



NEWSLETTER

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor,
so that you by his poverty might become rich.
II Corinthians 8:9 ESV*



LESSONS AND CAROLS 2024

By Dr. Jesse Nootte

The FPC Sanctuary Choir, along with voices from other local PCA congregations, is hard at work preparing our annual worship service of *Lessons and Carols*. This night has become an integral part of our church's history and is eagerly anticipated by many in our congregation. Not only does it help usher in the Christmas season, but it also reminds us of the wonder and purpose of the Incarnation.

As a choral director, one of my favorite (and most challenging) tasks is selecting the music the choir will sing. For this service, I always try to include a few standard Christmas arrangements. This year, we will sing familiar songs such as: "O Come, Emmanuel," "Angels from the Realms of Glory," "Go Tell it on the Mountain," "Of the Father's Love Begotten," and of course, "The Hallelujah Chorus."

I also include at least one piece annually that offers something new, either textually or musically. In these instances, I seek for an octavo that presents a fresh perspective on a long-standing truth. That special selection this year is called, "Let the Stable Still Astonish." The music is composed by Dan Forrest, arranged on the poetry of Leslie Leyland Fields.

Continue Reading
On Page 2.

INSIDE

Lessons and Carols 2024
Pages 1-2

FPC Harvest Campaign
Page 3

Advent Calendar and
Sermon Series
Page 4

SUNDAYS

Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.
Morning Worship, 10:45 a.m.
Evening Worship, 6:00 p.m.

The text begins,

*Let the stable still astonish;
Straw – dirt floor, dull eyes,
Dusty flanks of donkeys, oxen;
Crumbling, crooked walls;
No bed to carry that pain,
And then, the child.
Rag-wrapped, laid to cry in a trough.
Who would have chosen this?
Who would have said, “Yes,
Let the God of all the heavens and earth
Be born here in this place?*

The author captures the scene well. A stable is a dirty, smelly, damp, and dark place. Certainly, this was not an environment suitable for an infant, much less the God of the universe come in human form. The heaviness of this opening text is reflected in the music. Long, slow notes from the strings sway in agreement – the situation is dire.

To human reasoning, a newborn child should have all the comforts of home. But a newborn king? There should be servants running about, a palace, warm blankets made from the finest woven materials, and a kingdom beaming with anticipation.

However, that is not how our Savior chose to enter our world. The indignation in the question, “Who would have chosen this?” is self-evident. But the answer to this question is unthinkable. The answer to the question posed by the author is: God. It was God’s idea from the beginning. We read in II Corinthians 8:9: “...Although he was rich, he became poor for your sakes...” Philippians 2:7 says, “He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

These opening words alone are enough to give the listener pause to wonder. But that is not the end of the poem. Approximately halfway through this drama, the music suddenly subsides. The camera pans away from the stable and takes aim at a new target – the hearts of men.

*Who but the same God
Who stands in the darker, fouler rooms of our hearts...*

The poet draws a connection between the dismal state of the stable and our own broken human condition. Just as the stable was cold, dark, and odorous, so are our hearts in their natural, fallen condition.

Many in our culture (some even in churches) scoff at such an idea. They say, “I’m no saint, but I’m not as bad as all that. People are all *basically* good.” Unfortunately, scripture disagrees. Jeremiah 17:9 states: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” Roman 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” This truth is difficult to accept and often causes people to recoil with indignation. But truth is a constant that is unaffected by our reaction to it or even our hatred of it.

Thankfully, our journey does not end here. In the end, the music turns from sorrow to hope. The choir and instruments crescendo and swell as the author offers a final and deeply profound thought:

*Who but the same God
Who stands in the darker, fouler rooms of our hearts
And says, “Yes,
Let the God of Heaven and Earth
Be born here –
In this place.*

Yes, believer. The same God who chose to be born in a stable has also chosen to make our hearts, with all its wretchedness and emptiness, his dwelling place. If you belong to Christ, then he lives in you (I Corinthians 6:19; Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 1:27).

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but **Christ who lives in me**. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20).

Think of it! Who would have believed that a holy and perfect God would lower Himself to such a meager state? From a human standpoint, this seems unimaginable. Thankfully, God does not operate according to man’s understanding: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). What hope! What joy! Thanks be to God!

I hope you will worship with us on December 8 at 6:00PM as First Presbyterian Church presents *Lessons and Carols*.

In Christ,
Jesse



FPC HARVEST CAMPAIGN

By Arrington Rhett

God has graciously blessed our congregation with beautiful buildings in which to gather for worship and fellowship! We are grateful for the vision and sacrificial giving of those who helped provide these facilities for the benefit and enjoyment of our church family.

The original four-building complex at our present location was completed at a cost of approximately \$3 million (equivalent to over \$7 million today), and the first worship service was held in August, 1990.

In the mid-2000's, plans were developed for expanding the church's facilities to better minister to children and youth. After acquiring an additional five acres of property, a new educational building (Currie Hall-2010) and a multi-purpose building (McIntosh Hall-2011) were completed.

By God's grace and through the generous giving of His people, we anticipate that the mortgage line of credit associated with the Currie/McIntosh capital project will be fully paid off in 2025!

Church leaders recognize the need for technology and interior improvements of our original facilities—a “refresh” strategy to update audiovisual systems and modernize aesthetic and design qualities campus-wide.

Earlier this year, a planning committee was appointed to work with architects to develop a concept plan for these improvements and to assess the financial viability of the project. Members of the facilities planning committee are Rob King, Shea McNease (Chairman), Lee Norman, Abb Payne,

Jennifer Payne, Arrington Rhett, and Elizabeth Tullos.

The Payne Family has committed to provide a substantial contribution toward the goal of completing improvements outlined in the architects' plans. Church leaders are proposing expenditures of up to \$1.5 million for the project, which will be overseen by the planning committee in consultation with the project architects and contractors.

In all of this, our desire is to create beautiful and welcoming spaces where members and guests may worship and fellowship in the years ahead.

During December, each member of the church family has the opportunity to support the campaign to update our facilities through your prayers, gifts, and pledges to the FPC HARVEST FUND. A campaign brochure describing the proposed projects will be made available to each of our families soon, and our committee members would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

I hope that you will join us in asking the “Lord of the harvest” to bless our efforts together...for His glory!



ADVENT CALENDAR

- December 1 **White Gift Service**, 6 p.m., Sanctuary. *Bring non-perishable food items to be distributed to those who are needy in our community. The children's choirs will lead us in song, followed by the singing of Christmas carols by candlelight!*
- 8 **Service of Lessons and Carols**, 6 p.m., Sanctuary. *We will be led in worship by our Sanctuary Choir, along with guest singers from sister PCA churches, orchestra, and members reading Scripture lessons.*
- 15 **Christmas Caroling**, 5 p.m. *We will meet in Taylor Hall and divide into groups to go into the community to sing for older members of our church and assisted living residents.*
- 24 **Christmas Eve Communion Service**, 5 p.m., Sanctuary. *Pastor Darwin will share a message from the Gospel of Luke.*

There will be no evening service on December 22 or 29.

The church office will be closed for the holidays on December 24 and 25 and January 1.

ADVENT SERMON SERIES

By Darwin Jordan

Webster defines advent as “a coming into use or being” giving these examples: “the advent of spring, the advent of pasteurization, the advent of computers.”

In this season we celebrate the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, past and future. Join us throughout this Advent season as we take a deep dive into the most famous of Christmas stories, which begins with, “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.”

