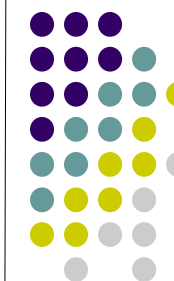


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# The Bridgebuilder

December 2022

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## The Magnificat: Mary's Song

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor  
on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."



The Reason  
for the  
Season



Luke 1:46-55

## First Presbyterian Church of Hoopeston

Head of the Church	Jesus Christ
Ministers of the Good News	All of Us
Session Elders	Gwen Bandy, Wayne Bandy, Sadie Hofer, Christy Lee, Waylon Lee, Jill Nelson, Missy Prorise, Julie Stump, Ray Stump
Deacons	Gina Morgan, Debby Dixon Linda Martin
Organist and Music Director	Rick Brackmann
Administrative Assistant	Pat Catron
Custodian	Gary Deck
Director of Older Youth Group	Sadie Hofer
Pastor	Wade Meranda
Childcare Provider	Lindsey Paredes
Director of Younger Youth Group	Lindsey Paredes



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We're on the web!  
[www.fpchoopeston.com](http://www.fpchoopeston.com)



### Pastor's Letter

Friends,

Let's make December a generous month of giving so we can meet or exceed our income estimate for the year. Let's fulfill our pledges and beyond. The end of the year is a good time to take stock in what is important in our lives. We have been given a loving congregation, a terrific facility, a faithful staff of gifts and integrity, well-ground worship traditions, not an ounce of debt, prayers and prayers, and an enduring hope for the future. Not everyone has been given so much, so I pray that everyone can appreciate what a gift we have here. And respond.

As you know, we were blessed with the high turn-out of guests at the Pasta Dinner on Nov 11. You can read the good news on page three. There's a deep spirit of gratitude and community in the air in November, so the Pasta Dinner fits in well. There's also a deep spirit of service in our congregation and that fits in well with the story of our Savior. Maybe we shouldn't be too surprised at the high turn-out after all.



Speaking of meals, let's invite family and friends to our Christmas Breakfast and worship on Dec 11. I promise to lighten up on the hell-fire sermons that day so everyone can enjoy the meal in peace. Preaching the good news of grace is much more challenging, but I'll do my best. We'll let grace lead you home that day for a change!

The season of Advent us much like the season of Lent. These are special weeks of reflection and anticipation because God has promised that something good is coming to you and me. Good things still happen. God is alive and well and still rooting for us. Maybe, for a moment on Christmas, we will see that all is still calm and all is still bright. I hope so.

Merry Christmas, Wade



### Season of Advent

**December 4**  
Worship includes handbells, hanging of the greens, holy communion, and many festive hymns. Pizza and Movie Night begins at 5:30 p.m. where we'll enjoy the sweet and funny Christmas movie ELF. Come and see.

**December 11**  
Invite family and friends to our **Christmas Breakfast** at 9:00 a.m. Bring a dish to share if you can. The PCUSA Christmas Joy Offering will be received in worship.

**December 18**  
Our Advent Music Service includes seasonal hymns, handbells, organ and piano. Our handbell choir will play Christmas Carols for residents at the Heritage Health Nursing Home in the afternoon.



**December 24**  
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service begins at 7:00 p.m. with holy music, holy scripture, holy communion, and *Silent Night* by candlelight.

**December 25**  
No worship due to the late Christmas Eve service.

### Baptisms

On Dec 18, **Audrey Curtin**, daughter of Michael and Anna Chaffin, will receive the sacrament of Holy Baptism. On Jan 1, **Jolleen and Oliver Watson**, children of Joe and Margo Watson, will receive the sacrament of Holy Baptism as well. In baptism, God claims us and cleanses us with grace. May God bless these children and their special day.

### Red Cross Blood Drive

The American Red Cross will host a blood drive for the community at our church on Friday, December 30 from 12–4 p.m. There is an especially large need for blood this time of year. Let's help those who need help. For an appointment call 1-800-733-2767 or visit [redcrossblood.org](http://redcrossblood.org) and type in 60942 in the "find a drive" box in the top right corner.



# December 2022

First Presbyterian Church  
915 East Orange Street, Hoopston, Illinois 60942  
[www.fpchoopston.org](http://www.fpchoopston.org) 217-283-6229

Sabbath Day of Rest	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Elder of Month: Christy Lee	Pray for Cooper Watson		9:00 Adult Study	1	2	3
4 Handbell Practice 8:30 WORSHIP 10:00 WORSHIP Hanging of the Greens Service Change for Change Offering 11:00 Refreshments 5:00 Younger and Older Youth Groups 5:30 Movie and Pizza Night - ELF	Pray for Joe and Margo Watson, Jolleen, Oliver	6	7 9:00 Adult Study	8	9	10
11 CHRISTMAS BREAKFAST 9:00 WORSHIP PCUSA Christmas Joy Offering	Pray for Scott and Kathy Watson	13	14 9:00 Adult Study	15	16	17
18 Handbell Practice 10:00 WORSHIP - Advent Musk Service 11:00 Refreshments 3:45 Handbells play at Heritage Health 6:00 Younger Youth Group (Pre-5th) 6:00 Older Youth Group (6th-12th)	Pray for Wayne and Gwen Bandy	20 10:45 Meals on Wheels	21 9:00 Adult Study	22	23	24
25 No Service Today MERRY Christmas	Pray for Alex Berg 1st Day of Christmas	27	28 No Adult Study	29	30	31
		2nd Day of Christmas	3rd Day of Christmas	4th Day of Christmas	5th Day of Christmas Recycling 12:00–4:00 Red Cross Blood Drive COMMUNITY BLOOD DRIVE	6th Day of Christmas  7:00 CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP



### General Fund Giving

	2022	2021	2020
Given as of Nov 30	\$88,379	\$82,540	\$96,907
Total for Year	tbd	\$95,085	\$100,396
Pledges for Year	\$92,000	\$108,458	\$112,345

Our church's ministry is made possible by those who give generously month after month. Thank you.



### Christmas Joy Offering

Please give to the our denomination's Christmas Joy Offering on **December 11**. For almost seventy years, the offering has provided assistance for hundreds of dedicated church workers and retirees who find themselves facing urgent financial needs. In addition, half of the offering supports scholarships at historical Presbyterian racial/ethnic colleges. Let's join together with the 10,000 Presbyterian churches around the country and give generously.



### Pledge Cards for 2023

Please return pledge cards for 2023 to Barb Park or the church office. The Session will use the total amount pledged to budget the Operating Fund for 2023. Presbyterian churches are financially independent. Each is funded by their members alone. It's up to us.

### McFarland Fund Helping Children

We are grateful for Dick McFarland's generous endowment gift and for entrusting us to support the children of our community with it. Given in 2022 thus far:

John Greer Read to Feed Program	\$200
DACC Scholarships, four for \$1,000	\$4,000
Golden Ticket Ministry for kids	\$1,100
Medical Care for Teen Burn Victim	\$300
New Skateboard Park at McFerren Park	\$5,000
HA Softball Association	\$200
DACC Summer Program for Kids	\$200
Pool Passes, City of Hoopston Pool	\$1,000
Back to School Shows for Little Souls	\$700
Back to School Supplies, Multi Agency	\$1,200
Infant Needs Center, Christian Church	\$500
HAHS Marching Band trip to Liberty Bowl	\$5,000
Project Success Christmas Wish List for Kids	\$1,600

### Change for Change

We have helped fill many unmet needs in our area though our Change for Change ministry this year. We are grateful to all who give.

Jan	CWS Church World Service Blanket Sunday	\$415
Feb	Riley's Children's Hospital Toys	\$253
Mar	Medical Care for Local Fire Victim	\$263
Apr	HA Schools New Teacher Welcome Packets	\$240
May	American Legion Kits for Veterans at VA	\$209
June	Keep Vermilion County Beautiful	\$159
July	HART Animal Shelter	\$190
Aug	Save the Lorraine Foundation	\$147
Sept	UMC Feed My Lambs	\$193
Oct	Bismarck Blessings	\$209
Nov	Grant Township Food Cupboard	\$215
Dec	Illinois Refugee Center in Champaign	tbd

### Session Highlights

From the November 21 stated meeting:

- 9 of 10 present.
- Reviewed December calendar.
- Approved baptisms: Audrey Curtin on Dec 18, Jolleen and Oliver Watson on Jan 1.
- Directed the Jan Change for Change to CWS Blanket Sunday.
- Approved Elder and Deacon Elects to be ordained and installed to office on Jan 15.
- Set the Annual Meeting of the Congregation for Feb 5 after worship.
- Made plans to repurpose the old preschool room into a childcare and younger youth group room: repair and paint walls, clean carpets, discard or reuse furniture other materials in the room. Funding from the McFarland Fund.
- Approved Christmas gift cards for staff members.
- Distributed about \$2,600 of net proceeds from Pasta Dinner to support both community needs and ministry needs within the church.
- Approved continuing the Golden Ticket Ministry in 2023, \$100 per month from McFarland Fund.
- Heard encouraging report from both youth groups.
- Approved the Finance Report for October. All is in good order.



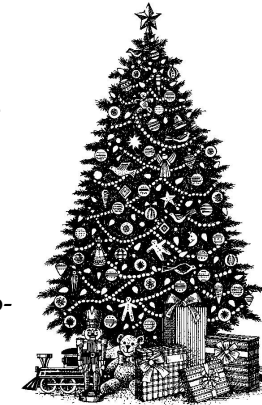
### Pasta Dinner Rocks

We weren't sure how many would come to the Pasta Dinner this year after missing the previous two years, but now we know. More than ever! We had about 300 for dine-in and about 200 for take-out, with about \$4,200 in ticket sales, well beyond previous years. The November 11 dinner was such a blessing for all who worked and all who attended. Yum!



We're grateful to Vera Keller for organizing us once again. We're grateful for our guests. We're grateful for all who decorated, prepared, cooked, served, and cleaned up afterwards. It takes a village to feed a village.

Expenses were about \$1,600, and as it does every year, the Session returned about half of the net proceeds to the community and retained half to build up our own ministry. Here's the distribution: \$250 Heritage Health Activities Program, \$250 Autumn Fields Activities Program, \$400 HART Animal Shelter, \$300 Multi Agency, and for our ministry - \$150 Christmas lights, \$500 Kitchen Fund, \$650 to begin a new fund to renovate the parking lot island with new trees and better lighting of the lot.



The Pasta Dinner provided Good News for both our community and congregation. Thanks be to God.

### December Birthdays

12/7	Randall Hofer
12/8	Katrina Cox
12/13	Miles Robinson
12/13	Caroline Lee
12/15	Larry Jahn
12/22	Anna Chaffin
12/23	Carol Sapochetti
12/25	Elizabeth Donley and Jesus
12/26	Rhys Root
12/29	John Boyer



### December Anniversaries

12/08/1968	Larry and Carol Betka
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### Christmas Movie and Pizza

Our next family movie night will be on Sunday, Dec 4 at 5:30 p.m. We'll begin with pizza in Fellowship Hall and then move to the sanctuary to watch the Christmas movie ELF and eat popcorn! All children and adults are invited. ELF is a sweet and funny movie that captures the innocence and joy of the Christmas season well. The movie is rated PG for some mild rude humor and language.



### Younger Youth Group

Our younger youth group ministry (Pre-5th) began in November and meets twice a month. The group will meet on Dec 4 at 5:00 p.m. for devotions and prayer and will join in with Family Movie Night at 5:30. The group will also meet on Dec 18 at 6:00 p.m. We are in the process of transitioning the old preschool room into a new Childcare and Younger Youth Group Room. We want the youngsters to have a space just for them.

### Older Youth Group

Our older youth group (6th-12th) will meet on Dec 4 at 5:00 p.m. and Dec 18 at 6:00 p.m. The group has been busy doing mission projects: putting together gift boxes for our college youth, working at the Fair Hope Ministry in Danville, providing gifts for Project Success children in need, and updating their bulletin boards in Fellowship Hall. Thanks for all they do.



### New Officers

Congratulations to our officers who were elected at our Congregational Meeting on October 30. New Elders and Deacons will be ordained and installed into office on January 15, 2023 and will begin service at that time. God bless them all.

**Elders:** Skip Betka, Donna Boyer, Kristy Kelnhofer, and Gina Morgan

**Deacon:** Shirley Wagoner

**Nominating Committee:** Kristy Keller, Larry Jahn, Cheryl Steiner, Debby Dixon, Gwen Bandy, Sadie Hofer, Julie Stump





## Why do Presbyterians Baptize Infants?

(By David Gambrell in *Presbyterian Worship: Questions and Answers*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2019.)

A sacrament is a funny thing. It is a gracious act of God, and at the same time, a human response of gratitude. Understanding this little bit of sacramental theology helps us to understand the difference between infant and believer's baptism, and more importantly, to understand how they can still be one and the same sacrament.



We baptize infants because God chooses, claims, and calls us long before we are able to respond to God's grace. The baptism of infants thus emphasizes God's gracious action, underscoring classic Reformed (Presbyterian) theology about "election," how God chooses us for salvation.

We baptize adult believers (who have not already been baptized) upon the profession of their faith because God's gracious action calls for our grateful response. The baptism of believers thus emphasizes our response to God's grace, demonstrating the central Reformed tenet of salvation by grace through faith.

Seven words from the New Testament sum it up perfectly: "We love because God first loved us." God loves us first. There is nothing we can do to earn God's grace. It is a pure gift of love, unexpected and undeserved. This is why we baptize infants. But because God first loves us, we love. Because of the great love of God poured into our hearts, we are able to love God and one another. This is our grateful response to God's grace, our faithful response to God's faithfulness. This is why we baptize believers upon profession of faith.

Sometimes people are presented for baptism who do not fall neatly into one of these categories. Examples include children between the ages of infancy and adolescence or people with cognitive disabilities. This is when it is critical to remember that there are not really two kinds of baptism; there is but one sacrament practiced in different ways, depending on the age and situation of the one baptized. In these cases, pastors and elders must work to discern which practice is most appropriate—relying, as always, on the grace and love of God. Indeed, it is on this grace and love alone that our salvation depends.

## In the Mailbox

*For birthday blessings:*

Thank you all for making my 90th birthday so very special. You are like family, so happy and blessed. We joined the church to become part of you. Prayers for all of you. God bless. —Marge Foster

*For birthday blessings:*

To my church family. Thank you for helping me celebrate my 90th birthday for a whole month! The beautiful birthday cake made the start of my month very special. A heartfelt thanks to all who gave their time to come to my open house celebration. My family and I appreciate your thoughtfulness. —Vera Keller

*For birthday building use:*

The families of Vera Keller appreciate the use of the church for Mom's 90th birthday celebration. The fellowship hall accommodations were perfect for the reception. Mom's church family is very important to her. She and her family are grateful to have had many of her church friends come share in the celebration. —The Keller families

*For Change for Change support:*

Thanks for your generous contribution to Bismarck Blessings (\$209). Our mission is to feed the kids of the Bismarck-Henning School District. During the school year, a backpack is filled with food for students to take home. Throughout the summer, pickup dates are scheduled for parents to stop in an pick up a box of food. Our program currently serves 73 kids from 28 different families every week. We appreciate your thoughtfulness. —Bismarck Blessings

*For McFarland Fund Support, four \$1,000 scholarships:*

Thanks, in part, to generous scholarship support, DACC has set a record with a 43 present graduation rate. We awarded over 658 scholarships valued at over \$946,000 this year. Every student who completed a scholarship application and is attending DACC received a scholarship. Thank you for inspiring and continuing to support the students we serve. Together we are building a stronger community through the gift of education. Your continued support is appreciated —Tonya Hill, Director DACC Foundation, and Larry Jahn, DACC Foundation Board



## Does God Answer Prayer?

(By Donald McKim in *Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.)

Yes. Presbyterians believe God answers prayer. We believe it because the Bible from cover to cover provides us with many examples and also because we, like countless Christians who have gone before us, have experienced God's answers to our prayers in our own lives.

If Jesus was who we believe he was—truly divine and truly human—it is significant that Jesus practiced prayer constantly and urged his followers to do the same, even giving us the Lord's Prayer as model for our own. God invites us to call on the Lord, even in the day of trouble.

So we are commanded to pray. We can also expect God to answer our prayers according to the divine will, a truth that is affirmed in all four Gospels. When we seek to pray according to God's will, we are giving ourselves over to being open to what God desires and trying to align ourselves with God's purposes. This was the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Not my will be yours be done."

How does God answer prayer? God answers through many means. We often hear it said that God may answer our prayers in three ways: yes, no, and not yet. This affirms that every

prayer has an "answer." The answer may not be what we want or expect or what we think is best. But the answer of prayer is trust. When we perceive God's answer to our prayers, our goal should be to trust those answers as being what is best of us. Just as we trust God to hear our prayers and to answer, so we should trust those answers we receive, even when they seem difficult or hard for us to follow.

Prayer should be a tremendously exciting element of our Christian lives. God is with us, God cares for us, God guides us, God loves us. These affirmations mean that as we pray and seek God's will for our lives, we can trust God's answers and believe we are being lead in the paths God desires. In prayer, we can "expect the unexpected." We never know how, when, or where God will answer our prayers. And that's exciting!



## In Our Prayers

**Those who grieve for:** Phil Voegele (Joyce Nelson's friend), Linda Carlson, Rich Thompson (R. Carter's friend), Melvin Miles (S. Burton's uncle), Ellen Martin-Huff (L. Martin's cousin), John Smock (R. Carter's uncle), Jim Peterson (Joyce Nelson's brother), Karen Evans (R. Carter's friend), Lisa DeWitt Amore (R. Carter's friend), Nancy Runge (J. Nelson's friend),

**Those with immediate concerns:** Marty Kloska, Katherine Cox (D. Dixon's niece), Gary Deck, Scott Drollinger (R. Carter's friend), Judy Brockway (K. Kelnhofer's friend), Scott Watson, Barbara Stump (R. Stump's sister-in-law), Cheryl Gillins (L. Martin's friend), Amanda Garman Landers (S. Wagoner's friend), Toby and Kim Wagoner, Paul and Patti Ziemnisky (R. Carter's friends), Larry Betka, Dwight Judy (D. Dixon's friend), Vickie Anderson (J. Stump's sister), Landon Potter (S. Burton's cousin), Kathy Grobowski (L. Martin's friend), Mark Spidle (J. Stump's friend), Christopher Graham (H. Steiner's nephew), John Schertz (G. Jahn's nephew), Karla Von Huben (J. Stump's friend), Marie Seaman (D. Boyer's friend), Tina Skender (C. Flint's daughter).

**Those with long-term concerns:** Mason Steiner, Linda Martin, Ann Wise (L. Martin's friend), Emma Winslow (G. Morgan's friend), Bob Murphy (M. Betka's dad), Lindsay Boyden (C. Lee's friend), John White, Larry and Jan German (L. Martin's friend), Marcie and A.J. Wright (L. Flint's cousins), Sam Matthews (home fire), Jane Steiner, John Zollar (E. Donley's brother), Beth Farias (L. Martin's cousin), Sue Burton, Roberto Martinez (R. Carter's friend), Crew Feltner (child with leukemia, K. Kelnhofer's friend), Tina and John Hanson (Vi Hanson's children), Leonard Goldstein (D. Boyer's brother), Patti Root (K. Root's mom), Joyce Cottingham (L. Martin's friend), Mary Kane (K. Root's aunt), Natalie Zollar (E. Donley's niece), Martha Barner, Carole Ronane (J. Stump's friend), Beth Meese (G. Morgan's friend), Sandy Glenn (J. Steiner's cousin), Cookie Galloway (B. Schellhardt's sister), Carol Schrepfer (J. Stump's friend), Ian Anderson (J. Stump's nephew), Karen Peterson (D. Dixon's sister), Troy Flint, John Long (D. Dixon's brother), Brian Lemenager (M. Foster's grandson), Rob Burton Family (J. Stump's brother), John Masengale (S. Burton's dad), Lori Egnaw Vaughan (G. Morgan's friend) and Sophia Voyda (E. Donley's niece).



**Those homebound in assisted living or nursing homes:** Marty Kloska, Mike Blankenship, Judy Benjamin, Sam Terrell, and John Haughee.

**Those in church leadership:** Our Session and Deacons, Rev. Wade, Rev. Ann, Rev. Ruth Santana-Grace and Rev. Shavon Stirling-Louis (General Assembly Co-Moderators), Rev. J. Herbert Nelson (G.A. Clerk), Rev. Jean Wollenberg (Presbytery Moderator), Rebecca Blair (Lead Presbyter).