

Newaygo Congregational United Church of Christ

432 Quarterline * Newaygo, MI 49337 * (231) 652-6624

Jonathan Riedel, Pastor



“”An Open and Affirming Church”

*No matter who you are,
no matter where you are on life's journey
you're welcome here!*



The Churchmouse



December, 2023



Another Birth

She gave birth to her firstborn, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the guestroom.”

Luke 2:7 CEB

We have trouble with these words. We are too accustomed to clean births in sanitary hospitals, attended by efficient and well-trained nurses and doctors. We marvel at stories about people who have given birth in the back of cabs or in the hospital parking lot because they are rare occurrences. Those who spend more time engaged with world-wide media are aware that those hospitable and modern conditions are not universal. Many still give birth at home, sometimes by choice and sometimes by necessity, and many women still face the threat that giving birth could kill them. Infections and post-natal trauma are still real possibilities worldwide. I see our trouble with these words appear whenever we paint and talk about the Christmas story. Most of our images of the scene at the manger feature well-dressed white people sitting in a wooden barn surrounded by clean hay and market-ready animals. They almost look like tourists caught by surprised by an early birth. I heard one pastor preach that all of our conceptions of this story are erroneous. Since Joseph's family was from Bethlehem, he was probably welcomed into one of his family member's houses. It was not unusual to share rooms with animals because the animals lived on the lower levels of most people's houses as a way to preserve space and heat on a grounded village street. The manger may indeed have been made of roughly-hewn stone, but it was far from the worst cradle that a newborn could face at that time. Instead of a testimony to human in-hospitality, the story of Jesus' birth becomes a warm family saga. There is something, however, too tidy about this reconstruction. It removes the tougher edges of Jesus' story by smoothing away the particular politics of his time. If Joseph was of the family of David, why did he live so many miles from his ancestral home? What economic

necessity prompted his family to relocate, to build new family ties in a village far away? Why did the family have to travel, at their expense, to Bethlehem to begin with? Why were they forced to do so (and we must consider it a compelled journey because women in their ninth month of pregnancy certainly do not need the stress)? What was the purpose of this tax registration? Was it to benefit the people paying the taxes or the Roman authorities? Given the political and economic unsteadiness of the land of Israel at the time, I am certain that many poor families did have to leave home to find work. Agriculture provided a good share of the income for many people, but land was expensive and owned by comparatively few. Most were sharecroppers and new taxes would have been especially burdensome to them because the landowners would have passed by the new expenses onto their shoulders. Requiring everyone to return to their family's hometown likely increased the town's population far greater than they could accommodate. Traveling with Mary so grave with child (as the KJV would have us understand) would have slow. By the time Joseph and Mary arrived, there would not have been a room to spare. They were likely just lucky that someone-a family member or even a stranger-let them sleep in the barn. She could have given birth to Jesus on the road or in the streets. Many refugees have. I have heard people object to calling Mary and Joseph 'refugees'. It is a politically loaded term in our age. But that is what they were. They had to go to Bethlehem. It would have been safer for Mary to stay home but they were compelled to go to ensure that they could keep their home and to prevent prosecution by the police. They went to a place they might have had family, but they went to a place sure to be overcrowded. They had no guarantee of safety or security. They could only be certain that the ancient customs of hospitality might urge someone to provide some smidgen of a place for Mary to give birth. I wonder if Mary's labor was the reason why they found a place at all. To be compelled to travel and to be dependent on the charity of others is the very definition of being a refugee. To see the Holy Family as temporary refugees moves me in another way. They were not extraordinary people. They were subject to the whims of political forces beyond their control, had to work hard to make ends meet, dealt with dilemmas that overwhelm so many families (pregnancies out of social norms, crisis travel, dependence on the kindness of strangers), and found themselves forced to be resourceful (she tore strips of her own clothing to ensure the baby stayed warm). The circumstances of Jesus' birth were not unusual for the needy of his time. While Jesus was a remarkable man, the poverty surrounding his birth was not. It was the norm. Maybe Luke's shower of angels to the humble shepherds reminds us that it is the ordinary that God speaks to and cares about. Surely, there must have more demonstrative ways to bring the Messiah into the world. Royal palaces. A full-grown warrior swept down from heaven. Dispensing with the human form completely and simply blasting a broken creation out of existence. No, God chose a crying, hungry, and cold baby. Because that is who we are. That is who we know. That is what we care about to the core of our being. God's way through Jesus-to be born poor to a refugee family looking for a safe and warm place to land-show how much God cares as well. Enough to be one of us, even down to the soiled clothes and the empty stomach. Maybe not the most pristine or safe of nativity scenes, but it is best one to draw me in. May it draw you in as well.

The Rev. Jonathan D. Riedel-Pastor,
Newaygo Congregational United Church of Christ





Something New For Christmas Eve

We are trying something new for Christmas Eve this year. We will have two services. The first will be at our regular time, celebrating the Fourth Sunday of Advent. We will gather after that service for a luncheon of soup and sandwiches. This is not a potluck so you are most welcome just to bring yourself. At 1 p.m. we will gather in our sanctuary for our traditional Christmas Eve service of stories, Christmas carols, and candle-lighting. The early time will allow people not to worry about driving after dark. There will be Zoom links for all of these services so you are most welcome to come anyway you can.



Christmas Program

The Christmas program, "A Remarkable Time" will take place during the service on Sunday, December 17.

We will have a rehearsal in the sanctuary after church on Sunday, December 10.

Dec 17 - Christmas program, "A Remarkable Time"



Veteran's Home Giving

We will again be adopting the Veterans Home for our Christmas giving.

The Veteran's Home has asked for donations of money this year to help with outings and prizes for the Veterans. The tree in the Fellowship Hall will be decorated with an ornament for each \$10.00 donated. If you wish to donate just put your donations in the offering box and mark it "Veterans Donation" or there are envelopes next to the tree in the Fellowship Hall for your donations. Let's support our veterans and get the tree decorated!

Prayer Room/Chapel

Anyone who wishes to have a small quiet place to pray or meditate is welcome to use the room across from the nursery to do so.

The room is open during the secretary's office hours and on Sunday morning.

Wednesday Night Prayer

Wednesday Night Prayer Time 7 pm. Call 978-990-5000 then 283560#



Treasurer's Report

October 16, 2023 to
November 15, 2023

	Income	Total Exp.
October 23	988.00	
October 29	1,244.00	
November 5	2,859.00	
November 12	1,914.00	
Total	\$6,105.00	\$5,896.03
Difference		208.97
Phillips Fund		\$149,444.75
Family Fund		\$ 70,442.26
Christmas Project Veterans Home		500.00

In this time of Thanksgiving, we rejoice for all God has taught us, given to us and shared with us so that we can be better Christians all year long.

Dawn Anderson Treasurer

Ways to Worship with Us

Here is a reminder of the different ways that our worship services are available to you. ♦ Everyone is welcome to attend our services in-person every Sunday at 10 am. ♦ You can also access a live audio/visual broadcast using ZOOM on your computer or smart phone by using the following link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/184864699096>
Those without internet access can call the following phone number and Meeting ID:
1-312-626-6799 Meeting ID: 848 6469 9096.

If you would like to access the services on your own schedule, they are added to our website www.newaygoucc.org and Facebook page following each service.

Links to Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve services are provided as needed.

Noon Forum on Tuesdays



Hot Topics

Join us for a lively conversation the first two Tuesdays of December at noon. We will gather in the Prayer Room to discuss whichever church or God-related topic is nearest and dearest to your heart. Let us know what you want to discuss. We will announce what we will be talking about the week before so you can do some preparation ahead of time.

Deadline for the January Churchmouse

Please send any information or articles you would like included in the December **Churchmouse** to the office by **Tuesday, December 26** You may e-mail information to:
Churchmouse@newaygoucc.org
or leave a hard copy in the office.

December, 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3 Worship Svc. 10 am In person, phone & Zoom	4	5 Noon Class 	6 7 pm Prayer	7 NCUCC Serves meal to NA Group 6:30	8	9
10 Worship Svc. 10 am In person, phone & Zoom	11 Worship & Pastoral Care 10 a.m. in Pastor's Office	12 Noon Class 	13 4:15 pm Mission & Social Action in church entry room 7:00 Prayer	14 1:00 pm Church Council in Main Sunday School Room	15	16
17 Worship Svc. 10 am In person, phone & Zoom Christmas Pageant	18	19	20 7:00 Prayer	21	22	23
24 Worship Svc. 10 am In person, phone & Zoom <div style="text-align: right;">31</div>	25 Christmas Office Closed in observation of Christmas	26	27 Pastor Jon on Vacation	28	29	30

The Ten Commandments

And God spoke all these words: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me." Exodus 20:1-3



Based on Exodus 20:1-17 (NIV)

W G Y O F W S T R P E B H T A
 G A E Q A O E M D S F Y O H D
 D P U E G V E S U O K Q N I U
 L S M N O S H O E R N Y O D L
 W A O C U T H K E V D K R O T
 N L L S L I S H Y X E E E L E
 Y R I O D A T S Q A G N R Y R
 A M E B R A R T A K J Q T O Y
 F M L M F D S L N B Q W B H W
 E A O D E S T E A L B H Y R O
 R C L T P M M J U K G A K O R
 W N S S H L B W T I Y A T N S
 I Z W S E E G E E L U L C H H
 F H H O L Y R N R F L I V E I
 E L R C P T E S T I M O N Y P

SABBATH	NAME	MURDER	LIVE	HOUSE
WIFE	FALSE	REMEMBER	DAY	IDOL
COVET	WORSHIP	MOTHER	LONG	FATHER
LORD	NEIGHBOR	DONKEY	SEVENTH	STEAL
MISUSE	HONOR	ADULTERY	TESTIMONY	HOLY

Anniversaries in December

21 - Wayne & Jane Porter

Birthday's in December

2 - Joyce Twining

20 - Dorothy Bos

28 - Marty Losey

30 - Jeanne Leaver

Christmas Fund/ Veterans of the Cross

We will collect the Christmas Fund/Veterans of the Cross offering during our Christmas Eve service. This special offering goes to aid struggling retired ministers, ministers who are struggling with job-restricting disabilities, and clergy families in need of special care. This is a way to give a hand to those who so often have offered theirs. If you cannot come to the Christmas Eve service, you can donate a check ahead of time. Simply use the special envelope available in the back of the church or write "Christmas Fund" in the memo section of your personal check.



December Worship Schedule on ZOOM

Worship is in person and on ZOOM at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/184864699096> or phone 1-312-626-6799 ID: 848 6469 9096

December 3 - Advent I

Communion -
Service of Candle Lighting
Carols of the Season -
While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night
Isaiah 64:19

December 10 - Advent II

Service of Candle Lighting
Carols of the Season -
O Come, All Ye Faithful
Isaiah 40:1-11

December 17 - Advent III

Service of Candle Lighting
The Christian Education Pageant
Luke 1:46-55

December 24 - Advent IV

Service of Candle Lighting
Carols of the Season -
Once in David's Royal City
Luke 2:22-40

December 31 —Carol Hymn Sing

Pastor on Vacation
Luke 2:22-40

*Pastor Jon will be away from December 25th to January 1st.
If an emergency arises,, please contact Dorothy Bos or Ken Bell.*