

## First Press Newsletter



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*We are a welcoming community formed in Christ, committed to sharing his love with others – with feet that carry us out into the world, with hands that serve, and with hearts in fellowship and faith.*

Dear Friends,

It was a number of years ago, a few days before Christmas, and my mom wasn't feeling well. So she went to see her cardiologist, who admitted her to the hospital for an electrical cardio-version procedure. As I talked with her after the procedure, my mom told me she had been under a lot of stress, and she believed the stress is what caused her heart to go out of rhythm. As we talked about that, she shared that there were two things weighing heavily upon her. One was that her brother was dying of lung cancer. The other was Christmas.

I totally understand the stress that losing a family member can bring. The death of a loved one is one of those stressors that can be difficult for anyone to handle. But Christmas? I asked my mom why Christmas was causing her stress.

She said, "Oh, you know. There's so much to do at Christmas time. Getting cards ready. Shopping. Wrapping. Cooking. Baking. Decorating. Making sure the house is clean. All those things." This from the woman who taught me the real meaning of Christmas. So I said to her, "Mom, you don't have to do any of those things. Just relax." Fortunately, the rest of the family felt as I did. And we held our family Christmas gathering at my brother's home that year.

It's easy to get caught up in the customs and traditions we've come to enjoy at Christmas and lose sight of what it's really all about. Or if we don't completely lose sight of the true meaning of Christmas, maybe it gets a little blurry.

And yet I'm guessing that if you're reading this article, you get it. At Christmas, we celebrate the incarnation of God. That moment in time when God took on human form and came to dwell in our midst. Or as John's gospel so beautifully renders it: *And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son full of grace and truth.* (1:14)

It's easy to get caught up in the beauty of Christmas. The little baby Jesus in his mother's arms, the angelic announcement, wise men following a star to shower the baby with gifts. With images provided by countless Christmas pageants, we imagine a baby who doesn't cry, a feeding trough as soft as a crib, a warm stable which doesn't smell, and a mother and father who are happy to be living in a barn. That is the romanticized version.

The real version of Christmas includes anxiety about an unexpected pregnancy, a long journey during the ninth month, no reservations and no place to stay in Bethlehem, sharing the birthing room with barnyard animals, no Christmas carols in the background, the flight to Egypt to avoid certain death, and the slaughter of the innocents at the edict of the mad King Herod, that part of the Christmas story you'll never see on a greeting card.

This is not a story for the fainthearted. Indeed, it was a cold, cruel world into which Jesus was born. And that was just the beginning. As the scriptures testify, sooner or later Jesus would experience every aspect of human existence, including testing and suffering and death. And he would do so for our benefit. He would do so for our salvation.

The truth is that Jesus entered into every detail of human life. He got hungry and thirsty. He got tired. He was disappointed at times. Sometimes angry. Sometimes sad. Sometimes impatient. He laughed. He cried. He was tempted. He bled when he was cut. He suffered. He died.

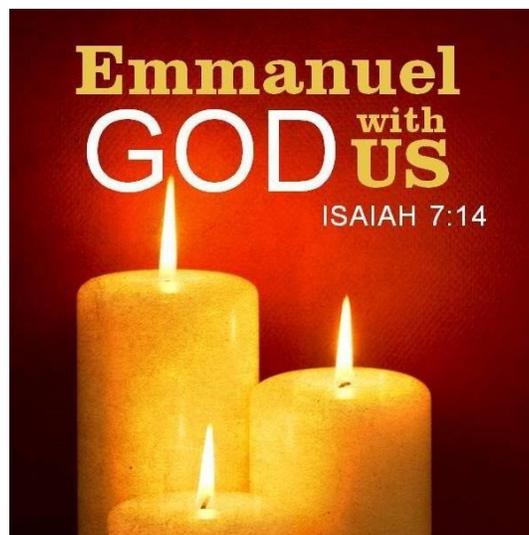
I take heart in the fact that Jesus Christ was completely human. It means that when my mom was afraid of losing her brother, and she prayed, she prayed to Christ who wept at the tomb of Lazarus. And he knew what my mom was feeling. It means that when I am tempted to make a wrong choice, and I pray, I pray to Christ who, himself, was tempted in the desert. And he knows how hard it is to make the right choice. It means that when one of the saints of the church is struggling with cancer, and the pain is unbearable, and she prays, she prays to Christ, who experienced the pain of the cross. It means that when I am facing my own death, and I am afraid, I can pray to Christ who has conquered death. And he will grant me courage and hope and peace.

The story is told of a missionary who found it necessary to be gone from his family for an extended time. Aware that his leaving would not be understood by his youngest daughter, he placed in his coat pocket a rare treat in their part of the world, a bright red apple, which he planned to give her as he boarded the train. Finally the moment came. He embraced his wife and each of the older children. And then it was his little girl's turn. Picking her up in his arms, he pressed the apple into her chubby hand, hoping that this special gift would soften the impact of his leaving. But instead, as he looked back from the slowly departing train, he saw the apple slip from her hand and roll across the platform. Tears streaming down her face, she ran alongside the train sobbing, "Daddy, I don't want what you give! I want you!"

That is the reality of the incarnation. God's love is such that God does not simply give us things. God gives us Emmanuel, which means God with us. As we make our way through a world that can be brutal and unforgiving, as we go through life with all its challenges, as we constantly face choices between right and wrong, as we face death with all its uncertainties, the reality is we are not alone. God in Christ is with us in every detail of human life, helping us to face life's challenges. That is the bottom line of Christmas. Thanks be to God.

Mindful of its true meaning, may you have a stress-free, meaningful and joyful Christmas! Mindful that God in Christ is always with you, may you face each day of your life with confidence and hope!

Bruce



## Mission



The Mission Committee would like to thank everyone who donated to the Fall Food Drive to benefit Social Services Association of Ridgewood and vicinity!



On Sunday, November 7th, Joan Davies delivered food from volunteers for dinner to the men at St. Paul's Homeless Shelter. Our volunteers making food were Sue Dickinson with Texas Turkey Chili, Marcia Unger with meatballs, Dana Feeney with BBQ chicken breasts, Rebecca Burger with fruit and bread, cake from the church, and Joan coming through at the last minute with salad and some bags of chips for an extra treat. As always, the volunteers are greatly appreciated for sharing their time, talent, and generosity!

If you are interested in providing part of a meal in the future, whether or not you are a good cook (purchased items work just as well!), we'd love to hear from you! The December meal is all taken care of, but we always try to schedule a couple of months ahead. We are currently scheduling for January and February, and meals always take place on the first Sunday of each month. Feel free to contact us with any questions you may have, as well.

Suzy McDevitt: text at 201-315-2063 or email at [suzyjmc2@yahoo.com](mailto:suzyjmc2@yahoo.com) or Sam McDevitt: text at 201-820-8056 or email at [sammcdev99@gmail.com](mailto:sammcdev99@gmail.com)

Did you know one in 49 children in the U.S. has a parent in prison?

The Mission Committee is once again asking you to help make Christmas a little brighter for a child whose parent is incarcerated.

The Angel Tree Prison Fellowship Program is virtual. To select a child to sponsor please copy and paste the link below in browser and enter code:

**CCZCE**

<https://vat.angeltreetool.org/ffbe5d7c-ed36-426a-864d-6bf4d20c75cf>

Your gift reminds a child they are valued and loved!

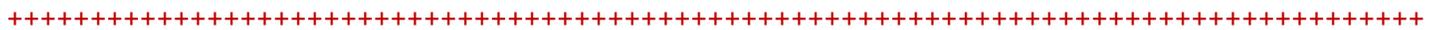




Caring cooks continued to happily whip up 9 tasty meals for our membership to help ease life's ongoing mishaps, losses, and overwhelming circumstances.

- The Shaws were thankful for a chicken and sweet potato dish from Jan cross
- Pastor Bruce was a gracious receiver of meals from Sue Dickinson (chicken soup), Donna Flagg (salad, grilled chicken and salmon), Joanne Bonwick (chicken and biscuits and apple and orange salad), Fay Reid (chicken francese and Spanish rice)
- Linda Sweetman Waters was grateful for meals from Sandy Santangelo (Italian wedding soup), Suzie McDevitt (pork tenderloin), Greta Croucher (chicken and all the fixins!)
- George and Nada Wood were very appreciative for a meal from Joanne Bonwick (chicken and biscuits)

Thank you to all our Caring Cooks for looking after our congregation through this special ministry! If you would like to be on the Caring Cooks list grab your apron and call Joanne Bonwick at 201-280-6621



When shopping now or any time of year, remember you can help support our church!



1. Visit **smile.amazon.com**.
2. **Sign in** with your **Amazon.com** credentials.
3. Choose a charitable organization to receive donations, or search for the charity of your choice. **First Presbyterian Church**  
Location: Ridgewood, NJ

When you shop at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com), you'll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price.



### Christmas Around the World Bake Sale

The Annual Christmas Bake Sale to support Camp Lots of Fun will be held in the cloister on Sunday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, following the Christmas pageant. We are looking for volunteers to bake goods from their heritage- Middle Eastern, European, African, Asian, Mexican, etc., please donate a baked good!

Of course good old fashioned American pies are welcome too!  
Please contact [Jessicatrader@gmail.com](mailto:Jessicatrader@gmail.com) if you can help in anyway!

merci, gracias, abrigado, dahnke, grazie, dank u, xiexei, do jeh, Shukran, salamat



On behalf of the entire First Pres. Nursery School, we wish each of you a blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year!



## Sunday School News and Events



The Christian Ed committee prepared 22 treat boxes and mailed them to our college students! We received many “thank you’s” from our happy recipients!



Sunday, December 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday school students will be practicing for our Christmas pageant and decorating gingerbread in the auditorium!



During the month of December we are collecting NEW hats, gloves, mittens and scarves to support Center for Food Action in Mahwah. Our Mitten tree is located in the Sanctuary you can place your items on the tree. There will be a box in the Cloister Hall marked Mitten tree donations as well. Please help someone stay warm this winter season! Sponsored by the CE committee.



**CHRISTMAS MART** Sunday, December 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> all church school students will have an opportunity to shop for their families and friends at our Christmas Mart located in the Sacristy!



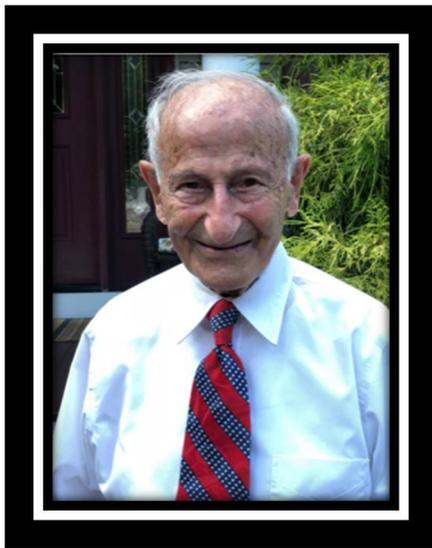
Please join us for our Annual Christmas Pageant entitled “CHRISTMAS AROUND THE WORLD”

Sunday, December 19th during our 10:00 AM worship service! We will have live manger animals after the service on our front lawn!



The Sunday school is sponsoring a toy collection November 14th through December 7<sup>th</sup>. Please bring an unwrapped NEW toy or game for a girl or boy and place it in the box in the cloister hall! Thank You!

Together We Remember-  
All Saints Sunday, November 7<sup>th</sup>



### Jamil Hanna Eliya

Went to be with the Lord on November 7<sup>th</sup> after 104 years on Earth!

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His faithful servants.

Psalm 116:15

Please keep the Eliya family in your prayers.

Second  
Saturday  
Service in  
November  
Was held in the  
Chapel~

Counting your  
Blessings!



On November 21st our confirmands participated in a youth worship service on Christ the King Sunday. They wrote the prayers of the people, served as liturgists, and shared their faith for the sermon.



Thank you to our wonderful confirmands-

Olivia Davis, Luke Eliya, Hudson Feeney, Luke Feltmann, Kyle Schnure, CJ & Dante Torielli!



And thank you to our talented Bell Choir!



debt  
heaven Amen  
power day evil  
temptation forever  
kingdom debtors comethy thine glory  
lead Father deliver daily  
Thy Give namedone  
bread earth art  
forgive  
Hallowed





Charles Dickens's description of Ebenezer Scrooge as "a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner" does not warm the cockles of anyone's Christmas heart. Yet the Christian message is to love and forgive everyone. A tough job description with which to entice willing workers.

As an Endowment Committee we balance our available funds to support our church and its needs with the greater needs of the poorest of the poor. Our abundance is someone else's desperate need. Do we give when we have satisfied our own desires or do we give sacrificially, denying some of our own unnecessary wants?

Do we choose to be like the Ebenezer Scrooge at the beginning of "A Christmas Carol" or to be the redeemed Ebenezer by the end of the story who comes face to face with the "squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner"?

On the Endowment Committee we **Like** to be able to keep up with repairs on our church and its property but we **Love** to know we have helped others who know little of abundance.

Please consider a special Christmas gift to the Endowment Fund. All gifts are deeply appreciated so that we may share our abundance and lift all to the Glory of God.

Checks can be made out to First Presbyterian Church with a Memo to "Endowment Christmas"

God Bless Us Every one!





Sophia Burger  
Alex Cascardo  
Linda Cascardo  
Jim Goudsward  
JoAnne Massey  
Fay Reid  
Victoria Schnure  
Joel Schwartz  
Glenn Santangelo

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**Church Staff~**

Pastor	Rev. Bruce Ballantine
Director of Children & Families	MaryEllen Castaldo
Director of Music	Dr. Ed Schmiedecke
Organist	Linda Sweetman Waters
Director Cherub Choir and Bells	Carol Schmiedecke
Administrative Manager	Dana Feeney
Youth Leader	Jessica Strader
Tom Carozza	Sexton
Custodian	George Wood
Director Nursery School	Julia Bolt
Newsletter Editor	Joan Davies (Volunteer)

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**Church Phone** (201) 652-2504 **Church email-** [office@firstpresridgewood.org](mailto:office@firstpresridgewood.org)

**Pastor Bruce:** (215) 337-5623 **please contact him directly for Pastoral Care**  
[www.firstpresridgewood.org](http://www.firstpresridgewood.org)

Please note: The church office will be closed Fridays in December. Office hours will be 9 AM -12 PM, Mon-Thurs. If you need to come to the office at an alternative time, please contact Dana Feeney by email or call the church phone.



*"Oh come let us adore Him" Christmas Eve Worship Service at 7:30 PM!*