

St. Paul's Epistle

An Inviting Community of Christ's Disciples

Volume 39, Issue 12

December, 2016

St. Paul's United
Methodist Church

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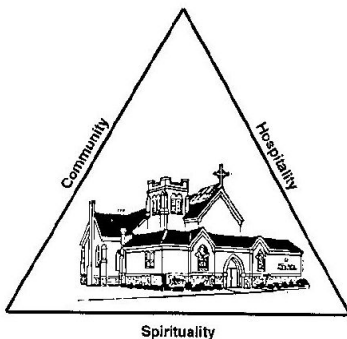
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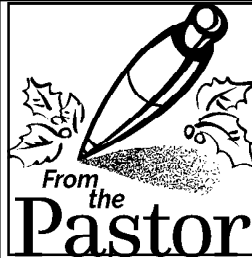
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The month of December is one of the busiest months in the life of the church and I know many of you are very busy all through the holidays. We are going to be spending some time this advent season looking at the many names of Jesus. Messiah, Savior, Emmanuel, Word Made Flesh, and Light of the World just to name a few. What do they mean and how do Christians declare all those things to the world in the midst of our busy lives? I want to invite you during the month to dedicate yourself to finding one person to share Christ with. A kind word, a nice gesture, an invitation for coffee, maybe even an invitation to church. All or any of these things and many more can make the difference in someone's life.

There are many things happening around the church in the coming weeks so have fun fellowshiping and I will see you around the building. The cookie and candy sale have a great variety of really good cookies, but only make your favorite to donate and buy for a great cause. Come sing a carol or two or three and bring some holiday cheer as we go caroling. If you're a senior, come enjoy lunch and fellowship at Senior's day out. Volunteer to change a child's life at E.A.S.Y. where homework is completed and God's love overflows.

In the weeks to come, over 160 gift boxes put together by this church will be delivered around the world to children. For some it may be the first time they have experienced a Christmas gift. Thank you for all the effort to put those boxes together and I want to encourage you to continue to pray for the child who will receive your box that they may feel the love of Christ in that special gift you prepared.

See you in the sanctuary,
Pastor Paul



CHRISTMAS SEASON

Thought for the Month:

The best gift we can
bestow on others
is a good example.



Christian Symbol

Angel

Angel, which means “messenger” in both Hebrew and Greek, is a spirit-being God created to perform tasks for him. In the Bible, angels appear in human form (always as men) to deliver divine messages. Angels appear separately to Joseph and Mary, announcing Jesus’ upcoming birth, and “a multitude of the heavenly host” (Luke 2:13) tells shepherds of the Savior’s arrival. Scripture offers little information about angels, though we know some rebelled against God. Among the holy angels, categories include cherubim and seraphim.



Newsletter
deadline:
the **16th**
of each month

Upcoming Events for St. Paul's

**December
Coins for Communion
to benefit
Lima Salvation Army**

**December 31, 2016
New Years Eve**



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Subscription Rate: NONE

Secretary	Gail Fessler
Newsletter	Jone Lane
Organist	Linda Holman
Pianist	Lois Cook
Choir Director	Judy Chaffins
Custodian	Dave Decker

**St. Paul's Book Club will meet
on Saturday, January 7, 2017,
at 9 AM to discuss the book
"Fruitcake and Other Leftovers"
by Lori Copeland.
All are welcome to join the book club.**



St. Paul's Family and Choir Christmas Caroling

Wednesday, December 14
6:00 PM

Meet at Elmcroft Assisted Living,
2075 N. Eastown Rd.



Seniors Day Out

Tuesday, December 20
at Noon

Bring a wrapped white elephant gift
*(an unwanted item that you previously
received as a Christmas gift)*



December 21st

Winter officially begins,
BRRRRRRR!!



Upcoming Events for St. Paul's

December 4, 2016



Special WORSHIP SCHEDULE



December 11, 2016



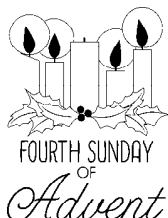
December 25, 2016

Worship Service
at 11:00 AM
(Please note time change)

"The Faith We Sing"



December 18, 2016



Christmas Eve
December 24, 2016

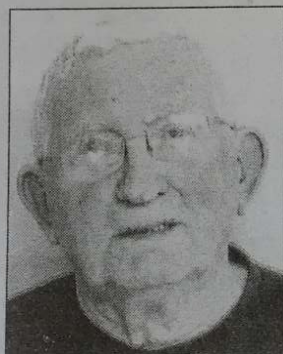
Early Service 6:00 PM
Late Service 10:00 PM

Both Services will include
Candlelight

In The News



Staas



Staas today

Vet shares poem

From Dillon W. Staas Jr., Lima

Dillon W. Staas Jr. served in the occupation of Japan from 1947 to 1950, in Korea from 1950 to 1951 and in the United States from 1951 to 1953.

Ode to the Fallen Soldier

So many of our brothers who went to fight the war
Remain in that forgotten place; we see them here no
more.

Their future has been forfeit; for freedom's price is
high.

And all of their tomorrows they gave for you and I.

Lest we forget their sacrifice; their glories go unsung.
Their deeds repeat on every street; their tale on every
tongue,

For all our future happiness was bought by those who
died,

Our gratitude must be brought forth; not hidden deep
inside.

So in your daily musings and in your nightly prayer
Remember those brave heroes, and tell them that you
care.

And ask our heavenly Father to take them to His
breast,

Give each soldier peace and love, and grant eternal
rest.

The Lima News, November 11, 2016, Salute to Veterans



John Holmes is pictured with his military photo to kick off National Assisted Living Week. Elmcroft of Lima celebrated its 12 veterans with a presentation by the VFW and a patriotic social with their families. John also celebrated his 96th birthday on November 15.

Making the Grades:

Elida High School

Joshua Guess –Honor Roll I, Junior
Isaac McAdams –Honor Roll II, Junior
Megan Emmons– Honor Roll II, Sophomore

Elida Middle School

Makayla Bok - Honor Roll I, 8th grade

Spencerville High School

Jenson Nagy –3.6 to 4.0, Sophomore



Connecting With...

Congratulations to **Makayla Bok** who was on the 7th & 8th Grade Elida Quiz Bowl Team that placed 2nd out of 7 schools on October 31st.



Congratulations



Congratulations to **Torie McAdams** on being accepted into the Occupational Therapy Doctorate Program at the University of Toledo for 2018.



Congratulations to **Isaac McAdams** for being voted the Max Preps/JJ Huddle Week 8 Football Athlete of the Week. Isaac threw for 497 yards and six touchdowns and ran for another score in Elida's thrilling 49-48 win over Kenton. Good job, Isaac!

Over the past year, **Steve Moser** has expanded the Dayton Metro Library's outreach to teens in the Juvenile Court System. Montgomery County has three facilities in the Juvenile Court System, the Downtown Juvenile Detention Center, Center for Adolescent Services, and Nicholas Residential Treatment Center. Steve is doing library outreach to all three facilities. At the Detention Center downtown, he does an informal book club with one of the units. At the Center for Adolescent Services and Nicholas Residential Treatment Center, Steve takes a collection of books to supplement their educational curriculum as well as leisure reading. Also, at those two facilities, he leads programming such as kitchen science experiments, games, crafts, pancake art, and more. All the visits are done every other week.

Recently, on November 1, 2016, Steve received a Special Recognition Award from the Juvenile Court System. Out of all the individuals and organizations that work with any aspect of the Juvenile Court System, Steve was one of three to receive this award. The county's Juvenile Court Judges read all the nominations and selected the winners.

Faith In Action

Worship Attendance:

October 30, 2016	104
November 6, 2016	114
November 13, 2016	104
November 20, 2016	108

Financial Giving

Weekly Need for
Unified Ministry Budget
\$3,466.00



Unified Ministry Giving:		Other:
October 30, 2016	\$1,874.00	\$241.00
November 6, 2016	\$4,228.00	\$352.70
November 13, 2016	\$4,959.00	\$883.00
November 20, 2016	\$2,393.00	\$307.95

Sunday School Attendance

October 30, 2016	20
November 6, 2016	16
November 13, 2016	21
November 20, 2016	13

Greeters

December 4, 2016	OPEN
December 11, 2016	Marty & Kathy White
December 18, 2016	Lois Rabley
December 25, 2016	OPEN

Flower Calendar

December 4, 2016	Dan & Margie Best
December 11, 2016	Ginny Doseck
December 18, 2016	Poinsettias
December 25, 2016	Poinsettias

Hospitality Cart

December 4, 2016	Steve and Tracy Sdao
December 11, 2016	OPEN
December 18, 2016	Mike and Becky Ellinger
December 25, 2016	Choir

Daily Bible Readings

Thursday 12/1

Psalm 18, Isaiah 2:12-22
1 Thessalonians 3:1-13
Luke 20:27-40

Friday 12/2

Psalm 16, 17, 22, Isaiah 3:8-15
1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
Luke 20:41-21:4

Saturday 12/3

Psalm 20, 21, 110, 116, 117
Isaiah 4:2-6
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Luke 21:5-19

Sunday 12/4

Psalm 114, 115, 148, 149, 150
Isaiah 5:1-7
2 Peter 3:11-18, Luke 7:28-35

Monday 12/5

Psalm 9, 15, 25
Isaiah 5:8-12, 18-23
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Luke 21:20-28

Tuesday 12/6

Psalm 26, 28, 36, 39
Isaiah 5:13-17, 24-25
1 Thessalonians 5:12-28
Luke 21:29-38

Wednesday 12/7

Psalm 38, 119:25-48, Isaiah 6:1-13
2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
John 7:53-8:11

Thursday 12/8

Psalm 37, Isaiah 7:1-9
2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Luke 22:1-13

Friday 12/9

Psalm 31, 35, Isaiah 7:10-25
2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5
Luke 22:14-30

Saturday 12/10

Psalm 30, 32, 42, 43
Isaiah 8:1-15
2 Thessalonians 3:6-18
Luke 22:31-38

Sunday 12/11

Psalm 63, 98, 103, Isaiah 13:6-13
Hebrews 12:18-29, John 3:22-30

Monday 12/12

Psalm 41, 44, 52, Isaiah 8:16-9:1
2 Peter 1:1-11, Luke 22:39-53

Tuesday 12/13

Psalm 45, 47, 48, Isaiah 9:1-7
2 Peter 1:12-21, Luke 22:54-69

Wednesday 12/14

Psalm 49, 53, 119:49-72
Isaiah 9:8-17
2 Peter 2:1-10a, Mark 1:1-8

Thursday 12/15

Psalm 33, Isaiah 9:18-10:4
2 Peter 2:10b-16, Matthew 3:1-12

Friday 12/16

Psalm 40, 51, 54, Isaiah 10:5-19
2 Peter 17-22, Matthew 11:2-15

Saturday 12/17

Psalm 55, 138, 139
Isaiah 10:20-27
Jude 17-25, Luke 3:19

Sunday 12/18

Psalm 8, 24, 29, 84, Isaiah 42:1-12
Ephesians 6:10-20, John 3:16-21

Monday 12/19

Psalm 61, 62, 112, 115
Isaiah 11:1-9
Revelation 20:1-10, John 5:30-47

Tuesday 12/20

Psalm 66, 67, 116, 117
Isaiah 11:10-16
Revelation 20:11-21:8
Luke 1:5-25

Wednesday 12/21

Psalm 72, 111, 113
Isaiah 28:9-22
Revelation 21:9-21, Luke 1:26-38

Thursday 12/22

Psalm 80, 146, 147
Isaiah 29:13-24
Revelation 21:22-22:5
Luke 1:39-56

Friday 12/23

Psalm 93, 96, 148, 150
Isaiah 33:17-22
Revelation 22:6-11, 18-20
Luke 1:57-66

Saturday 12/24

(Christmas Eve)
Psalm 45, 46, Isaiah 35:1-10
Revelation 22:12-21
Luke 1:67-80

Sunday 12/25

(Merry Christmas)
Psalm 2, 85, 110, 132
Zechariah 2:10-13
1 John 4:7-16, John 3:31-26

Monday 12/26

Psalm 89:1-29, Isaiah 59:15b-21
Philemon 2:5-11

Tuesday 12/27

Psalm 34, 93, 96
Isaiah 62:6-7, 10-12
Hebrews 2:10-18
Matthew 1:18-25

Wednesday 12/28

Psalm 18, Isaiah 12:1-6
Revelation 1:1-8
John 7:37-52

Thursday 12/29

Psalm 20, 21, 23, 27
Isaiah 25:1-9
Revelation 1:9-20
John 7:53-8:11

Friday 12/30

Psalm 46, 48, Isaiah 26:1-9
2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2
John 8:12-19

Saturday 12/31

Psalm 103, 148
Genesis 17:1-12a, 15-16
Colossians 2:6-12
John 16:23b-30

**The function of prayer is not
to influence God, but rather
to change the nature of the
one who prays.**

Soren Kierkegaard



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December Missions

The 2016 St. Paul's Special Christmas offering will be designated for the following missions:

- ½ to Elida Area Community Center/Elida After School Program (EASY)
- ¼ to Hurricane Matthew relief in the U. S.
- ¼ to Hurricane Matthew relief outside the U. S. (Haiti, etc.)



Hat and Mitten Christmas Tree.

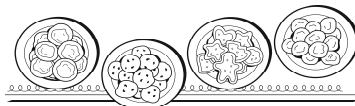
- St. Paul's special Christmas tree for hats, mittens and scarves will help to keep those less fortunate stay warm this winter. The items will be delivered to Elida Elementary, Lima Rescue Mission and Samaritan House. Consider buying insulated men's and women's sized gloves for the tree to compliment the many knitted scarves and hats that are donated.



Donate Gloves & Scarves

Annual Christmas Cookie and Goodie Walk

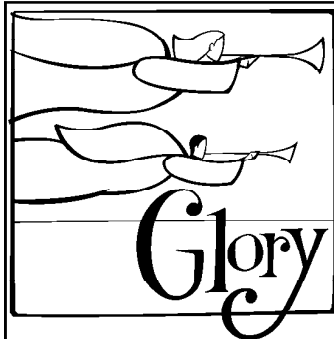
All those yummy sweets you think of at Christmastime will be available for you to sample and purchase. Buy some items for yourself, your holiday party, a neighbor, or as a gift exchange item. (Homemade goodies make the best gifts!) All the proceeds from this event will be given to the "Crafty Creatures" small group for quilt supplies. Cookie and candy donations are needed to make this event successful. Bring your items to the church on Saturday morning, December 10, between 9-12, or early Sunday morning. If you have any tins that could be recycled from last year, place them in the Fellowship Hall kitchen. So, mark your calendar and come downstairs after worship to experience the Christmas spirit at St. Paul's and help continue this mission outreach of our church.



Cookie Walk



Meeting Jesus in Scripture



When it comes to Jesus, the amazing thing is how little we really know about the facts of his life. But as fascinating as it would be to know the names of Jesus' childhood playmates or the address of his home in

Nazareth, what is truly important about Jesus lies elsewhere.

One reason why historians are shy on solid biographical data about Jesus is that outside of the Bible we have almost no historical record of Jesus - only a stray sentence here and there. What we know of Jesus essentially comes from the New Testament, and the authors of those documents start with their belief in the resurrection. The accounts of Jesus' birth and ministry are refracted through the prism of the church's faith in him as the risen Lord, and they are told in ways that show that Jesus was Lord from the very beginning.

Take, for example, the account of Jesus' birth. According to Luke, Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem - a long way from Nazareth where his human parents, Joseph and Mary, lived. How did this happen? Luke reports that Joseph and the pregnant Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem because Emperor Augustus had ordered every person in the whole empire to be registered in a census, and everybody had to sign up in their own hometowns. So, Joseph, a descendant of King David, was obliged to register in Bethlehem, the ancestral city of David, and Jesus happened to be born while he and Mary were on that trip.

Contemporary historians, however, have questioned some of the details of Luke's story. As biblical scholar Raymond Brown points out, while historians do know about various Roman censuses and tax registrations, there is no evidence at all of any such worldwide census under Augustus and no example of a Roman census where people had to travel to their ancestral towns to register (*The Birth of the Messiah*, p. 413). So why does Luke include these details in his story?

We do not really know the answer, but the solution is almost surely to be found in Luke's gifts as a faithful theologian, rather than in his tools as a scientific historian. Theologically, Luke believed that a messiah would come who would sit on the throne of King David. The prophet Micah had predicted that it would be from Bethlehem that this Messiah would come (Micah 5:2). Luke also has a universal theology - a conviction that Jesus is not just a local Messiah but the Savior of all humanity. Looking back at Jesus' birth through the eyes of his faith, then, no wonder Luke saw something prophetic (like Bethlehem, the city of David) and something universal (like a worldwide census under Augustus) as parts of the event. Luke's purpose is to tell the theological truth and to show how the hand of God, so clearly present in establishing Jesus as the fulfillment of scriptural prophecy and as the Savior of all, was at work all along - even in Jesus' birth.

So how can we know Jesus Christ - really know him? The church would say the more you study the biblical accounts of Jesus with a teachable spirit the more you will encounter the living Christ every day. And the more you encounter the living Christ, the more you will recognize and trust his voice and see his face in the pages of scripture. Faith and history, belief and scripture, work together to bring us into the presence of Christ.

Dr Thomas G. Long is Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta.

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Remember When...



December, 1997
Children's Musical



December, 2001
Kononia New Year's
Eve Party



December, 2008
Children's Moments
With Steve Moser



Our Church History (1983-1984)

The women's work continued in the church with new circles being formed. One was an exercise circle, and another was the Piecemakers Circle. The Piecemakers was a quilting group and their project for financing renovation was the name quilt. For \$5 a name, the name would be embroidered on a diamond and eventually the quilt was finished, approximately 76"x84", and hung above the south stairs in the education annex. More than \$1000 was raised.

In 1983, the Piecemakers Circle, first named So Sew, did their first quilt show in the education wing of the church. They had quilt shows for 9 more years.

The Bell Choir, besides playing for worship services, had a circuit of Christmas concerts at nursing homes. It was under the direction of Jane Brown.

The Joy Singers caroled to the shut-ins living in the Elida area. The Joy Singers were directed by Linda Holman, later by Judy Chaffins.

Near the end of the year, the furnace developed a crack so serious that replacement was necessary. The Fred Decker family, custodians, were given a cash gift because of the extra work.

During Lent, 1984, each Elida area church hosted and another church presented the service.

In 1984 the Joy Singers purchased new robes, financed with a Rock-A-Thon and pledges. The church held an All Church Birthday Party, sponsored by Mary Steiner.

St. Paul's celebrated the Bicentennial of Methodism during the year of 1984 on five special occasions. On March 15, the bicentennial committee met to plan the events that would portray our heritage through the last 200 years.

On May 20, 1984, Aldersgate Sunday, a musical jubilee was held with all church choirs taking a part. An old-fashioned hymn sing would not let us forget our great hymns – a great number Wesleyan – that have enriched our church and faith.

This year was also the centennial year for United Methodist Women. A pageant portraying "The Continuing Journey of Women in Mission" was presented by its members on July 8, 1984.

Name Quilt made by Piecemakers Circle.
It was one of many projects used to help
finance the church renovation.



Pageant: "The Continuing Journey of Women
in Mission" presented by U. M. Women
July 7, 1984

The People of St. Paul's

Thank You

*To Our Church Family,
Thank you for your thoughts,
prayers and concerns; for
food and visits; for the
flowers and lap robe.
Many, many thanks.*

*Gary has used the lap robe
everyday since Ginny
brought it. Thank you
Pastor Paul for your visits.*

Janet and Gary Grigg

*Friends,
Thank you for the beautiful
chimes that were sent in
memory of Jo. Thank you
also to the ladies of the
church for the delicious
meal served after the
funeral. We appreciate all
the love, prayers, and
support you have shown to
Jo and to us over the years.
And we thank Pastor Paul
for the visits and support
and for participating in Jo's
celebration of life.*

*God bless you all.
Gary and Deb Hurd,
Allan and family*

*It is with a grateful heart
that I would like to thank my
St. Paul's family for all the
prayers, cards, gifts of food,
and acts of love shown
during my recent surgery
and as I continue to recover.
They helped to make a
difficult time much easier.*

*May God bless you all!
Linda Holman*



In Sympathy

Our Condolences to the family of Betty Estes, who passed away Wednesday November 9. She is the mother of Nancy and Bruce Kizer and grandmother of Slone and Brad Whetstone.

Remember in Prayer

Recovering from Surgery or in the Hospital

Dee Johnson

Homebound Members

Hazel Dunn

Ruth Hardy

John Holmes

Mary LaRue

Those in Need of Healing, Support, Strength & Encouragement

Glenna Kohli

Ray and Phyllis Trigg

In the Military & Missions

Oliver Fessler

Dani Milke

Nathan Stewart

*Thank you to all who helped with
the Trick-or-Treat Mission. The
volunteers handed out 230 cups of
hot chocolate, 12 cups of coffee
and pencils to the trick-or-treaters
and parents.*



Congratulations to Ginny Doseck on the birth of her granddaughter, Katherine Claire McDonough, born November 17 to Valerie and Ryan McDonough. She weighed 7lbs. 1 oz. and was 19 inches long. She will be called Kate.

Meetings

December 5, 2016
PPR...7:00 PM

December 6, 2016
Trustees...7:00 PM

December 7, 2016
Worship mtg...6:00 PM

December 12, 2016
Finance ...7:00 PM

No Ad Council mtg.

TBA
Missions

Sundays
Prayer...8:45 AM
Sunday Sch...9:00 AM
Fellowship...9:30 AM
Worship...10:00 AM

Wednesdays
Chancel Choir.7:00 PM

December 2016

Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

				1 Lena Whetstone A.J. White	2 Michael Craft Lavonne Segovia	3 Mary LaRue 97 yrs.
4	5 Shirley Adams David Segovia	6 Jerry Crates Sue Theodore	7 	8	9	10
11 John Segovia Phyllis Trigg	12	13	14	15 Taryn Piper	16	17 Audrey Fox
18 Pam Gaghen Mary Holmes	19	20 Ruth Burgoon Mary Steiner	21 	22 Kara Woeller	23	24 Linda Craft
25 Denny Grapner 	26	27 Deb Hurd Megan Wyant	28	29 Tiffany Emmons Tammy Segovia	30 Cameron Emmons Tristan Gaghen	31 Jack White

Anniversaries

Roger & Jackie
Henderson
December 4; 45 yrs.

Shara & Dennis Bowsher
December 19

Larry & Gloria Brunk
December 21; 48yrs.

John & Val Kuenzli
December 27

Denny & Janna
Thompson
December 29

Ron & Karen Bible
December 30

Mike & Kim Crates
December 31



Featured Recipes from St. Paul's Cooks

Crunchy Romaine Toss

Served at Seniors Day Out

By Ginny Doseck

Ingredients		Instructions
4 cups	Romaine lettuce (I use more than 1 cup)	<u>Crunchy Mix:</u> Heat 2 Tbl. Vegetable oil. Add 1 pkg Ramen noodles, broken up, 2 cups chopped walnuts, 1 tsp. pepper and 3 tsp. sugar. Toast 10 min., stirring constantly. <u>Sweet and Sour Dressing:</u> 1 cup vegetable oil, 1 cup sugar, 1/2 cup white vinegar, 3 tsp. soy sauce. Mix all ingredients. Toss with crunchy mix and Parmesan cheese.
1	Red pepper sliced thin	
1/4 cup	Red onion strips	
1 cup	Broccoli florets	
8 Tbl.	Crunchy mix (I use more)	
4 Tbl.	Parmesan cheese, shredded (I use more)	

Peanut Butter Cup Brownies

Served at Seniors Day Out

By Ginny Doseck

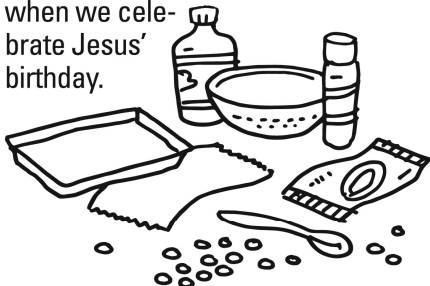
Ingredients		Instructions
1 box	Brownie mix (not family size)	Bake brownie according to pkg. directions in 9x9 pan lined with foil. During last 5 min. of baking, remove from oven and sprinkle chopped peanut butter cups and chopped peanuts on top. Return to oven for remaining 5 min. to melt chocolate.
1/2 cup	Chopped salted or honey roasted peanuts	
12	peanut butter cups, chopped	As soon as you pull them out of oven, spread the top to smooth. Let brownies cool.
2 cups	Semi-sweet choc. chips	
1 Tbl.	Butter	In microwave safe bowl, combine choc. chips, peanut butter and butter. Heat in microwave for 1 minute or until melted. Stir in cereal, vanilla and salt until evenly combined.
1 1/4 cups	Creamy peanut butter	
1 3/4 cups	Crispy rice cereal	Pour over brownies and smooth. Chill until set, about 2 hours. Cut into squares.
1 tsp.	Vanilla	
1/2—1 tsp.	Kosher salt	



KIDZ KORNER

birthday bark

Make this yummy treat to give to family and friends at Christmas, when we celebrate Jesus' birthday.



What you need:

- Nonstick cooking spray
- 3 cups chocolate chips
- Microwave-safe bowl
- Spoon or spatula
- 2 Tbsp. shortening
- Baking tray lined with wax paper
- Red and green M&M's (or sprinkles)

What you do:

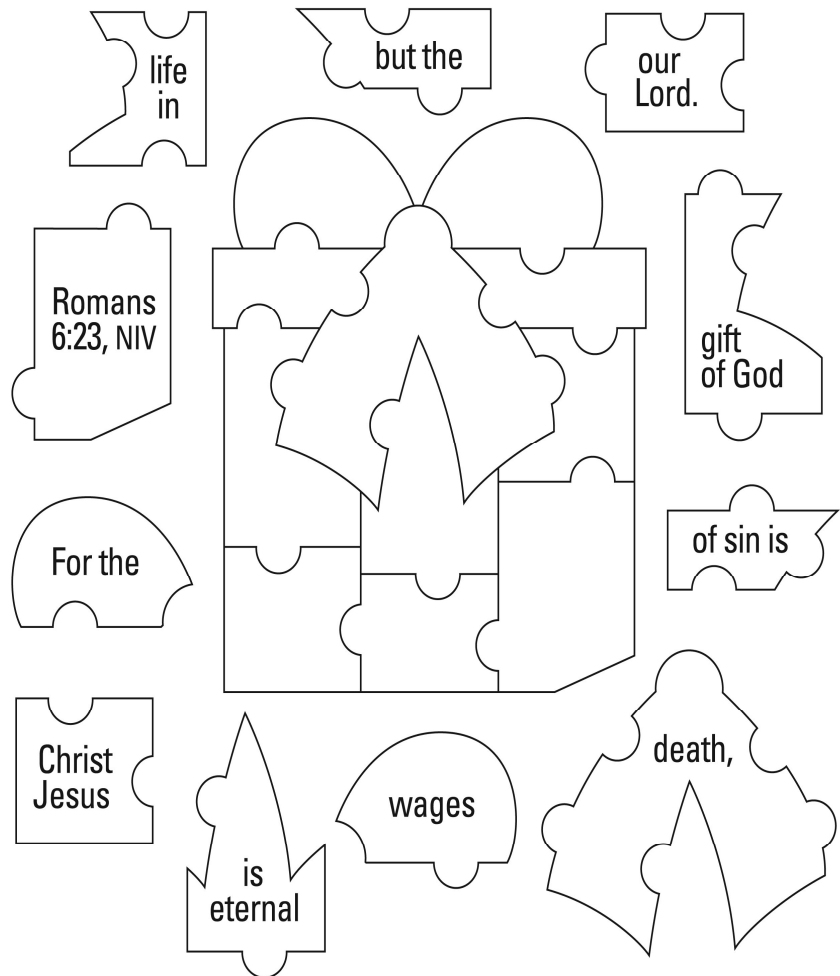
1. Lightly spray bowl and wax paper.
2. Microwave chocolate chips in bowl for one-minute intervals until chocolate is melted. (Stir after each minute.)
3. Stir in shortening. Heat in 10-second intervals, stirring until smooth.
4. Pour chocolate onto tray and firmly press in M&M's or sprinkles.
5. Refrigerate until firm. Remove bark and break into pieces.



The greatest gift

Gift-giving is a fun Christmas tradition. What very special gift has God given to you?

Directions: Write the words from each puzzle piece on the matching blank piece of the gift-shaped puzzle.



Answer: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23, NIV

St. Paul's United Methodist Church

105 E. Main St.
Elida, OH 45807

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www.elidastpaulschurch.org

Our Facebook page
Elida St. Paul's Church

Twitter Account
@ESPCHURCH

December
2016

Living Our Faith

Present Possibilities, Frontiers of Faith

Brazilian theologian Rubem Alves called hope “the suspicion ... that the frontiers of the possible are not determined by the limits of the present.” Who among us doesn’t sometimes imagine our future based solely on present-day obstacles? Even biblical heroes did so.

Abraham and Sarah laughed at God’s promise of a child, seeing only their present circumstance of old age. Only in hindsight could Joseph see how God turned slavery in Egypt into great good.

At first another Joseph, learning his fiancée was pregnant, believed his world was limited to two possibilities: shame Mary publicly or divorce her quietly. But his heart was open to God’s message: “What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [Her] son ... will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20-21, NIV). How exceedingly far this future must have seemed from the limits of Joseph’s present.

Christmas is a reminder that God calls us all into frontiers of the future we never could have dreamed!

Overcoming Despair

Christmas can be a difficult time for people who are hurting or grieving. In the 1860s, poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow had reason to despair: America was at war with itself, his son was severely wounded in battle and his wife died in a fire. The first Christmas after his wife’s death, Longfellow wrote, “How inexpressibly sad are all holidays.”

Three years later, on Christmas Day 1864, Longfellow penned a poem that later became the song “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.” The lyrics move from despair to hope — and, thanks to Jesus, so can we.

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!