Serve: Sue & Cliff Stenzel
Cleanup: Sue Stenzel
Snow Herder: TBD

DECEMBER 24, 2023

Head Usher: TBD
Ushers: Peg Duffy
Evelyn Seager
Lay Reader: Karen Sandstrom
Greeter: Sherrill Witt
Counters: Marge Culver
TBD
Nursery Asst.: TBD
A/V: David Pastor
Flowers: Janet Renovetz
Snack: Peg Duffy
Setup/Serve: TBD
Cleanup: TBD
Snow Herder: TBD

DECEMBER 31, 2023

Head Usher: Diane Gressley
Ushers: Evelyn Seager
Lay Reader: Bridget Sproul
Greeter: Peg Duffy
Counters: Marge Culver
Nursery Asst.: TBD

A/V: TBD
Flowers: Janet Renovetz
Snack: Jenn Elting
Setup/Serve: TBD
Cleanup: TBD
Snow Herder: TBD

The Pillar

is published monthly by the

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