While Luke and Matthew each endeavored to tell the early church about the birth of Jesus, what Christians would come to call the Christmas story, John chose to begin his Gospel, the final one to be written, with a Prologue. This Prologue is more poetry than prose, and it is written to make the theological claim that God became human. This, of course, is a claim that both Luke and Matthew offer in more narrative form through the stories they offer of Jesus’ birth. John begins his Prologue with the same three words that start the Hebrew Bible, found in the Book of Genesis: “In the beginning...” What John wants to say is that the same God who created the heavens and the earth took on human flesh and was born among us as the living Word of God.

The heart of this claim is found in John 1:14: “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth...” For John, this is what the early church would come to call the Incarnation. Latin speaking theologians called it the Assumptio Carnis, making the faith claim that God took on, or assumed, human flesh. John tells us that Jesus, “full of grace and truth”, entered this place of joy and sorrow, this veil of laughter and tears.

Jesus, “the Word made flesh”, showed us what it means to be

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The Mission of First Presbyterian Church, Nashville
To know Christ, to make Him known and to exhibit His love through worship, education and service.

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truly human. God, born of Mary, as helpless as every infant ultimately becomes completely vulnerable and totally dependent upon the human family for life and health. As we celebrate another Christmas, we remember the theological heart of this wonderful holiday, or Holy Day, is the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. We would do well to ponder what Jesus brought fully into our world: grace and truth.

Grace speaks of the mercy, the sheer kindness of God toward us. God is gracious. This claim was central to Israel’s understanding of the Lord. “The Lord is merciful and gracious...” is a statement you can find in the Old Testament over and over again. When Jesus walked the earth, he spoke often of this grace and mercy, this forgiving love of the Father. Even more importantly, Jesus embodied this grace. Believing that life is a gift, in itself an act of God’s grace and favor, Jesus lived gracefully and graciously among us. He healed the sick; he fed the poor; he restored sight to the blind; and he even ate with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus announced over and over again to people who were caught in guilt and shame, “Your sins are forgiven.” As we celebrate Christmas, the most joyful of holidays, I wonder if we might resolve in our own lives to become more gracious, more like Jesus. Cyprian, an early Church Father, called the Incarnation “the wonderful exchange.” “He became what we are, in order that we might become what He is.” Jesus was full of grace.

Our Lord was also “full of truth.” My friend, Tom Gillespie, used to say, “Jesus offered Truth, in the singular and with a capital T.” He combined both grace and truth in His person, living a life that was full of virtue, goodness and wisdom. Jesus’ legacy of teaching preserved in the Gospels gives us access to this truth. He also embodied truth, just as he embodied grace. In John’s Gospel, he would say, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” Jesus came to show us what truth looks like, and to live in the light of it. There is no deception or pretense in Jesus, but only the bold truth of God’s great love for the world. It was Jesus’ commitment to God’s truth that cost Him his life, but also the same commitment that gave us ours.

This is what Christmas gives, dear friends. Grace and truth. Jesus, the Word made flesh. Merry Christmastide!

Peace and Love,

Sympathy

Our church family extends prayers and sympathy to the following during their time of loss.

Friends & family of Mary Katherine Graham who died on December 3.
Thom Adkins on the death of his wife, Jennifer Kuster Adkins who died on December 4. Sympathy to Whitney, Chris & Zach Adkins.
Eleanor Willis on the death of her brother, Harry Howse Lawson who died on December 7.
Tom Pirtle on the death of his wife, Betty Brown Darwin Pirtle who died on December 8. Sympathy to John (Josephine) Darwin, Ed Pirtle, Liza & John Darwin, IV.

Congratulations

The First Presbyterian Church family congratulates the following people during their new birth.

Calen & Jennifer Jones welcome a daughter, Catherine Lauren Jones, who was born on October 25.

Praying the Psalms of Lament as We Seek Healing

You are invited to participate in a grief support group offered by Dr. Sandra Randleman that combines prayer with a study of the psalms of lament. The group will meet on Wednesday evenings for five weeks beginning January 11, from 6:00-7:15 P.M., in the Memorial Library (Room MW-224). If you have family members, friends or neighbors who you think would benefit from this group, please invite them to join us. Questions? Contact Sandra at 298-9502 or srandelman@fpcnashville.org.
2017 Winter Inquirer’s Class

- Would you like to know about the Presbyterian faith?
- Would you like to know more about First Presbyterian Church, Nashville?
- Are you considering church membership?
- Would you like to learn about how to become involved in the life of First Presbyterian Church, Nashville?

An Inquirer’s Class will be held on January 8, 15, 22, 29 and February 5, during the Sunday School hour (9:45-10:45 A.M.) in the Session Room (MW-203 on the 2nd floor of the Ministry Wing). If you are interested in uniting with First Presbyterian Church as members or just wish to learn more about the history and mission of our church and the Presbyterian Church, you are invited to attend. Registration is not necessary. For more information, please call the church office at 615-383-1815 or email Rev. Sandra Randleman at srandleman@fpcnashville.org.

Mark Your Calendar for VBS 2017

We invite children to discover their strength in God on June 26–29, 2017 at Vacation Bible School, an experience that introduces children to some of our favorite Bible heroes. Mark your calendar and register today on the Vacation Bible School page of our website. Children age 4 by March 1, 2017 through 3rd grade (Fall 2017) are eligible to participate. Join us and discover the qualities that make us truly heroic in God.

Eavesdropping on Galatia — A New Short-Term Bible Study

The letter to the Galatians is essentially one side of an argument between Paul and some other teachers. To read it is like overhearing Paul on the phone, angrily rebutting the other side. You wish you knew what they were saying! Beginning in January, you can join in the search by studying Galatians at lunchtime on Mondays, Wednesdays, or Fridays. The Rev. Stuart Gordon leads this group on Mondays in Brentwood in the offices of 3T Solutions, 214 Overlook Circle #152; on Wednesdays in Green Hills in the offices of Freeman-Webb, 3810 Bedford Ave #300; and on Fridays downtown in the offices of Parker, Lawrence, Cantrell, and Smith, 201 4th Ave N #1700. It’s a break from work to enjoy a brown bag lunch with a small group, pray, and study scripture among fellow Christians. For more information, contact Stuart at sgordon@fpcnashville.org.
On December 23, 1956, the congregation of First Presbyterian Church and visiting dignitaries celebrated the “laying of the cornerstone” of the Sanctuary at 4815 Franklin Pike, and also officially occupied the “educational building.” On the first Sunday in June of 1955, ground had been broken for these two buildings. On that 1955 Sunday, First Presbyterian Church was officially “at home” on Franklin Pike for the first time totally separated from its life at the 5th Avenue and Church Street downtown location. At 2:30 P.M., Dr. Walter Rowe Courtenay led the “Dedication Sentences,” a litany involving all the people gathered on that cold day. After naming items which had been placed in a cornerstone box, the box and cornerstone were properly placed and sealed. Dr. Courtenay’s dedicatory words:

_In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we lay this Cornerstone of a house to be erected here under the name of First Presbyterian Church, and devoted to the worship of Almighty God. Behold I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ._

Dr. Henry Mahler, Stated Clerk of Nashville Presbytery, offered a Dedicatory Prayer, followed by remarks by Presbytery Moderator Mr. T.H. Mitchell. After the cold, outdoor dedication was completed, everyone then walked to the warmer Chapel for a 3:00 P.M. dedication of the Educational Building (now known as “C Wing,” minus the gym which was built at a later time). After singing “The Church’s One Foundation,” the congregation heard prayers and a vocal solo followed by address by the Rev. Dr. Marshall Dendy, Secretary of the Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS).

A processional then led out in the cold again as everyone walked to the North end of the new building, where a children’s presentation preceded the “Presentation and Acceptance of the Keys of the Building.” Mr. H.V. Appen spoke “For the Contractor;” Mr. Allen Dobson “For the Building Committee;” Mr. James White (father of Georgeanna Payne) “For the Session;” and Mr. Robert Stanford “For the Diaconate.” It was noted that this building would house the Nursery through Junior High ministries for the relocated church. A tour of the building followed the ceremonies. Tours were conducted again that night, and again on December 30, when other churches and the community around were invited.

In years to come, many Sunday School and other groups have gathered at the white “1956” cornerstone to learn what the Bible says about foundations and cornerstones. One of the well-known passage is:

_So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God._ — Ephesians 2:19-22
Stewardship Breakfast Fair

Our church staff wore matching shirts and served over 300 members at our annual Stewardship Breakfast. After eating breakfast, Todd Jones engaged all those attending with a presentation that showcased how your stewardship gifts enable all of our spectacular ministries to do their outreach within our church walls and in our community.

If you missed Todd Jones’ Stewardship Breakfast presentation, you can link to it from our Parish News email from December 14.
Buddy Visits

On October 23 and November 6, our older elementary groups visited the young children’s groups. The second, third and fourth graders prepared a skit about Moses and the ten commandments to share with the younger children. Fifth graders prepared games to play with the first graders.

Second graders met with the three-year-olds of the Moon group; third graders met with the four-year-olds of the Faith group and the fourth graders met with our 5-and 6-year-olds in the Love and Grace groups.

The goal of these buddy visits was for young children to meet an older buddy and vice versa as a way to add names to their Faith Web. We invited the children to learn about each other using open ended questions and each child went home with an autograph book that held the name of their special buddy. Children were invited to pray each day for their Sunday School buddy. In the hallway after a buddy visit, a three-year-old showed his mom his autograph book and said, “I have two buddies, and we like the same things.”

Buddy visits will be repeated this winter.
Dated church material
Please deliver by December 24, 2016

7th & 8th Grade Overnight
Perfect North
January 27-29, 2017

Join us as we venture up to Perfect North Indiana! The middle school ski trip is a great opportunity to enjoy old friends and new as we worship together, play games, ski, tube and do life in the same place for a few days. We will leave after school on Friday and will be back Sunday afternoon. Total cost is $250, with a non-refundable registration fee of $50. Staff Trip Coordinator is Anna Wheeler (awheeler@fpcnashville.org).

9th Grade Overnight: Paoli, Indiana
January 27-29, 2017

The 9th graders will be heading to Paoli, Indiana for an overnight ski trip in January! There will be both skiing and snowboarding. We will be heading out Friday, hitting the snow all day Saturday, and returning Sunday. Total cost is $250 with a non-refundable registration fee of $50. Staff Trip Coordinator is Kody Whitaker (kwhitaker@fpcnashville.org).

Packing lists and registration details are available on the grade level pages of the website.