

THE TIMES NEWSLETTER

*A publication of the First Congregational Church
of Scarborough, Maine 04074*

DECEMBER 2023



PASTOR'S MESSAGE:

O Little Town of Bethlehem

There are many great stories about how Christmas carols originated. One of my favorites is the story about "O Little Town of Bethlehem." Most of us know the lyrics:



*"O Little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie.
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth, the everlasting Light.
The hopes and fears of all the years, are met in thee tonight."*

It was in 1865, when a clergyman named Phillips Brooks travelled to the Holy Land at Christmas. During Christmas week Rev. Brooks and his friends set out on horses to go to Bethlehem. He wrote about it in a letter home: *"It was only about two hours when we came to the town, situated on an eastern ridge of a range of hills, surrounded by its terraced gardens. It is a good-looking town, better built than any other we have seen in Palestine. . . . Before dark, we rode out of town to the field where they say the shepherds saw the star..."*

A few years later, Rev. Brooks was meditating over what he had seen on that trip when he penned the words to the carol *"O Little Town of Bethlehem."* It is a lovely image of a holy night. It is peaceful to be sure. And it is also startling to hear him say that our hopes and fears are being met in the birth of the Christ child.

Our Christmas story contains both hope and fear. Israel hoped for the promised Messiah who would be a military hero, yet that hope was fulfilled in the birth of a helpless baby. Mary and Joseph hoped to be treated with respect and to be welcomed into a comfortable place for the birth, but that hope was replaced by a stable behind the Inn. How could it be that this very influential person was born with mostly farm animals as witnesses?

Our Christmas story takes a turn for the worse when fear enters in. Upon hearing of Jesus' birth, the fearful Herod panicked and ordered his soldiers to seek out the child and murder him. Herod's troops obeyed and slaughtered many infants. This would not be the last time we hear about fear in Bethlehem. Fear is alive in our own time because of the Israel/Hamas war. Bethlehem is a Palestinian city, located on the West Bank. In response to the Hamas terror attack on Israeli civilians in October, Israeli soldiers have occupied Bethlehem in an attempt to capture suspected Palestinian militants. And children continue to die there.

Oh can't we just go back to the beautiful night of the birth – the stillness of Bethlehem, the everlasting Light, the dreamless sleep and the silent stars?

Yes, of course we can, as many times as we like - for it is a beautiful gift to us. But we also do not forget that the advent of God's salvation through the Christ child is even more important to us, and to the world, precisely because it lives in the same world that we live in – full of unfulfilled hopes and dreams; full of fears and terror and war; and full of God's unexpected redefinitions.

As you go to the stable in Bethlehem in your hearts this Christmas to praise the Christ child, I pray you will find peace in knowing God is with us. And I also pray you will find deep abiding joy in the truth expressed so well by Rev. Brooks - that all of your hopes and fears are finally met in this incredible gift of love from God.

I wish you and your loved ones a Blessed Christmas!

Yours in Christ's Service,

Reverend Linda Hey

Advent and Christmas Worship Services

1 st Sunday of Advent	December 3 9:30 A.M.
2 nd Sunday of Advent	December 10 9:30 A.M.
3 rd Sunday of Advent	December 17 9:30 A.M.
4 th Sunday of Advent	December 24 9:30 A.M.
Christmas Eve	
Service of Lessons and Carols	December 24 4:30 P.M.
Christmas Day (no service)	December 25



Special Christmas Music Program CAROLS – A Cantata *

Performed by choirs of the Brunswick United Methodist Church and the
First Congregational Church of Scarborough

When and Where:

1st performance - Saturday, December 9th 5:00 P.M.
Brunswick United Methodist Church
320 Church Rd., Brunswick, ME

2nd performance - Sunday, December 10th 5:00 P.M.
First Congregational Church Scarborough
167 Black Point Rd., Scarborough, ME

* by Heather Sorenson

MUSIC NOTES

Here's to November and lots of music happening. Veteran choir members and seasonal choir members alike are working diligently on the Cantata music that we will perform with members of the Brunswick United Methodist Church the weekend of December 9th and 10th. The first performance of the weekend will be in Brunswick, on Saturday, the 9th, at 5:00pm, and the performance when we hope you will all come and hear us and sing with us, too, at the Scarborough 1st Congregational Church, is on December 10th, at 5:00pm.

We expect it to be a special night of beautiful music with some surprise numbers in addition to the Cantata. Be sure to "SAVE THE DATE"; you won't want to miss it. We look forward to you joining in the singing, too, from the pews, on all of our favorite Christmas carols in the Cantata. We will provide the harmony, and you can sing your beloved melodies.

Be well and Happy Thanksgiving in advance. We have some songs of gratitude planned for you, soon, for our Thanksgiving weekend service, too.

Yours in music,

Wendy



MINISTRY OF CHRISTIAN OUTREACH & STEWARDSHIP

Helping to End Food Insecurity in Maine

Did you know that Maine ranks 9th in the nation and 1st in New England for low food security (hunger) or that one in every five children is food insecure? About 14% of the Maine population lacks access, at times, to enough food for an active healthy life.

As we approach our Thanksgiving Holiday, the Outreach and Stewardship Ministry has chosen the Wayside Food Programs as the recipient of our Thanksgiving Offering. Wayside has been increasing access to nutritious food to our neighbors in Southern Maine since 1986. Wayside's hunger relief efforts include: Community Meals, Mobile Food Pantries and Kids' Healthy Snacks Program. Our Scarborough Food Pantry is one of the recipients of their programs.

Through its food rescue efforts, Wayside diverted 1,000,000 pounds of edible food from the waste stream in 2022. Rescued food was distributed, free of charge, to 70 + partners throughout Southern Maine including food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and other social service agencies.

In addition, the Outreach and Stewardship Ministry is donating from its mission fund in November to the Preble Street Organization, also a leader in addressing hunger in Maine. Preble Street's Food Security Hub currently serves 26 towns in Southern Maine and prepares hot, nourishing meals each day.

Thank you for giving consideration to assisting in this very important cause.



SCARBOROUGH FOOD PANTRY HOURS:

The Food Pantry is open every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon between the hours of 1:30 and 4:00 pm, except on major holidays (i.e. Thanksgiving, when it will be closed).

Donations of food may be brought directly to the Food Pantry when it is open; otherwise donations can be brought to the office at Black Point Road and left in the breezeway anytime.

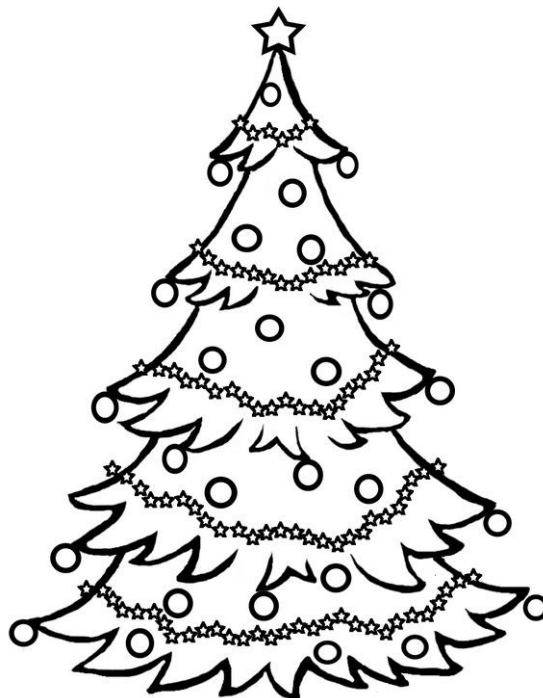
OUR GIVING TREE GOES UP SOON

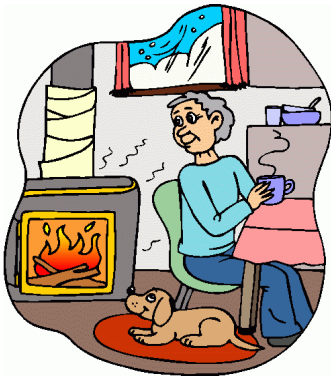
At the End of November, just after Thanksgiving, members of the Ministry of Outreach and Stewardship will put up the Giving Tree. It will be decorated with gift bags, just the size for a gift card. The gift cards are going to the Long Creek Youth Development Center. Right now there are 30 youth in the Development Center. That number changes day to day. The majority of young people in the justice system with whom the Center deals are in outlying facilities or are out on bond or parole. The gift cards are given to these young people as part of the holiday celebrations which include a holiday dinner for those at Long Creek. Each young person receives a gift bag with items appropriate to their ages and needs and gift cards are included. They are also used as incentives and rewards.

We label the small gift bags with the names of businesses that they can frequent in amounts that may cover purchases at those business, be they fast food restaurants or easily accessed big department stores like Target, Wal-Mart, Marshalls or T.J. Maxx and Burlington. The bags do not need any other paper or candy in them, please. If you would, please, write the amount of the card on the card or the folder that it comes in or a slip of paper.

Join us downstairs for Neighboring and pick a gift bag or two off the tree. Please help to let these young people know that someone is thinking of them at this special time of year. We ask you to return them to the tree by Dec. 17th. We will be delivering them to Long Creek on Dec. 18th. Any questions, please call Gail Dobriko, 883-3039.

Thank you from the Ministry of Outreach and Stewardship





SPECIAL CHRISTMAS OFFERING PROJECT G.R.A.C.E. FUEL FUND

Keeping Our Neighbors Warm - It's All About a Caring and Generous Community

Keeping warm. That's the challenge of a Maine winter. For some of our neighbors, the choices can be stark: eat or heat. Fill a prescription or fill the oil tank. Even lowering the thermostat to near 60 and putting on extra layers still leaves some in the cold. The worry of how to make ends meet, which bills to pay first, how to stretch a thin paycheck, weighs heavy on our seniors on fixed incomes and families with little ones to care for. It's why Project GRACE, a community group that relies on community support, turns to friends like you as the temperatures begin to drop to help us give our fuel fund a much needed boost before we hold our annual "Rally to Keep Our Neighbors Warm" community fundraiser in February.

At today's prices, \$2,500 is just about enough for seven or eight 'helps' of 100 gallons of oil, k1, propane, or firewood to keep the furnace going for seniors and families who are having trouble making ends meet. In a typical winter heating season, it's not uncommon for us to answer more than seventy calls for assistance. As the temperatures fall, Project GRACE also helps Scarborough residents with the cost of small home repairs to stop costly drafts or give a furnace cleaning or tune up to improve efficiency and lower energy consumption. Project GRACE volunteers visit senior lunches, host programs at the library, and participate in public events like Sustainable Scarborough to share tips on saving energy and give out inexpensive but highly effective do-it-yourself supplies like window films, caulking, and weatherization tape to stop the drafts and keep the cold at bay.

Whether you can share a little or a lot, each and every gift is precious, and helps us keep our promise that we won't leave our Scarborough neighbors in the cold.

Your Ministry of Christian Outreach and Stewardship thanks you for your consideration and any support you may be able to give.

SUNDAY SCHOOL AND CHRISTIAN NURTURE

Christian Nurture sounds so much more inviting to me than Christian Education. Nurturing people invokes images of feeding, giving living bread and water. Loving others into fullness of being.



Sometimes I am amazed that God has called me to teach Sunday school - I am not a teacher; I have no personal history of being in Sunday school. Often I am just one step ahead of the children, reading the lesson before I teach it! I do believe in God, and in Jesus, and I believe we all have the capacity to love and be loved. So this is where I come from in teaching Sunday school, or arranging for adult CE activities. Love, love, love, that's about it.

I strive to feed the children (and we are all children) - I feed them stories from the Bible; I feed them by listening to them, their interests and hopes and dreams.

Some wonder why FCC bothers to offer Sunday school. My response is this: Whether there is one child or ten children or fifty children, each child deserves attention and encouragement to know Jesus' love personally. That happens one on one.

That is why, Sunday after Sunday, I follow the child(ren) down to the parish hall. We like to stop and take a quick peek to see what's for neighboring! We might act out a parable, hunting everywhere for a lost sheep, or we might put on a puppet show of Joseph and his coat of many colors. We have killed Goliath and been rescued from the fire along with Shadrach and company. Sometimes we bake cookies for neighboring, or put away groceries for the food pantry. Maybe the lesson is about taking care of the Earth, so we plant flowers.

I like to keep it simple and fun, and easy to do. I'm hoping to encourage two or three adults to provide nursery care, or act as substitute teachers occasionally. I'm going to be creating a few ready to use teaching kits that a sub can open and use without preparation. Nothing fancy, just be yourself and engage with the children where they are. Please discern God's call to grow our Sunday school, and nurture our children and ourselves along the way.

Thank you all, and bless you bountifully, Liane Giambalvo, Christian Ed

REMEMBERING THE SAINTS WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US

Greetings. Elaine gladly provided me with a church cookbook (2003 vintage) as I was hoping to find a baked bean recipe entered by our own Betty Hart. I couldn't find that recipe, but I did find a Blueberry Cake recipe! My family and I had picked berries at Estes Blueberry farm in Buxton, so I had plenty of berries to make cakes!

Most of us knew Betty as the kind, loving, patient Pied Piper teacher. I didn't know her well, so I would love to hear from you, a few stories or phrases to remember her by. I hope we could make this a monthly column as you reconnect with one of the Saints Who Have Gone Before Us. Please send me your memories, not just about Betty, but all the Saints! Here is Betty's recipe:

BLUEBERRY CAKE by Betty Hart

3 c. Flour	1/3 c. Oil		
2 c. Sugar	1/2 tsp vanilla		
3 tsp baking powder	2 c. Blueberries		
1 tsp salt	3/4 tsp nutmeg		
2 eggs	1/2 c. Sugar		
1 c. Milk			



In a large mixing bowl sift together flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. Add eggs, milk, oil and vanilla. Beat for two minutes. Fold blueberries in with loving care. Pour batter into greased and floured 9 x 13 inch pan. In a small bowl mix together nutmeg and sugar. Sprinkle sugar mixture over cake. Bake at 350 for 50 minutes.

Delicious!

So, send me recipe favorites and stories of our beloved family! Thank you and bless you,

Liane Giambalvo, Christian Nurture and Education

WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

It's hard to believe the Yuletide Fair is December 2, 2023 from 8:30-noon. We can use your help!!!!

We need the following:

COOKIES - these are needed for the Cookie Walk. We always sell out! Cookies should be no bigger than 3 inches so they all are uniform. They must be bagged - 2 cookies to a bag - before they are brought to the fair. Please note if they have nuts, are sugar free or are gluten free.

CANDY - time to dig out your favorite candy recipe! Do you make needhams, fudge, peanut brittle, etc? We'd love some for the candy table. You can contact Susan Fielding as to how she would like it packaged. Please note if they have nuts or are sugar free.

BAKED GOODS - we need lots of goodies for the folks with a sweet tooth. We can use cupcakes, muffins, pies, breads of all kinds, squares, jams, jelly, pickles, homemade baked beans and soups. We had a wonderful assortment last year and hope to continue this year. All items need to be packaged before they are brought to the fair. Please note if they have nuts, are sugar free or are gluten free.

ALL FOOD ITEMS SHOULD BE BROUGHT TO THE PARISH HALL THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30 MOST OF THE DAY OR FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1 UNTIL NOON. This will allow the folks working on the tables to get items properly displayed for the fair on Saturday.

JEWELRY - time to clean out and get rid of unused costume jewelry. There is a box located in the Narthex of the church for you to leave your items in.

CHRISTMAS - we are always looking for your unused Christmas items. Please be sure that the items are clean, have all the pieces and are in good working order. If anyone has old Christmas trees they no longer use, we can use them to display items! The items can be taken to the Parish Hall. If you need the door unlocked, please contact Elaine at the church office.

ONGOING MEETINGS OF WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Our next fellowship meeting will be November 28th at 2:00 p.m. in the Ladies Parlor. Our program will be A Travel Log by Kathy Ross and Edie Davidson. The hostesses are Diane Brown and Sharon Haskell. If you are able, the donation to the food pantry this month is paper goods (napkins, tissues, toilet paper, etc.). Hope to see you there!

The Ladies Coffee is held the second Wednesday of each month at 9:30 a.m. at IHOP.

The Crafts & Fellowship Group meets every Tuesday (except for Women's Fellowship meeting day) in the Annex at 1:30 p.m.

**ORDER A POINSETTIA PLANT FOR CHRISTMAS
TO HELP US TO ADORN OUR CHURCH**

This is a long-standing tradition here as a way to remember and honor our loved ones as well as celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. We are offering, from Fleur de Lis in South Portland, a medium size red plant in a 7 ½ inch pot for \$30.00. To order a plant, please fill out the form below and **bring it or mail it to the Church Office** (161 Black Point Rd.) with your payment enclosed.



Checks payable to: **First Congregational. Church of Scarborough**

Please do not place it in the offering plate.

Orders will be taken until **Wednesday, December 6th.**

If you prefer, you may purchase your own plant. Please be sure to put your name on it and fill out the form below as well, indicating that you will be providing your own plant. Please leave your plant in the Church Office or the Vestry, with your name on it by Friday, Dec. 15th.

A list of dedications will be in the bulletins on Sunday, December 17th and December 24th.

of plants _____

Dedication: Circle one - in memory of / in honor of

Given by: _____

Phone No. _____

Amount Enclosed: _____

Providing your own plant: _____

Deadline: Friday, December 15, 2023

DEADLINE TO ORDER:

Wednesday, December 6

TRUNK OR TREAT 2023

On a very warm Saturday in late October, 27 folks stood in the heat to welcome over 300 children and adults to First Congregational Church's 2nd Annual Trunk or Treat. Those individuals that came to the Trunk or Treat snacked on grilled hot dogs, s'mores and cider. They also had a chance to snap a picture in our photo op area.

The costumes (both by the Trunkers and Treaters) were amazing. All of those participating in the event heard from the Treaters how thankful they were for holding the event, given all that happened a few days prior to Saturday.

I want to thank every who participated and made this year's event a HUGE success. From those that made signs, to those that kept the parking under control, to those that cooked hot dogs and s'mores, to those that helped pour drinks and keep everyone happy, and to all the Trunkers, you are amazing.



TRUNK OR TREAT

October 28, 2023



YULETIDE FAIR

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2nd 8:30 a.m. to 12 noon

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH*

167 BLACK POINT ROAD, SCARBOROUGH

FEATURED ITEMS INCLUDE:

BREAKFAST COFFEE/MUFFINS

HAND KNITS KITCHENWARE

BAKED GOODS COOKIE WALK

HOLIDAY GREENS/ARRANGEMENTS

CANDY TOYS

CRAFTS JEWELRY QUILTS

CHRISTMAS ITEMS/STOCKING STUFFERS

***Handicapped accessible by chair lift.**



To Bethlehem and Beyond...



J. Barrie Shepherd

Advent ahead! And for those who, in previous years, have used my little poetry chapbooks as a guide to the season, time to order a copy, or copies of my 2023 edition.

Introducing this year's Advent pilgrimage in verse, *To Bethlehem and Beyond...* which continues the tradition of *'Tis the Season, A Way with Words* and earlier annual chapbooks in offering a selection of some forty poems to guide the reader/prayer across the weeks of Advent-Christmas-Epiphany. Here's a teaser from this year's book:

Advent Proposal

What if,
despite our annual festival
of expectant prayers and hymns,
he had already come and was flipping
burgers in Chicago or training to be a cop,
trading currency on the market, undergoing
sex change or even tending goal for the Canadiens?
He did, and has, and is, of course –
or so he warned us all those centuries ago
when he pointed to the very least of these
and said, "Guess who?" or maybe
"Peekaboo! Here I come,
ready or not."

If you're "ready or not" to buy a copy please be in touch with me at barrieshep@aol.com. The books cost \$10 as before, plus \$3 postage. And remember all proceeds beyond cost are, as always, donated to the Chebeague Island or Scarborough Maine food pantries.

Barrie Shepherd

