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UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

December 21, 2020

Greetings and Grace and Peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,

Thank you to all you who joined our 8:30 am Zoom worship as well as those who joined via Facebook Live, Zoom, or in person for our 10:30 am morning worship. I appreciate Linda Clutter for being our online liturgist and for Janet Myers for being our in-person liturgist. Thank you all so much for your willingness to serve. What a blessing to see everyone in worship. I do appreciate the kindness and grace of all of those who were present virtually Sunday. I tried to make the church as Christmassy as I could because I know how difficult it is not to be present personally in worship.

Let us join in prayer for safety as the Pfizer vaccine and Moderna vaccine are distributed and given to health care workers and later to those in nursing homes and assisted living facilities and front-line workers. We continue to follow protocols of mask wearing, social distancing, and staying away from crowds, temperature monitoring, with the addition of a personal waiver for those who wish to join our in-person activities. Please know that we will maintain our protocols we have in place to ensure we are safely gathered. Please know that if you have been around anyone that has been ill or if you feel under the weather, please stay home and join us virtually if you can.

We will be able to have in-person Blue Christmas service on the longest night, December 21, 2020 at 6:30 pm in the Center UMC sanctuary. I would invite you to join us either virtually or in person, especially if you have lost a loved one this year. Another thing very special this year on December 21st is that you can witness something that hasn't been seen in nearly 800 years – the “Christmas Star” or “Star of Bethlehem” as it has been called. Two planets haven't appeared this relatively close together from Earth's vantage point since the Middle Ages. Patrick Hartigan, astronomer at Rice University told Forbes “You'd have to go all the way back to before dawn on March 4, 1226, to see a closer alignment between these objects visible in the night sky.” Stargazers in the northern hemisphere should turn their heads and telescopes to the southwest portion of the sky about 45 minutes after sunset to see the planets align December 21. However, reportedly sightings can be seen throughout that entire week. What a Christmas blessing to see the Bethlehem Star reminding us of that first Christmas night in Bethlehem when God came down to earth in a tiny babe named Jesus. What a wonderful reminder that God is with us and has always been and will always be with you.

We do tentatively we plan to have Saguache UMC's Christmas Eve candle lighting service virtually and in-person with protocols in place December 24th at 5 pm followed by Center UMC's service virtually and in-person with protocols in place at 7 pm. Please pray that our numbers stay low and that we are able to do this safely.

We finish our Advent Study this Wednesday evening, December 23rd at 6:30pm via our Zoom link, as we will conclude our Adam Hamilton's Advent Study *Incarnation*. We hope you will join us.

Remember that access to any worship is posted on our www.umcofcenter.com website, so feel free to go back and watch what you may have missed and forward it to your friends. The Story behind the Songs is on Facebook Live every Wednesday at 1 pm. The bishop's Advent devotion is on Saturday evening on the conference Facebook page at 5 pm and I have posted a link on our Facebook page. Advent devotions on our Facebook page are posted Monday – Friday focusing on our Advent readings which began November 29, 2020. These are meant to develop our acts of piety through prayer, reading scripture, and daily devotions. On Wednesday Adam Hamilton's Advent Study *Incarnation* began December 2nd and is open to anyone who wishes to join using our Zoom platform. Please let Hannah or me know so we can get you the book for the study. Remember the Zoom platform can be accessed by a telephone; you don't have to have internet or a computer to participate; you just dial the number. When participating in any of the virtual services or bible studies, we will be using our Zoom platform which allows us to participate via phone or computer. The link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8678651613?pwd=VlVDejlBRVBjT0tYNXVtUG42QTFNdz09/> that can be clicked on or pasted in your browser. It should take you to our Zoom platform. If you have the Zoom app, you can go to the app on your phone or your computer and type in Meeting ID: 867 865 1613 and enter the password: 2618860. If you wish to use your phone (cell or landline) without internet call +1 (346) 248-7799 US (Houston) or +1 (669) 900-6833 US (San Jose). Enter the Meeting ID: 867 865 1613 and then the Password: 2618860. You can call me at (504) 261-8860 if you need assistance.

We were able to deliver 105 Adopt a Veterans bag to Homelake on Friday due to your generosity and the generosity of so many churches in the valley. The school picked up 18 packed food baskets for those in need from the Kiwanis Club of Center; our church was able to make a contribution to that effort along with a personal contribution from Glenda Holcomb. Thank you so much for your generosity.

Yoga with Ms. Nancy had to be canceled due to weather and hopefully will resume on Tuesdays and Fridays at 9:30 am next week.

I would like to thank those of you who joined virtually for my CPE graduation Saturday. I appreciate your support.

As we come to the end of 2020, Center has been blessed to be able to pay our bills, but we have had to use some of our reserve funds to do so. As part of our responsible stewardship, we need to replenish those funds, so if you are able to help with that endeavor, it would be deeply appreciated. We have been blessed by your generosity during a difficult year we never imagined when this year's budget was designed. We have held down costs as much as possible and our administrative council and finance committee have been prudent in guiding us through this time. Thankfully, we have been able to receive grant money that has also helped, but I would be remiss not to acknowledge that it is due to the generosity of previous years that has helped us through this difficult time. As we draw close to the end of 2020 and move into 2021, we pray you would join us making an extra gift of faith toward our ministries in the coming year. I would also like to encourage you to consider giving above and beyond for the 3% initiative for global giving especially during this time of COVID-19. We have been blessed by riding out the virus with minor consequences although no death is minor. The worldwide service fund, African University, the ministerial educational fund, and so many other funds need our help. I hope you will prayer about it and consider giving. If you are attending in-person worship, the offerings can be left on the pew when you leave and someone will pick them up and Sue will deposit them later. Online donations can be made at www.umcofcenter.com or you can text the amount you wish to give to (719) 628-1830 which will walk you through the secure donation. There is a fee that is charged the church when payments are made online and by text. Both the online and text options are secure and the funds are immediately processed into Center UMC's bank account. Donations still can be mailed to P. O. Box 626, Center, 81125.

We are continuing a special call for donations toward Beaver Creek Youth Camp that is in dire need, especially since camp use is down and fundraisers weren't able to occur due to COVID. Please join us in helping to keep this worthwhile mission alive.

Our Cooking for Our Neighbors has been a blessing. Thank you to our good cooks and volunteers Betty Felmlee, Kitty Bigley-Entz, Janet Myers, and Linda Warsh. Linda's broccoli casserole was delicious along with Janet's fresh pineapple, and Betty's amazing Christmas goodies. We welcome anyone who wishes to join our little group. We know it is a lot of work which is much lighter as we share it together. It is not meant to be a burden but a blessing for everyone involved. It is such a delight to share the love of Christ in this unique way. I'm blessed to pastor such incredibly generous and compassionate folks. If you know of someone who should be on our list for meals, please let us know. If you wish to be removed, please let us know. It is truly an out pouring of God's love. We will be taking a two-week break and resume in the new year.

Please feel free to reach out to me to ask how to share in this unique time, especially with prayer requests and concerns. Our list continues to grow, so I hope you will join us in praying daily for our church, community, and nation. I am available via phone or text at (504) 261-8860. You can always reach me via email dupton@liff.edu or message me via our Center United Methodist Church Facebook page. Stay safe and remember we are all essential people in the family of God.

Peace and grace for the journey, *Rev. Debria Upton*