



The Scroll



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SPRIT OF ADVENT

Message from Pastor Linda

They are on our radios. In our stores. Outside gas stations. At holiday parties. There is nary a place one can go during the holiday season, where one won't hear Christmas songs being played. We might find ourselves unconsciously humming along as a favorite tune comes on, or just the opposite: rolling our eyes, thinking to ourselves 'if I hear that song played one more time!'

I imagine for all of us, there are a few Christmas songs that touch a tender place in us. Nostalgically they bring up a memory, draw out a smile, or lighten our spirit. Some keep us anchored in the true meaning of the season, reminding us of God's love for us through Christ. I mean, whose spirit doesn't sigh contentedly as the meaningful lyrics of O Holy Night are sung, "*Long lay the world in sin and error pining, 'Til He appeared, and the soul felt its worth.*"?

There is one song that stands out every year for me - *I Heard the Bells of Christmas Day* (based on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's well-known poem). I appreciate the raw honesty of the words penned by him in 1863. One cannot miss the longing and lament for lasting peace. It's no surprise, for it was composed in the midst of America's bloodiest war – the Civil War.

As Longfellow heard the tolling bells on Christmas day, they did nothing to comfort him. Nothing to lift his spirit. There was no peace. There was no hope in sight. He had only seen pain and violence and suffering. He only felt anguish for his severely injured son. Instead of writing odes of joy, one can feel the heaviness of heart as his poem unfolds. Where is God in these dark times? Where is this peace we sing of? Where is the compassion for one another? When will war cease?

Today, as jolly songs ring out, have you asked these same questions? While we hear of ongoing war in Gaza, Ukraine, and other lands, does your heart resonate with Longfellow's forlorn words: "*Hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth?*" It's not a big stretch to understand why so many despair. Songs with promises of peace can ring hollow.

Yet, there is this: a theme of listening threads its way through the poem. As Longfellow listened to the deeper message expressed through the bells but more specifically in his heart, a confident hope swelled in him. His feelings of despondency were replaced with defiant hope. He remembered that God is not dead; He is ALIVE. Righteousness *will* prevail one day. The world *will* be made right. Lasting peace *will* have the final say.

This, dear friends, is the spirit of Advent. It is the waiting and the watching, in what can be very dark, difficult days. It is hoping and believing in Christ's return. The day when He will make all things right. When darkness and death will flee...forever. For now, we live in the in-between, the now and what will be, holding fast with faith to the One who was, who is, and is to come. In the midst of the longest nights, this is what gives us cause to carol! Merry Christmas!

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
and wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail, The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."



WOMEN GATHER FOR MEANINGFUL DAY

For its tenth year, Salem drew women from around the region and beyond for its annual Women's Gathering at the start of November. This year's theme focused on "The Freedom in Letting Go." Surprisingly, about a third of our attendees were here for their very first time!

Rev. Dr. Devyn Chambers-Johnson started the day reminding all who attended that they don't have to live under the constant pressure of 'trying harder'. She offered an insightful illustration from her own life, describing a recent exchange with her ophthalmologist. After explaining to her eye doctor that with her history of poor vision she wouldn't be able to read the chart without aid, the doctor pressed her to 'try harder.' No amount of 'trying harder' would enable her to succeed.

Pastor Devyn used this relatable illustration to then unpack the truth from Scripture, that God doesn't expect us to 'try harder', or to get things done through will power. Rather He invites us to trust that we are already loved, accepted and can rest in His strength.

Pastor Linda used their time to share practical ways that women can "let go" in day to day living and find freedom in doing so. Talented Kim Aliczi was back to lead everyone in worship and song.

Following Pastor Devyn, Pastor Cristina, a prison chaplain in Rhode Island, and our own



everyone in worship and song.

"Thank you for the awesome women's gathering at Salem today! It was such a blessing! The speakers spoke God's word into my life today." ~ Amy

As always, Salem's hospitality team provided a beautiful mid-morning reception, healthy luncheon, and yummy cookies-to-go at the end of the day. Interspersed throughout the day were times of pause to give out Door Prizes which have become a much-anticipated part of the relaxing day! In addition, Crissy Dowling also provided each guest an incredible goodies bag full of skin care products. This day couldn't happen without many volunteers working to make this a rich day for all.



Left: Kiersten Marich and Carol Maxwell welcoming our guests.



Right: Our kitchen crew: Cathy Greiner, Julie Fredlund, Patti Anderson, Diane Swanson and Robin McHan

"I attended again the meaningful and worshipful time at the women's gathering. I left not only uplifted, but having spent some time expressing and letting go of some grief and some emotions that were there that only music, contemplation, reflection and intentional thought can bring. Women do a very good job at gathering indeed and listening to the Spirit of God." ~ Catherine



GAMES, GOODIES & GOOD TIMES

Have you ever stopped to think about what there is to do in town on a Friday night after 6:00, that *doesn't* involve eating out or going to a bar? There isn't much...especially for folks in their 20's who may not have their own home/apartment which can fit a bunch of friends or extra money to spend dining out. Last spring, we decided to host the

Salem Coffee House, once a month, 7pm-9:30pm to see if there was any interest. We would provide light refreshments (beverages, homemade cookies, chips/salsa, popcorn, etc.). People were welcome to drop in for an hour, or stay the whole time to simply chat, play a board game or card game, go a round of ping pong, or do a puzzle. It turns out this does meet a small niche for young adults and older adults alike.

We have now offered it three times. Roughly 10 people have come each time and they seem to have really enjoyed themselves. There has been a lot of laughter, some great time for catching up or getting to know each other, and just relaxing doing something outside of the house. The cookies – homemade by one of our regular visitors – have been AMAZING.



As the days get longer, and the weather colder, and you are wondering what to do that doesn't cost lots of money, consider coming to the next Coffee House! You are sure to be warmly welcomed, enjoy some great cookies/snacks and you may find yourself laughing to the point of tears! ❤️

POWER OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Studies have shown that people decide to visit a church, and/or visit it again based on their very first impressions of it. Nowadays they first look at websites, then the exterior when they drive by, and then the interior. People notice if the building is cared for or unkept, neat or cluttered, clean or dirty. Within minutes *literally* (sometimes even seconds!), they make a decision whether they will come back or not...all based on what they SEE. Subconsciously, they determine that the care of the property/facility is a reflection of how well the people who attend are cared for. The most critical areas in the church are the nursery and children's classrooms. Parents and guardians want to know that their children are well taken care of during your church's worship service. They are entrusting you with the most precious thing they have—their children.

Knowing these realities, our semi-annual Grubby Sundays take on even greater importance. Certainly, throughout the year, we work to keep our church clean, tidy, repairs/maintenance up-to-date, and comfortable inside and out. We are grateful for someone who volunteers every week to scrub the toilets (you know who you are 😊), those who vacuum and sweep, those who keep the kitchen spotless, and tend to the gardens. But like every home, occasionally there needs to be some deep cleaning. This is where Grubby Sundays come in.

This month, a small group of volunteers showed up to dust corner cobwebs, clean baseboards, wash windows, and a whole lot more. It's amazing how much is accomplished within an hour with energetic helpers. Thank you to Spencer Guptill, Trustee, for organizing our cleaning crew, and to each person who came to help!

GRUBBY SUNDAY





UPCOMING COUNCIL VACANCIES

Our Church Council is comprised of nine members who serve for a term of three years. They may serve up to two consecutive terms, and then they must step down. To maintain continuity, the Council positions are staggered in such a way that each year only three positions become vacant. In January 2024, the three positions that are opening up are: Secretary, Fellowship Chair, and Congregational Care. If you know someone who is a member of Salem that is gifted in any of these areas, or if you yourself are interested in serving in one of these positions, please reach out to Susan Swanson, Elliott Fisher, or Pastor Linda.

COVENANT WORLD RELIEF



COVENANT WORLD RELIEF & DEVELOPMENT

Each year we receive a Thanksgiving Offering for Covenant World Relief & Development (CWRD) on the Sunday before Thanksgiving. This gift is an expression of our gratitude toward God for the rich blessings we have received all year. From our abundance, we share with those who have far less due to circumstances out of their control. This year over \$320 was received for [Covenant World Relief & Development](#). CWRD has been doing work like this for almost 70 years now. May we continue to partner with the Lord in helping the least!

ADVENT SERIES - Hidden Figures: Heralds of Hope

It seems over the last decade interest in one's Genealogy has been growing in popularity. Programs like Ancestry.com and MyHeritage.com can be downloaded on your computers for a fee. People are eager to learn more about their roots and family tree. Perhaps part of the intrigue is finding out who in our past may have been famous or scandalous, fascinating or ordinary.



Genealogy has always been significant in the Bible. There are long passages of who begat who. It doesn't make for riveting reading for us, but in the days of old, who's who was exceedingly important. So, it's not surprising that Matthew (a former tax collector) included Jesus' list of ancestors in his own gospel. What is noteworthy is who he included in this long list: five women. This wasn't typical, especially in a patriarchal society. What makes this even *more* interesting is what five women are named. Scandal and surprise swirled around the lives of all five: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary.

Except for Mary, the mother of Jesus, we rarely here mention of the others and most definitely not around Christmas. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba and their stories are the type family members, back in the day, might only spoken of in hush conversations or never mentioned their names aloud at all. Yet here they are, their names added to Jesus' ancestry – forever. **Hidden figures now heralds of hope.**

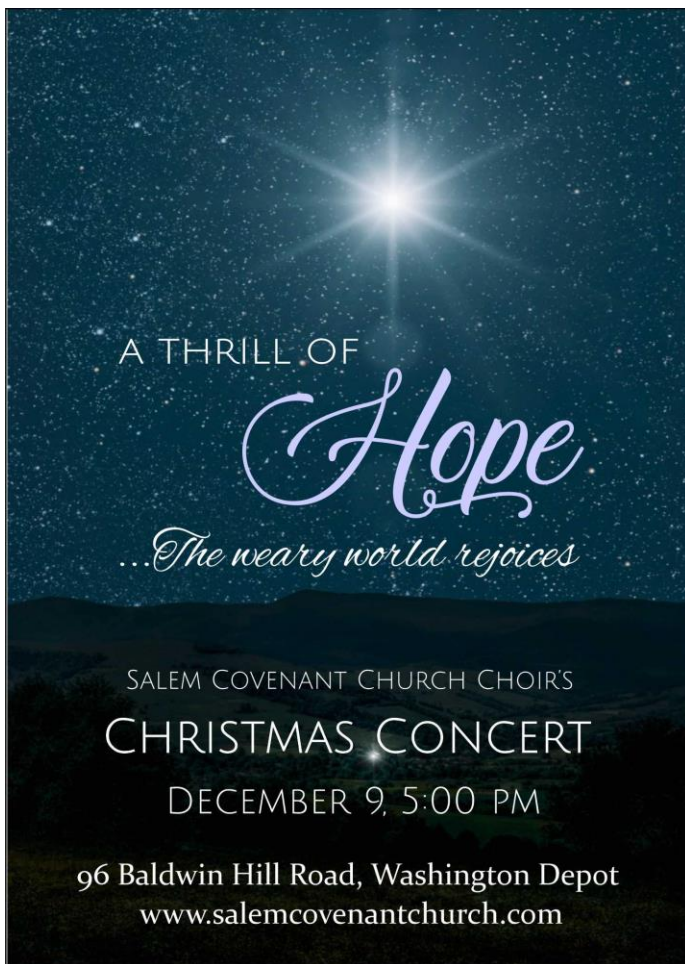


Why would Matthew make a point of including them of all women? What does God want to reveal to us through them and their lives? What might they have to teach us? How do they reveal the gospel of Christ? How are these hidden figures heralds of hope in today's times?

During the Advent season, our sermon series will focus on one of these women each Sunday. I think we will glean some rich truths from their experiences and the ways their faith transformed their lives, and were instrumental in God's rescue mission for the world. We will be reminded that yes, life is messy and relationships are complicated. We will see that in those seasons of life where all appears hopeless, God is at work. Yesterday and today.

Pastor Marlon only last week preached of young Tamar and her quest for justice. She knew that God had provided a blueprint – the Law – for her safety and protection. Though misused and abused, though completely powerless, God showed a way for her. Ultimately, despite a greedy and deceptive husband, the Lord worked through Tamar to provide a way of salvation for his people. [Click here to listen to Pastor Marlon's sermon.](#)

In these weeks to come, come and listen to the stories of courageous Rahab (Joshua 2, 6; James 2:25), loyal Ruth (Ruth), hopeful Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11) and humble Mary (Luke 1). Hear their testimonies of God's redemption. Come with, open hearts, a desire to grow, and readiness to be wow-ed.



A THRILL OF
Hope
...The weary world rejoices

SALEM COVENANT CHURCH CHOIR'S
CHRISTMAS CONCERT
DECEMBER 9, 5:00 PM

96 Baldwin Hill Road, Washington Depot
www.salemcovenantchurch.com



BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE
A Thrill of Hope

A Service of Reflection for those who are seeking
solace and peace at this time of year.

WEDNESDAY
DECEMBER 21
7:00 PM

DECEMBER CALENDAR

December 1 – Loaves and Fishes, 3:30 pm

December 3 – **Worship & Communion**

- Church's Potluck & 135th Birthday celebration, after worship

- Soul Talk & Supper, 4:00 pm

December 4/11/18 – Hangout Haven, 2:45 pm

December 9 – Christmas Concert, 5:00 pm

December 13 – Seniors’ Christmas Brunch, 10:00 am

December 14 – Council Budget Meeting, 7:00 pm

December ??? – Salem Coffee House, 7:00pm – 9:30pm

December 17 – Children’s Christmas Pageant, during Worship

December 21 – Blue Christmas Service

December 24 – Christmas Eve Service, 5:00 pm

- Nursery Care provided

December 25 – Merry Christmas!

December 27 – Evening Prayer, 7:00 pm via zoom

December 31 – New Year’s Eve



Dear Friends,

Thank you for giving all of us such a lovely day and wonderful lunch and treats. We look forward to this event [Women’s Gathering all year.

In Christian love,

The Ladies of Covenant Church of Thomaston



DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Tamara Ravelo	1	Noel Evans	16
Hayden Fisher	2	Susan Swanson	18
Patty Parker	6	Deborah Griesbach	20
Ann Von Hoorn	6	Christi Guptill	24
Linda Williams	7	Gaylinn Fast	28
Linnea Quist	9	Holly Camp	29
John Quist	14	Penelope Becker	30
Liam Hurley	15	Carol Alison	31
Diane Swanson	15		

REMEMBRANCES

December 11	Astrid Quist Colvin	Long time member and former choir director
December 14	Foster Whitney	Member/Dolly Whitney's husband
December 21	John Greiner	Caitlin Cannavaro's father
December 30	Tim Meeker, Jr.	Tim Meeker Sr. and Lisa Swanberg's son