

1P FIRST PRES

December 2018

A red tractor is shown from a side profile, moving from right to left across a field. It is pulling a large, dark, textured pile of hay or straw. The field is covered in a dense, wavy pattern of light and dark green, suggesting a field of tall grass or crops. In the background, there is a line of trees or bushes. The sky is a solid, textured blue. The overall style is that of a painting or a digital illustration with a heavy, wavy texture.

TIME FOR
JOY

Dear First Pres,

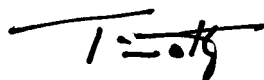
I hope you had a Thanksgiving full of reasons to give thanks—and at least a bit of time to express your gratitude to God for His presence and provision in your life. Now Christmas is coming and your First Pres pastors and staff are praying that it will truly be a **Time for Joy** in the life of our congregation. We're making all the preparations we can to help.



This issue of *First Pres Magazine* gives you a glimpse of all that is in store for us this Christmas season, but we don't hold these events simply to give you more things to put on your already full calendar. Every one of them is an opportunity to reach into our neighborhoods, to reach out to our community with a warm invitation. Even the devotional pieces written by our preaching team can be an introduction to the hope and joy we have in Christ. Why not pick up an extra copy of this magazine and pass it to a friend who needs to meet Jesus?

I do look forward to celebrating Christ's birth with you this season. And I hope to meet some new folks, close to your hearts, who might just be ready to spend their first Christmas truly knowing the reason we have for celebration.

Yours in Christ,



Tim McConnell
Lead Pastor

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FIRST PRES MAGAZINE

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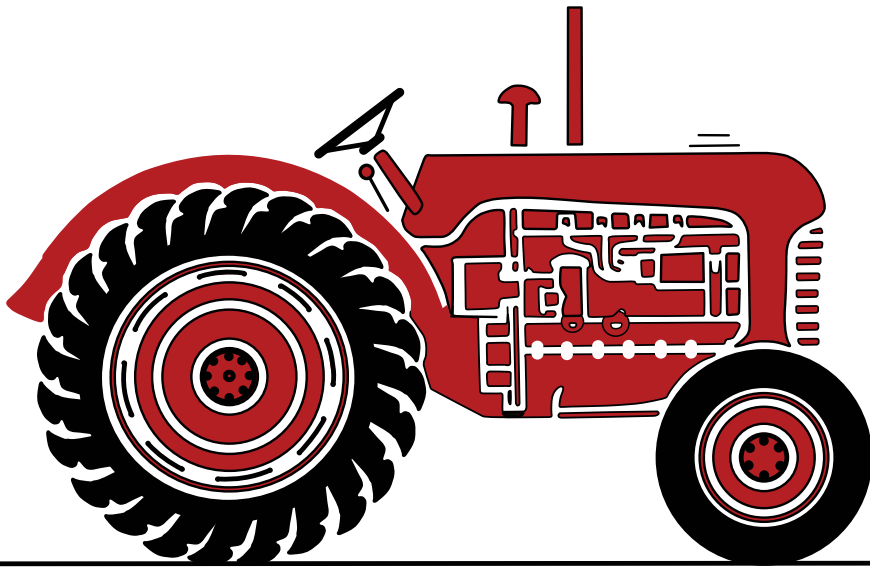
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ONE RED TRACTOR

By Tim McConnell

"Pastor Tim, why is there a tractor in my church?" Good question.

A Different Agenda

Do you have your to-do list made up? It's Christmastime and we're expected to get everything right. Are you "Seizing the Season"? Are you "Winning at Winter"? Are you "Crushing Christmas" this year? That language can be kind of fun when we want to celebrate an effort that went well or a moment we deeply enjoyed with family or friends. But it also expresses a little of the pressure we all feel to make this month Pinterest-worthy or record-setting.

In the middle of our ceaseless attempts to get things done, to achieve, to succeed—in our desperation to unlock the achievement "Killing it at Christmas" or "Hammering the Holidays," do you think we're missing something? I think God has a different agenda—that God has it in mind to interrupt our striving and succeeding, our failing and faltering, our "efforting" and longing. I want to suggest that God intends to interrupt our agenda with His own. On God's agenda for Christmas is one three-letter word: J-O-Y.

The Slow Growth of Joy

Christmas—the birth of Jesus Christ—was an interruption. It was an invasion, in fact.

God interrupted the decline and self-destruction of the world and sent His own Son into the world as an infant. Jesus—God—took on flesh and moved into our neighborhood. It was not the next thing on our agenda. It was unexpected. The angels announced it as *good news of great joy for all people*. The question is, how does this great joy intersect with my life?

Joy is not easy to attain. Joy is not instantly produced. Joy is a fruit. Paul lists it as a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. Eugene Peterson writes in his *Message Study Bible*,

Fruit is the result of a long organic process. This process is complex and intricate. Fruit isn't something made, manufactured, or engineered. It isn't the product of drawing boards or committee meetings or sophisticated technologies. It isn't the invention of a genius. It's the result of a life of faith that is both germinated and nurtured by God's Spirit.

Do you know about winter wheat? Seeds sown in late fall germinate as winter wheat. When the frost comes, the young plants go into a kind of hibernation—nearly dead. But when the sun warms the soil again, the wheat that is produced is full of protein, more abundant than normal wheat and better for pasta

and cake flour because of the cold winter wait it has survived.

Joy is not something you buy at the store. It isn't something you fake or sprinkle over your December calendar while you run yourself ragged "Killing it at Christmas." It is something that grows when you take time to wait and watch, resting in the hope of what Jesus has promised.

Sowing Seeds of Joy

The Scripture says what we sow is what we will reap. **"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life,"** says Galatians 6:7-8. So it is important to ask: what have you sown? What is germinating and growing under the frozen soil of your life? Have you sown seeds of joy in the Spirit or destructive seeds of selfishness and envy and lust? The time is certainly right to sow spiritual seeds now so that we can know the fruit of the Spirit of Christ in the future. I wonder what you are doing right now to cultivate joy, both in your own life and the lives of those around you.

Here is some good news: In Christ, seeds can be transformed. Jesus saw himself as a seed. He told His disciples, **"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life"** (John 12:23-25). Jesus tells us that He is the kernel of seed, that when He went to the cross He was starting a transformation process. Once that seed germinated, grew and broke through the surface of the soil, His death would bring life. Your life in His hands is exactly the same. Everything you keep tight in your fist will remain lifeless

seed, but everything you scatter and plant, allow to die, allow to be given over to Christ, these things will be redeemed and transformed. That's why the Psalm is true, saying, **"Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them"** (Psalm 126:5-6). Seeds planted with tears are transformed in the pierced and loving hands of Jesus, through his own death and resurrection, they are transformed into fruit of joy.

So, there's a tractor inside the church right now. (No kidding!) One red tractor. It stands as a symbol of breaking the soil and planting the seed. It is a reminder that we are those who sow, and we should sow to the Spirit for fruits of joy in Christ. It is testimony to the waiting and watching soul. It reminds us of the winter wheat frozen in the icy ground, waiting for the sun to return and the green shoots to break out. What has been sown will be reaped, and all that is given over to Christ will be transformed into the fruit of joy. It stands for waiting, watching, longing, hoping that the promises of God will one day soon come true. But it is there for one more reason. It testifies that there is a moment—however long-off it may feel—when it is time to take in the harvest with celebration.

The curse in C. S. Lewis' Narnia was that it was always winter and never Christmas. It was a land always frozen, always waiting, and never reaching the celebration. Christmas is an interruption of hopelessness, an interruption of God's own making. It stops our striving in its tracks. It puts the brakes on all our rushing and racing. It says, "Wait! Stop! Look! Here it is! Here it breaks out! Life is breaking up from the frozen soil! Good news! Great joy! All people! To you, Jesus Christ is born a Savior!" Now is the time to celebrate.

So come stand by the tractor. Stop and look. Take a picture with your family or friends. It's Christmas! It is **Time for Joy.**



LIGHT + LIFE for the CITY

Vision Sunday
January 27, 2019

Simultaneous worship services in the
Sanctuary and Worship Center at 9 and 11 a.m.
Congregational meeting at 10:15 a.m.

Enabling Cookies

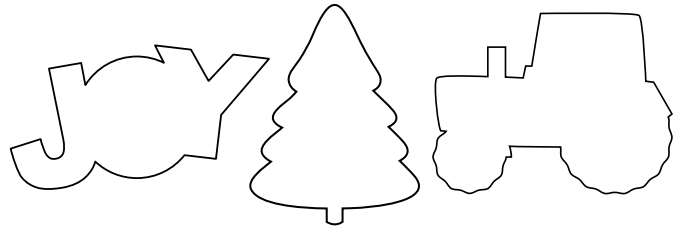
When you pull out an old family recipe and prepare it with love, you understand something of what it means to cultivate joy. It takes time, thought and care. It can be messy. But the results are worth it! The effort expended and the time spent waiting for that pan to come out of the oven only makes the final product sweeter. This Advent, why not bake some cookies and spread some joy?



Do you know your neighbors on each side? Share some cookies and learn their names.



Join in the neighborhood s during Carols and Cocoa take plates of cookies with y on December 16.



*If you're not a baker,
make a Christmas
ornament of your
cookie cutter as a
long-lasting
reminder to lean
into joy.*



Cookies: Michelle Adams-Fooshee



A Gift for You

When you come to worship on December 2, your church will have a fun gift for you. Each family will receive a cookie cutter, and with it, an invitation to attend one of our nine services of worship on Christmas Eve. If you have friends and neighbors in mind whom you know you'd like to invite to come to church with you on Christmas Eve, you're welcome to take an extra cookie cutter and invitation for them. Perhaps you can even deliver your invitation along with a plate of fresh cookies! Throughout December, share photos of your cookie creations with the hashtag #1PTimeforJoy.

CHRISTMAS at FIRST PRES

Here's all you need to know about what's going on during the holiday season at First Pres. Find details and links to register at first-pres.org/christmas2018.

Something Significant for Christmas

Now through January 1

Give meaningful gifts to your friends and family and support First Pres Local and Global Mission Partners. If you haven't already received a catalog in your mailbox, you can pick one up at First Pres.

Questions? Call 719-884-6233.

Breakfast in Bethlehem

Saturday, December 1, at 9 or 11 a.m.

Families can enjoy a pancake breakfast together, complete with simple crafts for little hands and an interactive Christmas play presented by our middle school choir.

Questions? Call 719-884-6126.

The Gifts of Christmas

Thursday, December 6, at 6 p.m., or Friday, December 7, at 11:30 a.m.

Women's Life will offer two seatings for this year's Christmas celebration—Thursday dinner or Friday lunch. Kappy Stewart

is our speaker and childcare is available with preregistration for infants through kindergartners.

Questions? Call 719-884-6117.

Christmas Joy! Concert

Sunday, December 9, at 2 or 4:30 p.m.

Two shows at the Pikes Peak Center offer hope, beauty and the perfect music to kick off the Christmas season. Christmas Joy! is a musical collaboration bringing together the First Pres Sanctuary Choir and many of Colorado Springs' most talented musicians.

Questions? Call 719-884-6113;

Tickets—719-520-SHOW.

Vivace Ringers Concert

Thursday, December 13, at 6:30 p.m.

"Jingle Bellathon" is the theme for this fun, free handbell concert, given in partnership with the Pikes Peak Youth Ringers.

Questions? Call 719-884-6113.



Men's Christmas Brunch

Saturday, December 15, at 9:30 a.m.

Bring your son or grandson, dad, granddad or just yourself for great food, Christmas carols and guest speaker and First Pres friend, Nate Stratman from Hope Community Church, Wilmington, North Carolina.

Questions? Call 719-884-6119.

Carols and Cocoa

Sunday, December 16, at 6 p.m.

Gather in homes across the city for a light meal, then go out into the neighborhoods to share Christmas carols and smiles.

Questions? Call 719-884-6117.

Christmas Sunday, December 23

We'll worship at all of our regular services. Children's, Youth and Adult Sunday Communities will not meet.

Questions? Call 719-884-6100.

Christmas Eve

Nine services on Monday, December 24, celebrate the birth of our Savior, including a morning children's service, traditional candlelight services, contemporary services



with video preaching and an acoustic Celtic service of communion. In addition, many are needed to serve on our welcome team and make guests feel at home. Sign up to serve!

Questions? Call 719-884-6100.

New Year's Eve

Ring in 2019 with evening worship and communion on December 31.

Questions? Call 719-884-6100.

For the KING and the KINGDOM

Meet Lydia Lockhart
Pastor of Mission Engagement



Lydia Lockhart joined our staff in September and was ordained and installed on November 25. Lydia is thankful to have had an opportunity to overlap in service with Mission Engagement Associate Susan Buenger, who retires in December and who has faithfully cultivated relationships with our Global and Local Mission Partners over the past 15 years.

How Lydia's childhood shaped her heart for the global mission of the Church

"I grew up the daughter of two pastors, so I call myself a PK². My mom was the solo pastor of the church where I grew up, and my dad worked in nonprofits and then as a professor. When I was 9, we adopted my sister from Nicaragua, which was a three-year process. At the dinner table, we talked about poverty and social inequalities, so I grew up aware of other cultures and praying for them."

On her roundabout journey to becoming a pastor

"I attended the University of Virginia and graduated with a Spanish and Sociology double

major. While I was there, I led small groups as part of a Christian fellowship. I found I loved studying the Bible and sharing what I learned.

"At that point, my mom said, 'You should go to seminary.' I didn't want to at first because I couldn't see myself doing what she did. I wanted to be a missionary.

"After three different international internships, I was a social worker with at-risk kids in rural Texas. When they asked why I was serving them with such love, I wasn't permitted to share about my faith because of the legal constraints of the field. So that was part of my impetus for going to Fuller Seminary and studying for an MDiv—I wanted to connect my faith with that kind of ministry."

Don't I know you?

If Lydia seems to be a familiar face, it's because she interned with CityServe and First Pres Middle School Ministry from June through December 2017.

"I was exploring how a pastoral call could look different from being a solo pastor at a church. I was curious about the dynamic of being in a bigger church, because I had grown up

going to only smaller churches. I liked seeing how the pastors worked together and shared roles. I could see myself being part of a team.”

Learning by doing

Throughout her training, Lydia has gained a holistic view of world mission while putting her hand to varied and meaningful work:

- serving in a girls home in Guatemala;
- studying root causes of malnutrition in Nicaragua;
- hosting U.S. short-term teams with Young Life in Nicaragua;
- starting a tutoring and mentoring program for 4th and 5th graders in rural Texas;
- serving as outreach director for an ECO church plant called Missio in California.

Single-minded

Asked to summarize what compels her in life and in ministry, Lydia has no hesitation:

“For the King and the Kingdom—Jesus is the King, and I want everybody to know Him. And also ‘For the Kingdom’—to understand what it means to be a citizen of God’s Kingdom and to live into the calling God has on our lives as the Church, and that is the restoration of the world.”

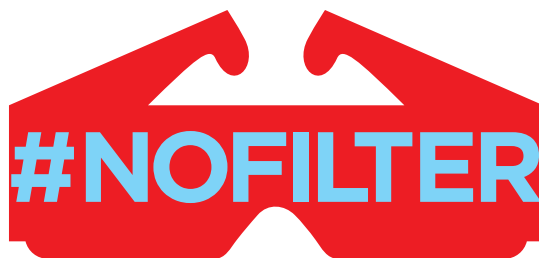
We welcome Lydia and pray for God to use her to shape and grow our rich mission partnerships both locally and globally. Learn more about Mission Engagement at www.first-pres.org/mission.



HIGH SCHOOL WINTER CAMP

Friday, February 1 to
Sunday, February 3
Breckenridge, CO

Register at
www.first-pres.org/students



MIDDLE SCHOOL WINTER CAMP

Friday, February 15 to
Sunday, February 17
Ponderosa Retreat and
Conference Center

Register at
www.first-pres.org/students

Sunday, December 2

A Joy Exercise

John 16:16–22

Eunice McGarrahan, Pastor of Adult Education

The disciples are thoroughly confused by their long conversation with Jesus (John 13-16). He's told them about His death, resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit. They just don't understand it. They are confused and somewhat depressed. But Jesus is preparing them for the turbulent times ahead. What I love about Jesus is that He doesn't tell them to just 'man up' when the bad times come. He expects them to be in the midst of deep grief. This seems like an odd setup for talking about joy, doesn't it?

This, however, is exactly the right time to talk about joy, because Jesus knows that the disciples' suffering will not only be replaced by joy—it will be transformed into joy. We would prefer all joy, all the time. But Jesus tells them (and us) that we cannot have joy without suffering. This may be difficult to grasp, but we see this truth more concretely when we look at our own lives in a rearview mirror, and we see it in the suffering of fellow believers. Joni Eareckson Tada, who has been paralyzed for most of her life, has said that her suffering helps her see heaven and fills her with the joy of anticipation. She thinks that if she had not been so afflicted, she would hardly think of heaven at all. For her, suffering and joy go together. Recognizing that connection cultivates joy in our lives.

We are in a time of Advent, where we are waiting to see the birth of a Savior. Just like the disciples, we want to see Jesus, but when will He appear? "In a little while." That answer is too ambiguous for impatient

people because it tells us we are going to have to wait. Jesus assures us, though, that we will see Him even though He now seems invisible. But what should bring us real joy in our suffering is that Jesus says that He sees us. We are never out of His sight, and that is cause for rejoicing.

TIME FOR JOY:

Spend some time prayerfully reflecting on a time of suffering in your past. In what ways did you see your suffering turned into joy?

PRAY:

Gracious and merciful God, thank You that you always see me as I wait to see You, and that Your constant presence in my life brings joy out of pain. Amen.

A Bundle of Joy

Luke 1:39–50

Katie Fowler, Pastor of Discipleship

As I write this, I am less than five weeks out from my due date. By the time we look together at Luke 1:39–50 on the second Sunday of Advent, I'll already have a new son in my arms. Baby is coming. The Fowler family is in waiting mode.

Raise your hand if you love to wait.

"Flight 2454 is now delayed."

"Current wait time: 95 mins."

"Please take a number and take a seat."

We don't generally think of waiting as something enjoyable. Waiting can be hard. Frustrating. Tedious. We wonder when the thing we hope for—the thing we long for—will come about. When will the night give way to morning? When will we arrive?

But what if the waiting itself is actually producing something? What if the waiting is time for something good and beautiful to be cultivated? What if God doesn't waste even the waiting?

In Eugene Peterson's Bible paraphrase *The Message*, we find these words concerning what it means to wait for God to do what He says He will do—renew all of creation: "That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don't see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy" (from Romans 8).

We are enlarged in the waiting. (At 35 weeks pregnant, I say, "No kidding.") And here's the thing: we know God keeps His word. His track record has proven Him

trustworthy. What has been promised will come to be. There is joy in expectancy.

Mary was in waiting mode in Luke 1. But she believed God. She trusted that God would keep His word. **"Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"** (Luke 1:45).

Joy will come, dear one. Joy will come. Happy are those who believe the Lord will do it.

How do we cultivate this expectancy?

TIME FOR JOY:

Light a candle and remind yourself that the Lord Jesus is present with you. Slowly read Psalm 27:13–14 out loud:

I remain confident of this:

**I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.**

Wait for the Lord;

**be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord.**

PRAY:

Lord, help me to wait on you. In Jesus' Name.

Sunday, December 16

Because God Said

Zephaniah 3:14–20

Jim DeJarnette, Minister of Worship and Music

**"The Lord your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing."
– Zephaniah 3:17**

Outrageously creative American composer Leonard Bernstein, upon completing one of his symphonies, was so pleased with what he had done that he ran out to his swimming pool, rejoicing, and jumped in fully clothed, shoes and all! The picture is one of total celebration. Similarly, the image in Zephaniah 3:17 is of our Lord rejoicing over us—literally singing and dancing—in unrestrained celebration.

God's pleasure over us is evident from the very beginning. Upon the completion of His creation, He pronounces it "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

At the baptism of His Son Jesus, He says **"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased"** (Luke 3:22). And, of course, we are told that the birth of this same Beloved Son is good news that will cause great joy for all of us (Luke 2:10).

Joy is a gift; Jesus is a gift straight from God! **"To us a son is given"** (Isaiah 9:6). He is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace—what a gift!

When we struggle to understand how to find joy—where it comes from, whether it

can be ours—we need only remember **"The joy of the Lord is our strength"** (Nehemiah 8:10). Joy is founded in God, and He gives it to us as a gift. His joy is our strength! It is as solid and dependable as the "Everlasting God," who has been our dwelling place in all generations (Psalm 90:1). This is joy that no one can take away (John 16:22) because it resides in God, and He has chosen to give it to us as a gift in Jesus Christ. The Lord is mighty to save; He is our strength and our song. He is our Joy!

TIME FOR JOY:

Let's follow our Lord's example this season—the God who rejoices over us with singing and dancing! Let's jump into the pool, clothes and all, giving ourselves over to unrestrained joy so vast that it can comfort, heal, restore, transform, ultimately bringing peace and assurance, as only the joy of God's salvation can.

PRAY:

God, free my heart and mind to share in Your unrestrained joy, for Your glory.

Joy to Share

Luke 1:11–25

Greg Hartnett, Stevens Fellow

Growing up, we always gathered with my dad's side of the family on Christmas Eve. He's one of seven kids, so these parties typically had upwards of 50 people attending! My favorite moment in our celebrations always came toward the end of the night. One of my uncles would inevitably jump on the piano and begin to play and sing Christmas carols—always the old classics, and always changing the lyrics to tease various family members. ("I put a tack on Patti's chair... Greg snitched on me!" Or, "Mary Therese got run over by a reindeer..." Or, "I saw Darla kissing Santa Claus....") If you weren't singing along, you would soon find your name plugged into a song! The best thing about this joyful tradition was that everyone at the party was involved and it became a running joke for our entire family.

This week, we think about what happens when we get to share joy with others. In Luke 1:11–25, Zechariah and Elizabeth are presented with incredible news, but instead of celebrating with their friends, Zechariah becomes silent and Elizabeth goes into seclusion. But when John is finally born, the entire neighborhood shows up and Zechariah breaks out in song to share his "joy and delight" (Luke 1:14) with those around him. This shared joy leads to a sense of awe throughout the countryside and conversations about the ongoing work of the Lord (Luke 1:64–66). Zechariah's joy ends up involving and influencing an entire region!

TIME FOR JOY:

The joy of singing with family and friends pales in comparison with the joy of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with those around us. It's not too late to invite someone to join you in worship on Christmas Eve. Consider inviting someone who doesn't know Jesus to share in your joy, to sing our church-family's favorite songs and to find themselves wrapped up in God's story this Christmas.

PRAY:

Lord, increase my joy in You this Christmas season, and cause joy to overflow from all areas of my life, that I may share it with others!

Christmas Eve, December 24

Great Joy! Luke 2:1–11

Tom Pipkin, Pastor of Family Ministries

It was Christmas Eve of 1989. Dawn and I had just returned home from an exhausting, high-energy, week-long ski camp in North Carolina with 260 teenagers—and we were two days behind schedule. Upon departing the camp, we had heard that we would be traveling through an unusual southern blizzard all the way back to central Florida. But we never imagined that our busloads of anxious high school kids and youth leaders would be grounded by an ice storm in Jacksonville, Florida!

Well, we got the kids safely home to their families in time for Christmas, but we had missed our flight to Colorado to be with my family. On top of that, there was no power in our freezing cold, dark house. We had to sleep elsewhere that cold Florida Christmas Eve. To make things even worse, Dawn was feeling a bit queasy.

Christmas day proved to us that God's mercies are new every morning. Dawn woke me up with "Merry Christmas! We're going to have a baby!" Though it wasn't the angel Gabriel who let us know, it was still a delightful, incredible surprise—and, as with all conceptions and births, a beautiful miracle! Needless to say, that was our favorite Christmas present of all time. That baby turned out to be our firstborn son, Luke. The announcement of his coming birth and all of the days and years since have brought us immense joy. But even

that joy doesn't compare to the joy we have in knowing the Baby who was born at Christmas to bring great joy to all people!

TIME FOR JOY:

Our God can do anything. He is a God of great surprises and incredible miracles, of things more spectacular than we can dream up or imagine. How might you bring joy to those around you this Christmas? Especially in the face of difficulty, with whom might God want you to share an unexpected blessing?

PRAY:

Thank you, Lord, for giving us Jesus, the greatest, most joyful gift of all!

Receiving God's Joyous Gift

Luke 2:10

Tim McConnell, Lead Pastor

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

– Luke 2:10

Joy is not something you and I create. It isn't a product we can manufacture. It is something God grows in us. But what can we do to cultivate joy? Can we, like a farmer in winter, look down over the soil of our lives and believe—the seeds are down there, the soil is good, the sun will come again and these dead things will once again sprout up, blossom and bear the sweetest fruit of joy?

Today there are gifts under the tree. They sit prepared. Will they be opened? Most of what God calls us to do is receive. Have you ever thought of that? Jesus said abide in me and you will bear fruit. What is it to abide in Christ but to receive? It is to hold on to Jesus, as Jesus holds on to you, and feel His life, His Spirit, flowing into your life. To receive.

We are saved by grace, simply through believing. Believing is another way of talking about receiving. I receive what Christ has done on my behalf. I accept the grace offered as a gift in His name. I believe and receive the gift God has for me. I receive a Savior.

That's the challenge. Will you have a Savior? Will you answer the invitation and be the guest, abide in the vine, be the receptor of life, admit your spiritual need and allow a Savior to come close to you? Will you allow yourself to receive the embrace of the loving Father, and simply be the one being hugged today?

The angel said, "I bring you..." Here comes a gift. Will you receive it? Most of what God asks of us is simply to receive. "I bring you good news that will cause great joy."

Remember the red tractor in the plaza at church? Like a farmer looking down in winter over a frozen field, we wait and wait, we watch and watch for something like joy to come up again. Look up this morning and see the angels before you. Lift your gaze to the gifts of God all around you. I bring you good news. It is great joy! God has come. Jesus Christ is born a Savior. Receive.

Merry Christmas!

TIME FOR JOY:

Go out and plant a seed in the frozen ground—who knows what might happen come spring? As you stand and look down on the winter soil, give thanks for one unexpected gift in your life this year.

PRAY:

Almighty God, what love is this at Christmas, that in your Son Jesus Christ you have joined together Your greatest glory with our greatest need? All we seek is found in You. Bring us, our families and our friends, good news of great joy for all people today as we receive the Savior. Bring Your glory, and bring our joy. In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 30

Joy to the Past

Luke 1:68–79

Pat Hartsock, Pastor to Men

Have you ever waited and waited for something you were promised? Has the wait been agonizing? Has that wait ever been awarded with an answer that exceeded your expectations and filled your heart with joy? My mom and dad died before I was 21. I lost my family. For four years I prayed to have a family again. God answered my prayer. The answer far exceeded my expectations: He gave me Ann Squires to be my bride! We waited for four years while attending seminary to start a family and were told in year four we could not have children. We cried and immediately got down on our knees and prayed to God, "If you could do a miracle with Abraham and Sarah, please do it for us." Again, we waited. Almost five months passed and our first son, Ryan Christian, was on the way. Joy filled our hearts.

Those waits were not nearly as long as Israel's. Israel waited more than 700 years for a Messiah. They waited and waited and waited. Zechariah says, **"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them."** How had God come to his people and redeemed them? He came through the birth of Jesus Christ. God came in the flesh. The answer far exceeded any of their expectations. Joy, joy, joy!

TIME FOR JOY:

Our hope and joy in the future is often instructed by God's faithfulness in our past. Intentionally, as an individual or as a family, take some time this Christmas season and look back on your life. Reflect on God's faithfulness to you and let those reflections fill your hearts with joy.

PRAY:

You are a remarkable God who has been faithful in our past. Your faithfulness fills our hearts with joy. You have showered our lives with blessings and answers to our prayers. Lord, continue to fill our hearts with joy—Your joy. Your joy, O Lord, is our strength.

Joy to the Future

Isaiah 12:1-6

John Goodale, Pastor of Care

A Scottish pastor named Thomas Chalmers once identified what he considered to be three grand essentials of happiness: something to do, something to love and something to hope for. While the first two qualities occur in the present moment, the third, hope, is different, for it looks out ahead. Chalmers rightly identified that without hope for the future, something can die within us.

Isaiah's words hold out a promise to his readers—but it's a promise still to be experienced sometime in the future. This is consistent with the biblical narrative we see again and again between God and His people: Abram was given the promise of a son; the Israelites were given the promise of a land; David was given the promise of a throne; God's people were given the promise of a Savior. And since Jesus entered this world to save His people, we've been given the promise of a glorious future with Him for all eternity.

I can still vividly recall my joyful expectation and anticipation as a child, waiting for Christmas to come with all that I hoped would be good. As we grow older, we continue to joyfully and expectantly look towards what lies ahead: an upcoming vacation, a visit from family, a new baby or a wedding. Our joy occurs not only in the moment of experience, but also in the season of anticipation.

As we turn our calendars to 2019, we look ahead into the unknown of a new year—waiting, like Isaiah's audience, for the good that lies ahead. But our waiting is not passive. We

wait actively as God's people, confidently leaning upon the Lord's promises, joyfully and expectantly trusting in the life-giving experiences He has in store for each of us this next year.

TIME FOR JOY:

Reflect on moments in 2018 that provided you a great sense of joy. Which of these moments were unanticipated last January 1? Thank God for those unexpected joyful moments—and cultivate a sense of joyful anticipation for what the Lord will do in 2019.

PRAY:

Lord Jesus, thank you for all that you desire to do in my life and to reveal of Yourself to me this next year—may your promises and presence be a source of great joy for me!

Christmas Eve at First Pres

SANCTUARY

10 a.m., 12, 2, 4, 5:30, 7 & 10:45 p.m.

WORSHIP CENTER

4 & 5:30 p.m.

www.first-pres.org/christmaseve



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