

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – DECEMBER 6 EDITION

Celebration service and reception for Bishop David Graves set for Jan. 8

On Sunday, January 8, 2023, the South Georgia Conference will host a celebration service and reception for South Georgia’s returning episcopal leader Bishop David Graves. It will be held at 4 p.m. at Mulberry Street United Methodist Church in Macon.

The special service is a time for our Annual Conference to gather for worship and to welcome back Bishop Graves and Mrs. Nancy Graves and to give thanks for his assignment to the South Georgia Conference.

Bishop Graves will preach, the Mulberry Street UMC choir will perform, and the service will feature laity and clergy from different areas of service and ministry. The service will be followed by a reception.

All are invited and encouraged to attend. Childcare will be available.

For those not able to travel to Macon, the service will be streamed live at www.sgaumc.org/welcomeservice.

Bishop Graves was elected bishop by the 2016 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference and was assigned to the Alabama-West Florida Conference. In addition, he has been serving South Georgia since September 2021 following the retirement of Bishop Lawson Bryan. At the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference held Nov. 2-4 at Lake Junaluska, NC it was announced that Bishop David Graves has been reassigned to the South Georgia Annual Conference and will serve as the Episcopal leader for the next two years. He will also continue giving oversight to the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference as well.

South Georgia pastor pens book on prayer

By Kelly Roberson

Prayer changes us.

That’s what the Rev. Dr. Ted Goshorn, senior pastor of Mulberry Street United Methodist Church in Macon, Ga., writes about in his new book.

Goshorn grew up in Rome, Ga. and never expected to become a pastor. Having first pursued a career in higher education, he found a calling for helping individuals grow in their faith and churches to transform their communities. As a result of that call, Goshorn joined the ministry as an ordained United Methodist elder in the South Georgia Annual Conference.

Throughout his ministry journey, Goshorn has found a common thread woven across the pages of his story: the transformative practice of prayer. With encouragement from Mrs. Martha Wright, a member of Eastman First UMC where Goshorn previously served as senior pastor, he decided to write a book about it, “Prayer Changes Us.”

“Writing the book encouraged my journey of becoming more vulnerable, which has deepened my prayer life,” said Goshorn. “The more vulnerable I can be in life, the more vulnerable I can be with God, and the greater healing I find.”

Through the chapters of his book, Goshorn takes readers on a journey of self-discovery, finding the transformative impact of regular prayer practice and teaching how to incorporate prayer into the rhythms of life. In the first part of the book, he addresses how to pray, expanding the scope to include styles of prayer like repetition and praying scripture. In part two, he focuses on the impact of prayer on the soul, exploring the ways prayer makes us better disciples and brings us deeper in relationship with God.

Bishop David Graves, episcopal leader of the South Georgia Conference, has called laity and clergy of South Georgia to an intentional and focused season of prayer for 2023. He appreciated how this book draws us to practical ways to pray in these days.

“As you turn the pages of this book, you hear from Ted’s humble heart that reminded me of how prayer has not only changed my life but formed it,” said Bishop Graves. “We live in a world filled with so much noise that distracts and divides us. Ted reminds us that relationships are everything. His reflections highlight that home is where the heart is. Through prayer, our relationship with God is not only deepened but we experience the heart of God.”

The book includes helpful resources on establishing a rhythm of prayer, including descriptions and how-to guides on types of prayer, Methodism founder John Wesley’s self-examination questions, and daily guides for praying the Psalms or all of scripture throughout the year.

Goshorn wants people to see that prayer facilitates ongoing transformation of ourselves and our relationship with God, leading us to become evermore the healing presence of Christ on earth.

“I have experienced the power of prayer in many places,” said Goshorn. “My experience in this Annual Conference has been formative for my prayer life, helping me discover the power of prayer and its transformational effect.”

The Advocate Press is the publishing arm of the South Carolina United Methodist Advocate newspaper. It launched in 2017 to produce books of interest to United Methodists on matters of faith and to amplify regional voices and those that advocate for the advancement of the kingdom of God. “Prayer Changes Us” is available at <https://advocatesc.org/store/books/prayer-changes-us> or on Amazon.

Theme & adjusted dates announced for 2023 Annual Conference session

Bishop David Graves announces that the 2023 Annual Conference session will be held Sunday, June 4, 2023, through Tuesday, June 6, 2023. The conference theme will be: *When They Prayed*, based on Act 4:31.

“While it seems so obvious that prayer is the center of our work, sometimes we need to make intentional efforts,” said Bishop Graves. “It is easy to get sidetracked by the business and agenda items of our meetings. We add more to our plates; we find ourselves in a cycle of busy-ness; and we stay in problem-solving mode. All of this distracts us from listening for God’s voice and seeking His will for our churches and lives. This collective effort will allow space for the Holy Spirit to guide us and our work.”

The newly amended dates of Sunday through Tuesday are a reduction in one day from the dates originally announced at the conclusion of the last conference session. The shorter conference length provides cost savings for both local churches and the annual conference.

“We continue to seek ways to be better stewards of our resources, and this is just one way in which that is possible,” said Meredyth Earnest, Conference Secretary.

The 2023 Annual Conference session, which will be held at the UGA Tifton Campus Conference Center in Tifton, Ga., will begin on Sunday, June 4 with an opening worship service. It will conclude on the afternoon of Tuesday, June 6, after the fixing of appointments and sending forth service.

An email will be sent in January that will include lodging options available to clergy and lay members of the Annual Conference.

Scott’s Chapel UMC receives Renfro Grant

Scott's Chapel United Methodist Church is the 2022 South Georgia recipient of the Renfro Trust Grant.

The Renfro Trust awards grants for the purpose of establishing and supporting United Methodist churches in rural areas of the United States within the Southeastern Jurisdiction. Grant applications are considered for projects involving new or existing church buildings.

Located in Blackshear, Ga., Scott's Chapel UMC recently held their 160th celebration of ministry in November of 2022. The church was organized in 1862, and the church’s historic building has been standing for over 100 years.

Their challenge, according to their pastor, Rev. Michelle Dailey, is to restore the church for preservation as a Georgia or national facility, but more importantly to worship in the facility safely. The church received \$2,500 in grant money.

“We sought the grant to identify proper restoration techniques for the brick and mortar restoration and to begin the process of maintaining the structural integrity and soundness of Scott's Chapel,” said Rev. Dailey.

In addition to maintaining the soundness of the building, the church will also be looking to renovate the existing structure and add a restroom in the sanctuary. Persons with disabilities cannot enter the sanctuary safely without fear of injury or use the restrooms without first exiting the sanctuary and entering into the fellowship hall.

“While our current average attendance is 14, we believe more could attend if they were able to negotiate the steep ramp into the sanctuary or be able to use the restroom without having to leave the sanctuary, go outside and around the building to enter the fellowship hall to use the facilities there,” said Rev. Dailey.

As part of his role as the Conference Secretary for Global Ministries, Rev. Garth Duke-Barton is part of the group that helps make determinations about who receives grant money.

***quote from Garth about Scott’s Chapel being chosen...“I was excited to present...” said Rev. Duke-Barton.

“I do, however, acknowledge that the church will need additional assistance beyond the grant money to accomplish their goals.”

Rev. Duke-Barton says that volunteers to help with renovations would be greatly appreciated.

“If you or a work team from your church have the skill set to install a new restroom, update a sound system, repair their sanctuary floor, make a sanctuary ADA compliant in terms, you can help,” said Rev. Duke-Barton. “I love the ways our connectional system helps support one another.”

If you would like to volunteer your services or bring a team to work over a week or weekend, please contact Rev. Duke-Barton at revgarth0810@gmail.com.

'Tin can miracle': Perry church builds mobile medical clinic

Rev. Bobby Gale was asked to build 10 OBGYN clinics for them to send to Ghana. He says the clinics help the indigenous, marginalized, and disenfranchised.

[By Jessica Cha, WMAZ, Macon](#)

It can be easy to take our everyday access to health care for granted.

However, [Unto the Least of His](#), a ministry in Savannah, is working to expand healthcare access in places that need it most, like a number of African countries.

So far, the ministry has formed 10 mobile OBGYN clinics. They've been working on the last one since the summer that they'll soon send to Ghana.

“If each organization can do just a little bit, I think it'll make the world just a better place,” says Unto the Last of His’ Reverend Bobby Gale said.

Gale has been building wells and providing access to clean water to folks in Africa for the past 20 years, but he says some people need more than that.

"One of the ladies of the tribe was going to get water. She was nine months pregnant. All of a sudden she gave birth on the side of the river, and she had to walk a mile and half back to her house," he said. "Because of having no proper medical care, she died that night."

As the pandemic started, the Yonkafa clinic, a project working to build medical health centers in Ghana asked Gale to build 10 OBGYN clinics for them.

"We partner with churches, and churches build these miracles of love, and then it will go to Atlanta and we'll load the container full of pharmaceuticals," Gale said.

Buddy Roper, with the Perry United Methodist Church, thought they could take on the challenge of building the 10th and final "tin can miracle."

"We were looking for something that we could do for the community as well as the world and it's to save lives," he says.

Roper says it's taken six months and \$65,000 worth of fundraised money to transform this 40-foot cargo container into a solar powered OBGYN clinic.

"I've got splinters in my fingers right now as we talk. We've all put a lot of work in, a lot of painting. You know, that final stroke with a brush."

Gale explains that the clinics help the indigenous, marginalized, and disenfranchised.

"We feel happy that we're able to do it, but we feel sad that we have to do it because these are beautiful people. If you could meet them and just shake their hand and hug them, you'd love them. They're just like you and me. They just lack the material resources to be able to have the things and you and I would just take for granted," Gale said.

Roper says people from the church are sending their love with the box, and it means a lot to them.

"I think they're going to get the same feeling that we've got out of it too, about how much it means to this church, how much it means to the community. When you walk in there, it gives you chill bumps to think that they'll be a life saved in that," he says.

Roper says they hope to ship the clinic by Thanksgiving.

Reverend Bobby Gale says he was asked to create 10 of these clinics to be shipped off, but he says there's an 11th one already being worked on.

He says they'll keep making them till they can't anymore.

Camps & Retreats Happenings

Encounter Youth Retreat: Returning back to Epworth after a couple of years away, we had our largest Encounter Youth Retreat in 9 years! We dug deep into Psalm 46 and worshiped together with 21 different churches attending.

Confirmation Retreat: Registration for the 22nd annual South Georgia Conference Confirmation Retreat opened December 1st for South Georgia churches and January 1st for all other churches. The 2023 retreat will take place March 3-5 at Epworth By The Sea. Designed for students in the fifth grade and above, the “Join the Journey” Confirmation Retreat will provide churches of ALL sizes an opportunity to connect with others through worship, study, and fellowship. Bishop Graves will be joining us to kick off the event! For more information, [click here](#).

Summer Camp: Registration opens up January 1st for Camp Connect - the South Georgia Conference Camping Ministry at Epworth By The Sea. These week long residential camps are offered for elementary, middle and high school students in June and July. For more information, [click here](#).

Camp Connect Leadership Team: Now hiring college students for summer staff at Camp Connect! Do you know of a college student who loves Jesus and desires a summer of ministry in a beautiful location? As a camp counselor, college students will be able to minister to hundreds of youth and children throughout the summer, while making Christian friendships with other staff that last a lifetime. As a paid position, the Leadership Team will commit to nine weeks of service which will include serving at high school, middle school, and elementary camps, as well as closing the summer serving at a camp for foster children. For more information, [click here](#).

2022 Conference Journal now available

Journal includes conference business, directories, reports, appointments, and statistical tables

The 2022 Journal of the South Georgia Annual Conference is now available for purchase. Those wishing to purchase a Conference Journal will order their copy(ies) online directly from the printer. The cost of the Journal is \$26 each plus tax and shipping. (Promo code WELCOME15 will give you a 15% discount at this time).

“I am appreciative of the time and effort that our new Journal Editor, Rev. Dr. Ted Goshorn, put into this year’s publication,” said Meredyth Earnest, Conference Secretary. “The Journal is our official record of conference ministry, and I am grateful for this and Ted’s many other contributions to our annual conference.”

[Click here to order your copy of the 2022 Journal of the South Georgia Annual Conference.](#)*

The Journal is also available as a free PDF download at www.sgaumc.org/conferencejournal or see files below. Please note: [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#) is required to download the file(s). You have the ability to download the entire Journal or just the sections desired.

Full version of the Journal (minus Section 3**)

[2022 Journal of the South Georgia Annual Conference](#)

Journal broken into sections

- Section 1 - [Organization](#) (54 pages)
- Section 2 - [Conference Leadership](#) (35 pages)
- Section 3 - Directories (see note below**)

- Section 4 - [Conference Business](#) (202 pages)
- Section 5 - [Historical Data and Records](#) (122 pages)
- Section 6 - [Statistical Tables](#) (143 pages)

**Please note: In response to growing concerns about internet privacy, Section 3 has been removed from the public file. This section is available to members of the annual conference in the following ways:

1. Order a [printed copy of the Journal from Lulu.com](#), which contains Section 3;
2. Access Section 3 as a free download through either the [Church Dashboard](#) or [Extension Ministry Dashboard](#). This option works best for clergy actively serving and lay members of the Annual Conference;
3. Reach out to your district office for a downloadable file. This option works best for retired clergy not serving;
4. Contact the Conference Secretary for assistance.

Contact Journal Editor Ted Goshorn at tgoshorn@mulberrymethodist.org with any questions about the Journal.

**The Conference is using www.Lulu.com, an online print-on-demand publishing company, to print the 2022 Journal of the South Georgia Annual Conference. Orders will be made and processed via their secure website and shipped directly from their facility.*

December 11 Lesson: Zechariah Speaks

Winter Quarter 2022-2023: From Darkness to Light Unit 1: God’s Preparation

Sunday School Lesson for the week of December 11, 2022 By Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: Luke 1:57-66, 76-79

Key Verse: “And you, my child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways.”

Lesson Aims

- To reflect on the “great mercy” shown by the Lord to Elizabeth and the joy it created
- To recall how Zechariah came to be mute and how he miraculously came to speak again
- To explore the question, “What then will this child become?”
- To study the canticle of Zechariah and the other canticles of Luke 1-2
- To draw out the significance of what Zechariah revealed about the Messiah and his forerunner
- To reflect on John’s role as a prophet in comparison to the prophets who preceded him
- To explore how John will be a prophet to wake people up and to give them hope

The Great Mercy Shown to Elizabeth

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

We learned in the previous lesson about the backstory behind Elizabeth and her pregnancy. The news that Elizabeth was to conceive and bear a child was announced to her husband Zechariah by none other than the angel Gabriel. It was a surprising announcement because Elizabeth had been unable to have children and was considered to be well past childbearing age. Word had gotten around that Elizabeth was pregnant, and the neighbors and relatives rejoiced with her when she gave birth to a son. They rejoiced not only because Elizabeth and Zechariah would enjoy the unexpected blessing of a child, but also because there was no doubt in their minds that a miracle had been performed. The Lord had done this. The Lord had shown great mercy to Elizabeth.

Those who desire to have children and are unable to conceive can identify with the deep longing and anguish that accompany that experience. Those who are finally blessed with children through natural means, through medical intervention, or through fostering or adoption often attest to the great mercy shown to them. In biblical times, the inability to conceive and bear children carried with it a stigma. One need only to read about Hannah in the first two chapters of 1 Samuel. In that story, Hannah's heartache of being unable to have children was compounded by the torment she had to endure from her husband's other wife. Hannah "was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly." (1 Samuel 1:10) Imagine the great weight that was lifted from her when Hannah was able to conceive and bear her son, Samuel. Hannah would have identified with the feelings associated with being shown divine mercy.

The word "mercy" also conveys the idea of favor. When God grants God's favor, there is often a bigger picture that accompanies the divine action. In the case of Hannah, God had big plans for her son Samuel. Samuel would be thought of as the last judge to rule before God allowed and anointed kings to lead God's people. Then, Samuel would become a prophet and the chief advisor to Israel's first two kings, including King David. In the case of Zechariah and Elizabeth, a thousand years later, Gabriel's announcement informed these parents that their son was to fulfill a grand purpose in God's plan.

The parallels between Hannah and the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah do not end here. When Hannah was praying in the temple for a child, she made a vow to the Lord that if she was given a son she would dedicate him to the Lord. She would raise him to live out the nazirite vows listed in the sixth chapter of the Book of Numbers. These vows included abstinence from drinking wine or other intoxicants. Notice the parallel with what the angel Gabriel told Zechariah. Gabriel said that the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth must never drink wine or strong drink—"even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit." (Luke 1:15) God had big plans for their son that required a life of self-denial and spiritual preparation.

What thoughts have you had about the great mercy shown to you in the birth of your children or your nieces and nephews? If it had been difficult for you, your wife, or your sister to become pregnant, how did the eventual birth or adoption heighten the sense of excitement? What dreams have you had about the future of a child laid out before him or her? How could we think of raising children in ways that prepare them spiritually for life ahead? Could God have plans for each of us that take us outside of ourselves so that our lives could be spent in a way that adds value to the lives of others?

How Zechariah Came to Speak Again

⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. ⁶⁰ But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." ⁶¹ They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." ⁶² Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God.

In the previous week's lesson, we were told that Zechariah and Elizabeth "were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord." (Luke 1:6) The Lord knew that he was placing this child of great promise into the hands of devout parents. As devout parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth would be very familiar with the holy ritual of having their son brought for circumcision according to

the law of Moses. This rite signified their son's membership among the covenant people of God. It was a high holy moment for all who were gathered for this joyous occasion.

A part of the ritual was the naming of the child. In biblical times, a lot of care went into the naming of a child. Those who were gathered with Zechariah and Elizabeth assumed they would be naming their child after his father. When Elizabeth said "no," that he was to be called "John," they wondered why they would use a name that none of their relatives had. They wanted to verify that Zechariah was supportive of this idea of naming his son John. They motioned to him, because he had been unable to speak for at least nine months.

Again, the previous week's lesson reveals why Zechariah had been unable to speak. When Gabriel first announced to Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a child, Zechariah's first instinct was to ask for some kind of confirmation. After all, he had to go to his wife and tell her what Gabriel had said. Since Elizabeth had been unable to conceive and was on up in years, Zechariah would have wondered how to tell her that something no less than miraculous was about to happen. Gabriel told Zechariah, "because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur." (Luke 1:20)

Gabriel had made this startling announcement to Zechariah while he was in the temple fulfilling his week-long role as priest. When Zechariah went out from the sanctuary into the outer courts where the people were, they wondered what had taken so long. Immediately, they concluded that he had seen a vision. It must have shown on his face, and then it would have been confirmed by the fact that he could not speak. You could say that Zechariah got the confirmation he had requested. He wanted to know how an old man and woman were going to have a child after all the years of not being able to do so. If an angel could render Zechariah mute, then perhaps God could provide the way for Zechariah and Elizabeth to conceive.

It was actually a two-part verification that Gabriel offered. The first part was Zechariah being made mute, and the second part was when God would finally enable him to speak again—the day when these things occurred. He was not able to speak eight days earlier when John was born. He was able to speak again during the ceremony when the name of their child was made public. The decision to name their child was not Elizabeth's choice or Zechariah's choice. Gabriel was the one who told Zechariah that God had already named their child "John." Elizabeth had been told (in writing) by her husband what the angel had told him. It was when the crowd motioned to Zechariah, and he wrote on a tablet that their son's name was to be John, that Zechariah was able to speak. Zechariah's obedience to Gabriel's command "broke the spell" you might say.

When Zechariah's mouth was opened and tongue freed, the first thing out of his mouth was praise directed to God. Think of all that pent-up praise, joy, and amazement! Can you imagine a more beautiful and memorable circumcision ceremony?

When I think of this ceremony, I cannot help but think of the practice of infant baptism and the doctrine of prevenient grace. Prevenient grace is the grace that "comes before." The idea is that we walk into a future kept by God for us. Even before we are even aware of God, God is aware of us. John would not have been aware of what was being done for him when he was eight days old. This does not mean, however, that John's circumcision ceremony was inconsequential. I imagine God using this moment to shape the people in John's orbit. I imagine it shaping the conversations that would happen around John. I imagine this moment shaping the priorities to which John would be exposed all during his upbringing. When John was named at this public ceremony, it spoke volumes concerning his identity, his sense of belonging, and his destiny.

Think of the religious rites where you and your children might have been participants, including but not limited to baptism, confirmation, marriage, church healing services, even funerals. Think of Holy Communion where Christ is spiritually present in and around the bread and cup and spoken of in the liturgy. Think of the prayers in this service and the liturgy that recalls our salvation history. Think of the confession of our sin that is a part of the service and the pronouncement that our sins are forgiven, so

that we are freed to new life. What can you do to become more aware of these moments as means of God’s grace—making the grace of God more real for us? How do these moments make us more aware of the miraculous?

What Then Will this Child Become?

⁶⁵ Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶ All who heard them pondered them and said, “What then will this child become?” For indeed the hand of the Lord was with him.

Note that the fear that came over all their neighbors was not the fear that we associate with a sense of foreboding. The fear noted in this scripture is marked by a sense of reverence, awe, and recognition of divine forces not under our control. I like to visualize the conversations reverberating around the Judean hill country. They did not even personally witness Zechariah’s encounter with the angel Gabriel. This is the nature of such encounters. There is the event, and then the subsequent telling of it. We might dwell on what is lost in translation between the event and its telling, but that would be to dwell on the wrong thing. There is a build-up as the ripples of an event go outward. God has evidently designed it to be this way. There is the eyewitness of the event, and then there are the participants who join in by faith.

There is the telling of an event, and then follows the pondering and reflection. Relating the details of an event and making meaning of the event are two distinct but interrelated movements. The overwhelming outcome of the reflection surrounding the birth of John to Zechariah and Elizabeth was to wonder what this child was to become. It was an unmistakable conclusion for them that the hand of the Lord was upon this child. This was a child with a destiny. The burning question had to do with what John’s destiny was.

We wait on tiptoe for what answer is going to come. According to Luke, “His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied.” (Luke 1:67) This is clearly an instance where Zechariah was not merely going to give his opinion. What will follow could be classified as a divine utterance. Zechariah, in the power of the Holy Spirit, will speak for God.

The speech is in the form of a song resembling the kind of Hebrew poetry we find in Job, the Psalms, the Old Testament prophets, and sprinkled throughout scripture (for instance, the Song of Moses in Exodus 15). In the first two chapters of Luke’s gospel, there are four such songs, or canticles. These songs were identified by the Early Church and have been used in Christian worship from the beginning until the present day. These four canticles have been given names by the Church.

- The *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) sung by Mary
- The *Benedictus* (Luke 1:67-79) sung by Zechariah
- The *Gloria* in Excelsis (Luke 2:14) sung to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born
- The *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:29-32) sung by Simeon, an old man who could depart in peace because he witnessed the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah

These songs punctuate the nativity story in Luke in ways that elevate the story while adding movement and emotion. The content of these songs also bridges the Old and New Testaments in ways that celebrate the arc of salvation history as it finds fulfillment in the incarnation (the Word made flesh). We will give attention to Mary’s song in the lesson two weeks from now.

What do you make of the buzz created throughout the Judean hill country about the birth of John? Have you ever been a part of spreading news of God’s work in your own life or in the life of someone in your social network? Think of the ways we can give witness to our faith even with a question about what God may be up to. If you have a talent for putting your experiences in words on paper, how might you put that talent to work to share how God shows up in your everyday life? You might have an undiscovered talent

for creative writing. You would not be the first to discover that talent simply by journaling about what God is doing in your life. Many a poet or song writer was born in this way.

What Did Zechariah's Canticle Say?

Strangely enough, Zechariah's canticle does not begin by addressing his son's identity. Instead, Zechariah celebrates the coming of the promised Son of David.

“Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
For he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a mighty savior for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.
Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,
and has remembered his holy covenant,
the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,
to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,
might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness
before him all our days.” (Luke 1:68-75)

Note the tense of this song. The song describes a mighty savior who has been raised up as if the redemption of God's people has already happened. Perhaps it is because of Zechariah's knowledge of what was already being set in motion. Not only that, but what was happening was promised to the house of David centuries earlier, it was spoken of by prophets of old, and it was promised to the ancient fathers and mothers of the faith going as far back as Abraham and Sarah according to God's holy covenant. Also, what was happening came forth from the heart of a God who is just, merciful, and compassionate and desires to save the oppressed from the hands of their enemies. The end goal is to create a people who serve God confidently and without fear, in holiness and righteousness, before God.

Zechariah sees in his present-day the vision of what God will accomplish. Visionary people are always keeping the end in mind to give them hope and to direct and drive their present actions. When we endeavor to live in the present according to God's future promise, then the future has already come in a real way. Zechariah's song anticipates the reign of the Christ.

Up until this point, Zechariah has focused on the coming of the Son of David and not his son, but then the focus of Zechariah's song shifts to his son John.

**⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
⁷⁷ to give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.
⁷⁸ Because of the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
⁷⁹ to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”**

Notice the order of the song: the Messiah first, then the Messiah's forerunner. The Messiah occupies first place, and the forerunner takes second place on purpose, because the forerunner's purpose is to serve the Messiah. Zechariah appears to understand this completely.

Zechariah knows that his son will be called the prophet of the Most High. John's calling will be that of a prophet. Think of the prophets who preceded John, who told of a coming Messiah, the promised Son of David. God had promised David that God would make a dynasty of him and his descendants. There would never lack a son of David on the throne of God's people. Although there were conditions on such a promise, the prophets were sent by God to keep this hope alive among the people of God, especially during all the dark years of Babylonian oppression and all the uncertain years that followed. During Zechariah's day, God's people were still hanging onto this hope as they suffered under the oppression of Roman rule. John would be the last of a long line of prophets preceding the coming of the Messiah. John would be the last of the prophets before Jesus, but certainly not the least among them.

John would be the forerunner who will go before the promised Messiah to prepare the way. How will John do this? Zechariah's prophetic canticle gives us clues. He will give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins. He will give witness to the tender mercy of God. He will point to the dawn that is coming for those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. His ministry will guide the feet of God's people into the way of peace.

Following the pattern of the prophets before him, John will fulfill a two-pronged ministry of waking people up from their complacency and giving them hope—in other words, “afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.” To give people knowledge of their salvation involves waking people up to the ways they sin, the need to acknowledge their sin, to repent, and to seek God's forgiveness and reconciliation with God. This is why those who are too comfortable need to be “afflicted” by helping them come under conviction. Forgiveness then brings all the comfort we could ask for. This is the salvation that brings us out of darkness and the shadow of death and into the light of God's love and renewed life. This is the way out of our inner turmoil and into the way of peace.

Now that we live two thousand years after the coming of the Messiah, how do you recognize this truth and give witness to it in the way you live? As we pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” how do you seek to anticipate in your daily living on earth the divine life kept in heaven for you? How are you using these days in the season of Advent to prepare for the celebration of the birth of Christ? How might we take a page from Zechariah's song and grow in the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of sins? In what ways are we continuing our journey from darkness and the shadow of death into the way of peace?

Prayer

Gracious Father, who sent prophets to prepare the way for your son, make us sensitive to the opportunities of this holy season of preparation, that we may grow in our faith and glorify you and your son, through the power and leading of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Assistant to the Bishop for Ministerial Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at jharris@sgaumc.com. Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the “Layered Bible Journey,” at www.layeredbiblejourney.com.

December 18 Lesson: John the Baptist Appears

**Winter Quarter 2022-2023: From Darkness to Light
Unit 1: God's Preparation**

Sunday School Lesson for the week of December 18, 2022

By Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: Luke 3:2b-6, 15-18

Key Verse: *“He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”*

Lesson Aims

- To explore the reasons the word of God came to John in the wilderness of all places
- To ponder the significance of a movement based on repentance, forgiveness, and baptism
- To reflect on the use of Isaiah’s prophecy and other prophecies to shed light on the Messiah
- To explore the “fruit in keeping with repentance”
- To explore the distinctions between John the forerunner and Jesus the Messiah
- To compare and contrast water baptism with being baptized with the Spirit and fire
- To examine the similarities and differences between John’s baptism and Christian baptism

A Movement in the Wilderness

In this unit, we have learned that Luke’s gospel begins with the birth story of Jesus and the birth story of John woven together. They overlap in the following manner:

- John’s birth is announced to his father, Zechariah, by an angel
- John’s mother, Elizabeth, conceives
- Jesus’ birth is announced to his mother, Mary, by an angel
- Mary conceives (conceived by the Holy Spirit)
- Mary visits her relative, Elizabeth, while they are both pregnant
- Elizabeth gives birth to John
- Mary gives birth to Jesus

From this order, we learn how closely these births are interrelated. The same details unfold together in the combined story. The mothers were related by blood. The pregnancies overlapped one another. The mothers actually visited one another and remained with one another for three months. Luke tells these stories together because they unfolded together. All of this foreshadows how intertwined the lives of Jesus and John will be in adulthood and how their ministries will complement one another.

After the story of John’s birth, we are given this summary of the years between John’s birth and the beginning of his public ministry: “The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.” (Luke 1:80)

Today’s scripture in the 3rd chapter of Luke is the first time we see John again since the story of his birth. It relates the story of how John, as an adult, first appeared publicly to Israel.

² The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

We already knew what John was going to do with his life because he was set apart for his mission from birth. When the scripture says that “the word of God came to John...in the wilderness,” we understand that this is John’s call story. Saying that “the word of God came to John” was shorthand for saying that the call from God to prophetic ministry came to John. It was God confirming for John what his mission in life was to be and that it was time to begin. God impressed upon John the particular word, or message, that John was to give. This was the moment when John got his marching orders. It was the signal he needed to begin his public ministry.

The location of his ministry appears to have been chosen for him by God as well. He was called in the wilderness. He went into all that region around the Jordan. Going into all the region around the Jordan meant he traveled a certain amount in his preaching ministry. He covered enough territory to make contact with different groups of people, but it was limited to the Judean wilderness region around the Jordan River.

It was an arid rocky region. It was a setting that went along with John’s austere, ascetic lifestyle. We’ve already been told that he abstained from wine or strong drink from birth. According to Matthew’s gospel, John “wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.” (Matthew 3:4) He lived off the land. His life of self-denial was custom designed to make him more in tune with matters of the Spirit. Such a lifestyle formed his life as a prophet.

This location also meant that most of those who came out to hear him had to leave where they lived their daily lives and come to a desolate place. John’s audience would have had the distinct feeling they were going on retreat. They were retreating from life’s comforts and indulgences and going to a place where life comes down to the basics—spirituality, morality, and reliance on God.

Recall that it was in the wilderness, in the time of Moses, where God tried to teach his people to rely on God for food in the giving of manna. According to Deuteronomy, it was to humble God’s people and help them learn that humans are not meant to live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Deuteronomy 8:3)

Think about those who took this journey from the routines of daily life and into the wilderness to hear this powerful preacher. They would know undoubtedly that others were making this same journey. They would likely have the sense they were checking out for themselves a movement being born in the wilderness. Some may have gone to the wilderness very deliberately to join the movement. Some may have gone to see what all the fuss was about—wary, but open.

Can you think of a time when you had to get out of your routine to hear God speak to you? Why does that make us more receptive? What was going on in those moments? What are ways to enter those kinds of moments without traveling far?

A Ministry Focusing on Baptism, Repentance, and Forgiveness

Another factor in the location, of course, was the Jordan River. The Jordan River courses from the north to the south from the fresh water lake known as the Sea of Galilee and eventually empties into the Dead Sea. It is a narrow, shallow, meandering river. You could say that it is made for baptisms. Luke tells us that John

proclaimed a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” This was the challenge that the people would hear when they went out to hear John. This is why we refer to John as “John the Baptist.”

Notice that this was a 1) message, 2) to be followed up by a life response, 3) symbolized by a ritual ceremony. The message about the meaning of repentance from our sins and God’s offer of forgiveness is something we need to know. We must not stop, however, with *knowing* about repentance and forgiveness. Such a message demands that we follow up with *action*—a whole life response. This life response was so important that it needed to be formalized through a decisive declaration expressed in the power of a sacred ritual.

What we need to know about repentance is that it is a process of turning. Confession or acknowledging our sin begins the turn. Accompanying our confession is a feeling of deep remorse. Sometimes the feeling of remorse comes before the acknowledgement. Whether it is our heart telling our head, or our head telling our heart, head and heart come together in repentance. The turn does not end with our head and heart. The turn continues as it is made manifest in action. There may be penance (actions intended to humble one’s self or impart self-discipline).

This is where deep learning takes place so that we do not easily commit the offense again. Our repentance may involve making amends or restitution to repair any harm we have done and repair the relationship. Repentance is not complete however until we resolve not to commit the offense again. If the sin in question was a good thing that we should have done, but neglected to do, then we resolve to do that good thing in the future. To back our resolve, we make a plan. We make a plan to correct our course. We make a plan for translating initial actions into habits. Repentance is a process resulting in a life change. We resolve to grow.

The forgiveness of sins is God’s action. Forgiveness flows out of the grace of God—the undeserved, unmerited favor of God—the unconditional love of God. God’s grace not only follows our repentance, but it often precedes our repentance, creating the conditions for repentance to occur. Knowing that God loves me unconditionally, often gives me the courage to look at myself in the mirror more closely, defects and all. It is in the light of God’s love that I am able to see my unloving actions and sins more clearly. God’s grace begins the turn and completes the turn. Forgiveness is God liberating us—freeing us to begin again and walk in newness of life. When we forgive someone, we are freeing that person and simultaneously freeing ourselves. This is why we pray, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Forgiveness represents the restoration of a relationship. Repentance and forgiveness work together to strengthen the bonds of our relationship with God.

The baptism of John was a ritual cleansing. The sacred ritual of baptism symbolized the cleansing of a person from their sins. If a picture paints a thousand words, a ritual action paints exponentially more. A ritual action not only provides a visual, but it also involves the participant in an action that seers itself into the participant’s memory. The first baptism that I performed as a minister was in the baptistry of a country Baptist church. The water was not heated, and it was a chilly, Easter morning. Even through the waders I was wearing, I felt the icy cold of the water, and I did not even get wet. Billy, a twelve-year old, got wet. Whether the baptism is an immersion in water or water applied to one’s head, the one being baptized gets dripping wet. The symbolism of being cleansed in a public baptism would have been an intimate experience. At the same time, one would have gotten the impression that he or she was being personally initiated into a mass movement.

What would you say is your level of involvement in acts of repentance? Do you see yourself participating in all aspects of this turning? How and why might the process of repentance be watered down? What

about your experience of God's forgiveness? Is it difficult for you to believe you are forgiven? How might we project our insecurities onto God and doubt the unconditional love of God?

A Messianic Movement Foreseen by Isaiah and the Prophets

It is important that we keep in mind the larger context for this movement of repentance. The New Testament Church claimed the prophecy contained in the 40th chapter of Isaiah as the basis for John's ministry. Other prophecies are claimed in the gospels as foundational to the ministry of John and the ministry of Jesus. The Church saw John as the voice of one crying out in the wilderness.

⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

**‘Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.**

**⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth,**

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ”

How do we read these references from the Old Testament prophets? You could say that there are two different theological contexts in which to place these scriptures.

For God's people living in the 6th century B.C., the original recipients of this prophecy, this message was part of a larger message of hope promising the captives in Babylon that they would be enabled to return to their homeland from the place of their exile. It will be as if a highway will be built in the desert for God's people to return. It will be for them as if the valleys will be filled in, the mountains leveled, the crooked pathways made straight, and the rough patches made smooth. All flesh will see God's salvation brought to a people who would have been thought to be utterly forsaken.

The 1st Century Church (A.D.) saw another fulfillment of this prophecy. They saw John the Baptist as the voice crying in the wilderness. They saw John as the one sent to prepare the way for the Messiah to come with his baptism ministry of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John was preparing the people to receive the ministry of the coming Messiah.

Which meaning is the correct one? The good thing is we do not have to choose one interpretation over the other. Knowing how Isaiah's prophecy speaks to each group deepens the meaning. Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament longings. The themes of salvation are universal in scope. Our salvation history spans the ages. Bringing Old Testament images of salvation into New Testament applications helps us expand our understanding of the salvation God offers.

How has your study of God's Word been enriched by a growing understanding of both the Old Testament and New Testament? How would you explain the value of reading the Old Testament to a new Christian? What are your favorite connections to make between the message of the Old Testament prophets and

their fulfillment in the gospels? How has your understanding of the salvation God offers been expanded as you have grown in your knowledge of God's Word?

Fruit in Keeping with Repentance

Although the main scripture passage we are studying skips verses 7 through 14 of chapter 3 of Luke, it is good to take a look at these verses. We see John comparing the crowds who came for baptism to a brood of snakes fleeing the wrath to come. John was rightly questioning their motives. He challenged them to “produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” He cautioned them not to base their security on being a descendant of Abraham because God could easily produce children of Abraham out of the countless stones that littered the landscape, if that is what gave us security. If we are not producing fruit that is in keeping with repentance, we will undergo a pruning. Trees that stop producing fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

John now had the attention of the crowd. They asked, “What should we do then?” John gave them very specific challenges. “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.” To tax collectors who were in the crowd, John told them not to collect more taxes than they were required to. To some soldiers, John told them to stop extorting money from people and issuing false charges against them, but instead, be content with their pay.

What do we make of these challenges? John was telling them how to make their repentance real—not just giving lip service. Fruit means evidence. We should be able to give evidence that our repentance is heartfelt and resulting in tangible expressions of us turning from our sins.

What evidence can you offer of a healthy life of repentance and turning from sin? If John looked straight at you, and you asked him, “What then should I do?” what do you think he might say to you?

The Need to Distinguish between John and the Messiah

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

With a ministry as dramatic as John's, it is natural that some might think that John was the Messiah. John wanted to clear up that misconception quickly. John was the forerunner who was sent to prepare the way through this ministry of repentance, forgiveness, and baptism. The Messiah was the one who was coming who was more powerful than John. John was unworthy to be compared to the Messiah—to Jesus. John was not worthy to untie the strap of the Messiah's sandals.

John also explained that the Messiah was not going to baptize anyone with water. John baptized with water, but Jesus did not baptize anyone that we know of. The Messiah, however, was going to lead people in a spiritual baptism, a spiritual immersion, a spiritual cleansing. Water baptism is a symbolic action, but the spiritual baptism Jesus offers is the real thing to which the symbol points. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire. Fire is another metaphor related to cleansing. Fire cleanses iron of its impurities. Or, to add another metaphor,

fire is what you burn the disposable chaff with after the good wheat has been separated from the chaff and gathered on the threshing floor by the farmer's winnowing fork. The spiritual baptism of Jesus results in us being cleansed from our sins, through the power of the Holy Spirit, revealing what God intended us to be.

Comparing and Contrasting John's Baptism and Christian Baptism

So, when we are baptized in the Church, are we baptizing folks with the baptism of John? The answer is no. Recall, that right after John introduces the ministry of the Messiah, Jesus showed up. Jesus told John to baptize him. John protested because if anyone needed to baptize the other, John thought Jesus should baptize him. Jesus stated that John had to baptize him to fulfill all righteousness. It must have perplexed John, because John's baptism was a baptism to symbolize the cleansing of persons from their sin. Jesus was the sinless one. Jesus had no sin from which to be cleansed.

Jesus underwent baptism in order to transform forever the meaning of baptism. Jesus had to be baptized so that every believer could be baptized into Christ. So, for us, baptism does not merely symbolize repentance and forgiveness. It is through baptism, according to the Church's liturgy, that "we are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation." Although repentance and forgiveness are included in the meaning of baptism, Christian baptism goes further and incorporates us into the saving mission and work of Christ. Now, we understand that repentance and forgiveness truly happen by being incorporated into Christ's death and resurrection. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we die to self and die to sin by dying with Christ and rising new to life through Christ. This is what is symbolized in Christian baptism. We are not left to do the work of repentance on our own. It happens through Christ.

Good News Includes Exhortation

The scripture passage we are examining concludes with this verse:

¹⁸ So with many other exhortations he proclaimed the good news to the people.

An exhortation is a strong challenge. A lot of the exhortation we have heard in this passage has been related to sin. Sin is a part of our human condition. The gospels do not shy away from talk about sin. The gospels address the subject of sin head on. With the call to repent of our sin comes the good news of our ability to repent of our sin through Christ. Read our scripture passage again, line by line, and say after each line, "That's good news!" Everything John's ministry offers is ultimately good news. Remember, that John was ushering in the ministry of the Messiah. This just marks the beginning of a movement that will turn the world upside-down.

Do you reflect on the meaning of your baptism often enough? Baptism is an act in which we participate once in our life, but Holy Communion is an act we are to celebrate as often as we will. How do you make the occasion of Holy Communion an opportunity to remember your incorporation into God's mighty acts of salvation? How well do you listen to the words of the Communion liturgy that you speak?

Prayer

Father in heaven, at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan you proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Grant that all who are baptized into his name may keep the covenant they

have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, One God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Assistant to the Bishop for Ministerial Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at jharris@sgaumc.com. Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the “Layered Bible Journey,” at www.layeredbiblejourney.com.

JOHN WESLEY MOMENTS

DAVE HANSON

Wesley’s Thoughts on Preaching

John Wesley would remind us that there are four purposes for preaching: *to invite...to convince...to offer Christ...and to build up!*

These should be done in every sermon!

Some other suggestions:

- Never disappoint a congregation. By this he means “show up”!
- Begin and end on time!
- Be sincere, weighty, and solemn!
- Suit your subject to your audience!
- Do not ramble!
- Choose as plain a text as you can!
- Keep to your text!
- Be sparing of allegorizing or spiritualizing!
- Take care of anything awkward or affected in gesture, phrase, or pronunciation!
- Do not pray more than 8 or 10 minutes!
- Avoid quaint words!
- Beware of clownishness in speech or dress!
- Wear no slouch hat!
- Avoid mere formality in preaching or in using the liturgy!
- Mean what you say and speak only what you feel!

The Rev. Dave Hanson is a retired pastor and John Wesley scholar.

Young adult Global Mission Fellow befriends, listens, and offers words of hope

By Rev. Garth Duke-Barton, *Conference Secretary for Global Ministries*

Have you ever heard someone in church ask the question, “Where are our young adults?” Many are in the world quietly, if not apprehensively, serving. This generation of young adults is one that grew up doing things. They did not learn to wait their turn to rise up for their chance. They took it.

One of the ways young adults in The United Methodist Church are serving is through a program called Global Mission Fellows. Young adults, ages 20–30, commit to serve in social justice ministries for two years. They

enter into new communities, understanding the challenges and assets through relationships with the long-term goal to overcome systemic oppression. Fellows partner with community organizations internationally and in the U.S. to address a variety of issues, including migration/immigration, education, public health, and poverty.

One of these fellows, Reeba Imola Webster Bennett, is a young woman from Honduras who is serving in Uruguay. For those unfamiliar with the geography of Latin America, Honduras is located on the Atlantic side, due south of Alabama, in Central America. Uruguay is also on the Atlantic side but much further South, below Brazil.

Reeba is tasked with whatever duties are needed by those in the area she is assigned. She hoped to work with children and youth but was assigned to a shelter for people who did not have permanent homes. Much like what happens in shelters in the U.S., there are people there who made poor decisions regarding substances. There are people in the shelters who suffer from mental illnesses. Also, much like in the U.S., there were people who lived paycheck to paycheck, and one day the paycheck stopped.

Reeba befriends people, listens to their stories, and offers words of hope. She conducts weekly meetings with prayer, scripture, and a time for reflection. The people at the shelter share their stories with Reeba and one another. This time of fellowship sustains them as they leave the shelter.

We can support the ministries of missionaries working around the world, including young adult Global Mission Fellows, by giving to the Advance # 01138A.

Interested in becoming a Mission Fellow? Applications are being accepted for the 2023-25 cohort for the U.S.-2 track. Interested candidates can [learn more here](#).

Rev. Garth Duke-Barton, pastor of Epworth United Methodist Church in Jesup, also serves as Conference Secretary for Global Ministries.

Obituary: Rev. Wayne MacDonald

Rev. Wayne MacDonald, retired clergy from the South Central District, passed away December 2, 2022, after a long illness. A memorial service will be planned at a later date.

Resource Roundup - December Advocate

2023 Worship Planning Calendar

This resource is the full music and worship planning calendar for each Sunday in 2023, as well as special days and times throughout the year. Designed to help pastors, worship leaders, Sunday School teachers, and more. [Download today](#)

Advent resources to help you create community connection

Invite your community to worship with you this Advent with the help of customizable outreach resources! Choose from banners, signs, postcards, invitation cards, posters and more. All are available in a wide variety of designs and messaging. [View resources](#)

Give love campaign promotes year-end giving to support mission and disaster response

Global Ministries, the worldwide mission and development agency of The United Methodist Church, invites churches and individuals to give love, joy, hope and peace through a denomination-wide year end giving campaign. The United Methodist Committee on Relief, the denomination's relief arm, is part of Global Ministries. [Read more](#)

Learning to speak more honestly in meetings

(Claire Bowen) Melissa was sitting in a meeting of church leaders, and she was ready to tell the truth. "Before I say this, could you pass me the PayDay?" she said. At that moment, the item she had requested — a PayDay candy bar with a grubby red, white and blue wrapper — sat in front of Jon. It had moved around the room in the past hour. I could tell: courage was winning over fear. What does a candy bar have to do with courage? [More here.](#)

Extend a warm greeting with a virtual tour video

When you think of a virtual tour, you might think of a video to show the latest house to hit the market. Why not use that same concept to bring people in your church? With a well-crafted church tour video, you can show potential visitors that you care about them and want them to have a good experience at your place of worship. [Read more](#)

10 free services for local churches

United Methodist Communications has a menu of services and tools as extensive as the menu of dishes at The Cheesecake Factory. Greg Petree has assembled a list of the top-10 services United Methodist Communications offers for free to help local congregations reach out to their communities.

[Read list](#)

Retired Clergy Birthdays – December 2022

12/01 – Virginia Connelly: 11130 Springfield Pike, Apt. B 131; Cincinnati, OH 45246

12/06 – Charles Adams: 301 Island St.; Lake Park, GA 31636

12/09 – Mollie Danner: 1415 Sunrise Ave.; Moultrie, GA 31768

12/10 – Charles Cox: 100 Spring Harbor Dr., Apt. 244; Columbus, GA 31904

12/10 – Britt Priddy: 109 Churchview Dr.; Leesburg, GA 31763

12/10 – Cephas Williamson: 4815 Tirol Pass; Ft. Wayne, IN 46835

12/12 – Alan Miller: 2099 Corsica Way SW; Marietta, GA 30008

12/15 – Paula Lytle: PO Box 2905; Statesboro, GA 30459

12/16 – Pat Holbert: PO Box 1004; Louisville, GA 30434

12/19 – Ed Eschmann: 520 N. Spring Creek Cir.; Cobb, GA 31735

12/19 – Morgan Johnson: 5000 Fairbanks Ave. #148; Alexandria, VA 22311-1227

12/22 – Larry Giles: 214 Jasmine St.; Sandersville, GA 31082

12/22 – Lenton Powell: PO Box 42986; Atlanta, GA 30311

12/22 – Joy Wilson: 59 Amanda Lane; Ellaville, GA 31806

12/26 – Grady Carter: 3285 Vista Circle; Macon, GA 31204

12/26 – Wayne Mitchell: 431 Oak Ridge Dr.; Nashville, GA 31639

12/26 – Diane Shedd: 1718 Azalea Dr.; Valdosta, GA 31602

12/28 – William Blalock: PO Box 187; Vidalia, GA 30475

12/28 – Ellis Carpenter: 604 Quail Ridge Lane; Perry, GA 31069

12/31 – John Carroll, Jr.: 4663 Wesleyan Woods Dr.; Macon, GA 31210

12/31 – Bill Daniel: 2450 N. Oceanshore Blvd., C215; Flagler Beach, FL 32136

12/31 – William A. Smith: 102 Pierce Rd.; Reynolds, GA 31076

Scripture Readings – December 6 edition

December 11

Third Sunday of Advent, Year A

- [Isaiah 35:1-10](#)
- [James 5:7-10](#)
- [Matthew 11:2-11](#)
- [Luke 1:46b-55](#)

December 18

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year A

- [Isaiah 7:10-16](#)
- [Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19](#)
- [Romans 1:1-7](#)
- [Matthew 1:18-25](#)