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EXPRESSIONS

The First Presbyterian Church
Grace Transforms

OUR VISION

A church deeply formed by the Good News of Jesus Christ, experiencing and expressing God's grace together in Hattiesburg.

Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.
Charles Wesley, 1744



Happy Birthday, Dear Jesus

Jesse Noote

"Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear (_____). Happy birthday to you!"

Like it or not, this song has become the default anthem used by many to celebrate the birth of friends and family. Have you ever wondered why we celebrate birthdays? Why do human beings find it necessary to remind themselves year after year that they or a loved one was born? I confess that as the years go by, I tend to appreciate the reminder less and less.

Christmas is also an annual reminder of Jesus' birth. Why do we do this? In what ways is the memory of our Savior's birth different or similar from the way we celebrate our own birthdays? And is there some connection between the song, "Happy Birthday" and the singing of Christmas carols?

First, how did we come to celebrate Jesus' birth in December? While the Bible describes precise locations for the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, the time of year he was physically born is unspecified. The first known mention of December 25 being related to Christ's human birth was around A.D. 336:

"25 Dec.: *natus Christus in Betleem Judeae.*"
Translated: "December 25, Christ born in Bethlehem, Judea."

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SUNDAYS

Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.
Morning Worship, 10:45 a.m.

For a deeper anthropological dive into why we celebrate Christmas on December 25, I refer you to our more knowledgeable reverends. Regardless of how this tradition began, this is the time of year we celebrate the fact that God took human form by way of a both natural (born of a woman) and supernatural (of the Holy Spirit) human birth.

The church's practice of commemorating Christ's birth is in some ways dissimilar from how we celebrate merely human ones. For earthly birthdays, the number of candles on the cake corresponds to the number of years lived. We do not celebrate Christ's birthday in this way because He is the Ageless One. Jesus, the Creator of the universe, unbound by time and space, chose at the appointed time to become human. This act gives Christians even more reason to rejoice and to wonder. Why would a God who had every right to reject His creatures choose to enter their very broken race? The simple and profound answer is found in the most quoted Bible verse of all time. "For God so loved the world…" (John 3:16). Take a moment to let that idea sink in.

On the other hand, the reason we celebrate human birthdays is in some ways quite similar to why we commemorate the Incarnation. The main reason is that we want to remind the world what life was like before and after this person was born. When we sing happy birthday to a loved one, we are in essence saying, "I'm glad you were born." We confess that our lives are better off, enriched, and somehow changed for the better by this person's presence on the earth; and conversely, that the world would have been a poorer place had they not been born.

When was the last time you thought about the implications of Christ's birth? Or even more sobering, what would have happened had he not been born? Think of how empty and hopeless the world would be had He decided that we were not worth such humiliation. More specifically, what would your life be like had He not condescended to rescue you in your fallen state? Christ's birth played a major role in fulfilling his covenant promises, and thereby securing your eternal salvation. That's why Christ's birthday is such a big deal for the Christian. Our very lives – our eternal lives – depended on it. His birth was quite literally the most important event in history. The fact that much of the world uses BC and AD as calendar markers is evidence of its significance.

This leads to another way our births and the Divine birth are alike. We use singing to remember them. We sing Happy Birthday to loved ones. And we sing Christmas carols to Jesus and about Jesus.

Have you ever been in the situation where people spontaneously begin singing happy birthday and you either don't know whose birthday it is, or even their name? You might sing along politely, and then hum during the part when they sing the person's name. However, your singing will probably be less than enthusiastic and feel awkward and disconnected at best.

Contrast that experience with someone you know intimately. It is interesting to observe that someone's willingness to sing happy birthday loudly and proudly corresponds directly to a person's relationship with the one being celebrated. In a more personal setting, everyone in the room knows who will sing well, and who will bellow the loudest (and possibly out of tune). Someone might insert an extra lyric that only this particular birthday boy or girl will appreciate. No one cares how good or bad it sounds, or that someone improvises a lyric. The lack of self-consciousness often associated with singing in public is outweighed by the desire to make sure the object of their affection feels their ardent love and appreciation.

So as we sing carols as a church family this Christmas season, let your voice reflect your personal relationship with the object of your affection. The Christian faith is a singing faith. Sing joyfully and unapologetically. May our sanctuary (and our homes, vehicles, and businesses) ring with enthusiastic, grateful hearts: "Happy birthday, dear Jesus. I'm so glad you were born!"

Please join us on Sunday, December 13th at 6:00PM as we present Lessons and Carols, where we will proclaim the most important birth in human history.

Merry Christmas!

Jesse

Welcome Our Newest Members!



Katy and Chad Carmichael are coming to FPC from Temple Baptist Church. Katy is a photographer and Chad is a finance executive. They have three children: Annie (10), Crew (6), and Mary Carter (3).

Dawn Harmon moved to Hattiesburg from Illinois last year and works in sales. She has four adult children and three grandchildren ages 3, 2, and 1!





Jessica and Carter Holland are coming to FPC from 4 Points Church. Carter is a Physician Assistant and Jessica is a stay-at-home mom to Sam (5) and Jonathan (2).

Chelli and Bobby Jones are coming to FPC from Heritage Church along with their daughters, **Lillie Jo** and **Caitlin**. They also have a son, Aubrey, who is a sophomore at William Carey University. Chelli is a teacher and Bobby is a family doctor, and they are both singing in our Christmas choir!





Ina and Buster Pace are coming to us from First Methodist Church of Laurel. Ina is a homemaker and Buster is a business owner. They have a daughter and two sons and seven grandchildren (including our own Clark, Finn, and Jane Pace)!

Lauren and Ryan Robertson are coming to FPC from Parkway Heights United Methodist Church. Lauren is a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) and Ryan is a Chief Financial Officer, CPA, and attorney. The Robertsons have two daughters: Marion (8) and Rivers (6).





Debra and Kirk Smith moved to Sumrall a couple of years ago to be near their daughter, Kim Palermo, D, and their boys. Debra worked previously as an administrator in Christian education and later at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, where she and Kirk met. Kirk works in medical research, and they have been married for 7 years. Between them, they have six children and 18 grandchildren!



Millie and Randy Swan are coming to us from Temple Baptist Church. Millie is a retired health care executive and Randy is a retired TV anchor and news director. They have two daughters: Ivey Bell (Garner) and Zoey, along with two grandchildren, Millicent and James, all of whom are now members of our church!

Zoey Swan is a recent college graduate and is pursuing a career in medical sales.

Christmas at First Presbyterian Church

White Gift Candlelight Service & Carol Sing

Sunday, December 6, 5:00 p.m., Sanctuary

Children's choirs and musicians will help lead us in worship, with a homily from Pastor Darwin. We are asked to bring non-perishable food items to the service that will be used to restock the FPC food pantry and to distribute to those in need.

Service of Lessons & Carols

Sunday, December 13, 6:00 p.m., Sanctuary

Featuring the FPC Sanctuary Choir, guest singers from area PCA churches, and orchestra.

Christmas Caroling

Sunday, December 20, 4:30 p.m.

We will meet at the entrance to Taylor Hall and divide into groups to sing for homebound members.

Christmas Eve Communion Service

Thursday, December 24, 5:00 p.m., Sanctuary

Rev. Davis Morgan preaching.



The church office will be closed for the holidays on December 24 and 25 and January 1, 2027

Advent Sermon Series

Pastor Darwin will be preaching a series entitled "**God On the Hall**" at morning worship services during Advent. Here are the Scripture texts for each week's message:

November 29	Isaiah 9:1-7	**Light in Darkness**
December 6	Luke 2:1-20	**Who *is* this Jesus?**
December 13	Matthew 1:18-25	**What does this mean, "He will save his people from their sin"?**
December 20	Matthew 2:1-12	**What will we do with Jesus? What *are* we doing with Jesus?**

Let every heart prepare him room…. Isaac Watts, 1719

Year End Giving to First Presbyterian Church

If you wish to make a gift to the church prior to year-end, your mailed check should be dated and postmarked no later than December 31. The church office will also be open December 28-31 to receive your gift in person. Online gifts to the General Fund or Harvest Fund may be made through the church website (www.fpchattiesburg.org) and should occur before midnight on December 31 to be considered as received in 2026.

For assistance with your gift, please contact Arrington Rhett.