

Bedford Presbyterian Church

105 West Main Street, Bedford, Virginia

From 1844 to 2023 (179 Years)

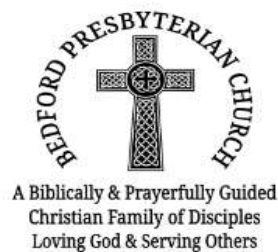


Week of December 17th

We will continue sending out this combination of the newsletter and bulletin to keep you up to date on announcements, prayers, needs and scheduled activities for those that are uncomfortable to attend service yet.

Included will be the usual newsletter information along with prayers, scripture and a sermon.

We hope that you can utilize this format to keep up to date while being away from actual services, meetings, activities and watching the online sermon.



*Bedford Presbyterian is a Biblically and
Prayerfully Guided Christian Family of
Disciples, Loving God and Serving Others*

The Approach to God

One: The peace of Christ be with you

All: And Also with you

Prelude

"As with Gladness Men of Old"

arr: Bill Wolaver

Lighting of the Advent Candle

James & Ann Marie Fleming

Reader One: This is the third Sunday of Advent. In one week we will celebrate the birth of Christ

The Third Candle Is Lit.

Reader Two: Two of the advent candles have already been lit, the candles of faith and submission. Today we light the candle of DILIGENCE. Like the Wise Men of old may we be diligent in our search for the Christ Child so that we might worship and honor Him during our journey to Christmas.

Hymn

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

Hymn 154

Prayer of Confession

God of grace and truth, we confess our unworthiness to stand in Your presence. Mary accepted Your call to be the mother of Jesus. Forgive our lack of submission to Your will. Your Son, our Savior, was born in poverty in a manger. Forgive our greed and rejection of Your ways. The shepherds left their flocks to go to Bethlehem. Forgive our self-interest and lack of vision. The wise men followed the star to find Jesus the King. Forgive our reluctance to seek You. We have sinned. Forgive and heal us.

Assurance of Pardon:

One: Friends, believe the good news of the gospel.

All: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven! Through Jesus Christ we have been born again to new life.

Gloria

"Glory Be to the Father"

Proclaiming the Word of God

Introduction to Scripture

Scripture

Matthew 2:1-12, Numbers 24:15-17, Micah 5:2

Hymn

"What Child Is This"

Hymn 184

If you and I were to take a trip during this Christmas season, one of the places we might want to visit is Cologne, Germany, especially the cathedral in that city. It would be aglow with religious fervor at this time of year for it is the home of the “Shrine of the Three Kings,” otherwise known as “The Tomb of the Three Magi.” Within this Gothic cathedral, the largest in northern Europe, resides the remains of three men, housed in a beautifully decorated golden casket. For centuries, Christian pilgrims from all of the world have journeyed to this site to honor these men whom they believe were the very ones who bowed before the Christ child and bestowed upon Him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The authenticity of these skeletal remains will never be known for sure, but they are quite old, dating all the way back to the Fourth Century AD.

Who were they? How did they know that the Christ child had been born? Where did they come from? How many were there, just three or maybe more? And most importantly, what can we learn from these Wise Men that will make our journey to Christmas more meaningful? These are but a few of the questions which arise when we examine the Scriptural account of the Wise Men in the gospel of Matthew, as well as investigating the day and times in which these men lived. This morning let’s see if we can find some answers to at least a few of these questions.

The Wise Men go by many names. Sometimes they are called Kings and sometimes Magi. Personally, I think the term “Wise Men” suits them best, because that’s what they were. They were repositories of wisdom, the most learned individuals of the ancient world in terms of history, religion, politics and science, at least as science was known back then. As such they served as advisers to kings with the kind of royal authority that elevated them above just about everyone else. In the eyes of some they were almost like potentates. They were also referred to as magi, a fancy word for magician. But it was more than just pulling rabbits out of hats. They were the kind of people who knew the secrets of the universe, especially the movements of the stars and planets. In the ancient world everyone believed that stars and planets determined not only the seasons of the year, when to plant and when to harvest, but the affairs of mankind, especially the royal affairs of mankind. Lastly in terms of history and religion they were walking encyclopedias. Many of them were followers of Zoroastrianism, a Persian religion that was in many ways similar to the religion of the Jewish people.

Speaking of the Jewish people and these visitors from the East, I believe that there were three of them who came in search of the King of the Jews. There could have been more, but since there were three gifts, three seems about the right number to me. Of course, they did not come alone. There were a whole host of servants traveling with them—caring for the animals, setting up and taking down the camp and most important of all, providing protection. Bandits and thieves were plentiful back then. Arriving in Jerusalem, it was not just three men, but an entire caravan that entered the city. I also believe these Wise Men had come a long ways, all the way from what we would call today, modern Iran. That’s quite a journey, about a thousand miles, especially if you’re riding a camel. So let’s meet these men and find out a little more about them and the journey they took to find the Christ child.

We’re not given their names in the Scriptures. Tradition says they were named Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. What we do know is that what got their attention was a new star rising in the East. I think I can hear them now. “Melchior, Balthasar, come here. I see something in the heavens that I have never seen before.” Caspar was pointing up into the evening sky. “Do you see it?” “Yes, we see it Caspar, but what does it mean?” Melchior and Balthasar replied. “The only way to find out is to consult our charts and historical records,” Caspar said. After a careful inquiry, they came to this conclusion. The quadrant of the sky where the star had first appeared was dedicated to the Jewish people. In response, Melchior said,

“See if there is anything within their writings that speaks about stars and kings. This star is obviously the star of a new king. Just look at its position in the heavens.”

After diligent research, Balthasar finally found the passage of Scripture that he had vaguely remembered. His study of the Jewish people and their writings had yielded favorable results. Unrolling an ancient manuscript he stated, “In the book of Numbers, written by their greatest patriarch, Moses, there is a story about a man named Balaam. In many ways he was like us, a spiritual adviser to royalty. Summoned by the king of Moab, he was commissioned by that king to pronounce curses on the Israelites. Instead, each time he spoke he offered a blessing instead of a curse. Listen to what he said when he spoke for the fourth time, ‘I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel’ (Numbers 24:17). We always thought this prophecy referred to their greatest ruler, David, but there is no record of a star appearing at his birth.

“Clearly,” Melchior stated. “The time has come for a journey. We must go to the land of Judah and seek out this new king who has been born. Perhaps He is the fulfillment not only of what Balaam prophesized, but of our own prophecies as well. As you will remember, according to our religious beliefs, we too are looking for a savior, one who will deliver us from our sins and lead us in the ways of righteousness.” That very night they began to make preparations for their trek to Jerusalem, the capital of Judea. Their arrival, months later, caused a great stir and almost immediately they were ushered into the presence of Herod, the Roman puppet, who ruled over the land. After conferring with him and his religious leaders they were introduced to a second passage of Scripture which they had overlooked. Found in the book of Micah, one of the minor prophets in the Old Testament, it read, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times” (Micah 5:2).

Now they knew the place where this Savior, this ruler of Israel, had been born. They hurried on their way to find Him. Stopping at a well, a short distance just outside of town, one of the Wise Men made a marvelous discovery. Reflected in the waters of that well was a star, the very one that had appeared to them months earlier. “Look,” said Balthasar, “The star has returned.” Indeed it had and this time like a lantern in the sky it led them to a tiny little hovel on the outskirts of Bethlehem. Carefully inquiring so as not to cause alarm, they were introduced to a young mother and a little toddler named Jesus. Realizing that their quest had been fulfilled, the three Wise Men told Mary about their journey and why they had come to her home. Then solemnly bowing before the inquisitive infant, they offered Him gifts, a gift suitable for a king, a chest filled with gold, a gift suitable for a priest, frankincense for worship and a gift suitable for a burial, myrrh, a perfume used for embalming. Perhaps these Wise Men knew more about this child than anyone would have ever guessed. They had found a king, who as a priest, would lead humanity back to God, even at the cost of His own life.

Bidding farewell to a startled and anxious mother who at first thought that these strangers might steal her Son, they quietly returned to their animals and made camp outside the town, still marveling at the star that glowed so radiantly over the little town of Bethlehem. The next morning they huddled by their campfire as they reflected on the events of the past evening. One of them, Caspar said, “I had the strangest dream last night. An angel warned me not to go back to Herod.” Melchior replied, “It wasn’t a dream, but an uneasy feeling that kept me awake for hours.” Then it’s settled,” said Balthasar. “Herod is a dangerous man. We’ve all heard what he’s done to those whom he considers to be a threat. For the sake of the child and his parents, I think we should return home by another route.” “Agreed,” Caspar and Melchior chimed in. And so it was that the three Wise Men departed secretly for their own homeland, taking with them the memory of a most remarkable journey.

Now what does this account convey to us on our journey to Christmas? There are two things, both found in the book of Psalms, chapter 19. First, God speaks to us through His creation. Chapter 19 begins with these words, “The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament reveals His handiwork.” It goes on to say that although the heavens are silent, they nevertheless speak in a voice that everyone can understand. Their very presence is a testimony to the One who created them. Not only Jewish people, but people everywhere can be drawn to the Lord and the way in which He moves and works in our world. Such was the case with the Wise Men. They saw a new star in the heavens and it drew them to the Christ Child in Bethlehem. The same is true for you and me.

Years ago I met a man who had served in the United States Navy. He had been stationed on a carrier off the coast of North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. He was an agnostic. He didn’t really believe in God or want to have anything to do with Him. During basic training there were chapel services that everyone was supposed to attend. He would hide in a closet to keep from going. One night he was up on the flight deck all by himself. Looking up at the stars overhead, he was overwhelmed by their brilliance. Almost without realizing it, he said to himself, “Somebody had to create you. You didn’t get up there all by yourselves.” That experience marked the beginning of his journey back to God. And he is not alone. Down through the centuries countless thousands, perhaps millions of people, have been drawn to the Lord through His creation. Perhaps, like the Wise Men you too have been led to the Savior in the same way.

Second, God speaks to us through His Word. Yes, the Wise Men saw a new star and decided that it announced the birth of a king. But whose king and where was he to be found? Without the Scriptures they would never have known that He was to be born among the Jewish people in a forgotten little town in Judea. That’s why Psalm 19 declares that the Lord speaks to us not only through His creation, but also through His Word, the Bible. While the creation offers a general awareness of His divinity, the Bible clearly and unambiguously tells us who God is and it informs us as to how He desires for us to live with Him and with one another. Psalm 19:7 declares, “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.”

Speaking of the simple, a young man barely out of his teens, finally found a job at a hotel in Charlotte, North Carolina. It was during the Great Depression and jobs were hard to find, especially for a young man who knew almost nothing about life. His salary was an attic room and leftovers in the hotel restaurant. At least he thought to himself, “It’s room and board.” A single light bulb illuminated the room as he arrived after his first day at work. On the nightstand beside his bed there was a book. It had been placed there by the Gideons. With nothing else to do, he opened it and began to read. For the first time in his life he discovered what it means to be a Christian. Kneeling beside the bed on that very night, he gave his heart and life to Jesus Christ. Years later when they tore down the old hotel, he asked if he could have the brass room number of where he had met the Lord. He placed it in his office, the pastor’s study at the First Baptist Church of that same city, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Three Wise Men left their native land and journeyed across rivers and deserts in search of the Christ Child. Although your journey to Christmas may not take nearly as long or be nearly as difficult as what they experienced, may it nevertheless conclude on bended knee in humble adoration. As has so often been stated, “Wise men still seek Him.”

Response to the Word of God

Worship Song

“Offering” (Christmas Version)

Paul Baloche

An Advent Affirmation of Faith

Rev. Stephen M. Fearing

We believe that God has come to us; that God brought us into being, that this God gave us breath and purpose that we have been blessed to be a blessing to others, that we have fallen short of this commandment, but that God has nevertheless loved us despite our brokenness.

We believe that God is coming to us; that God is not happy to leave us alone, that this God will come to us as a particular human being, that God will be made known to us in flesh and bone like ours, that Mary will soon give birth and Joseph will soon clap his hands in joy, that Jesus Christ will be born and our salvation made complete.

We believe that God will come to us; that God will have the final word and that Word will be good, that this God will give us the presence of the Spirit to continue our work, that we are called to be disciples to all the corners of the earth, that the day is coming when tears and pain will be no more and all will gather at the Table to sing an endless and perfect "Alleluia!"

Doxology*"Doxology for Advent or Christmas"***Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Lord and Giver of all good things, the magi travelled for miles to bring the Christ child the first Christmas presents. So may we, too, remember with thankful hearts the love that comes with each present we open. We also thank You for the love You have for each of us, and we thank You for the many gifts that You give us, especially the gift of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sharing of Joys and Concerns**Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Closing Hymn*"As With Gladness"*

Hymn 236

The Sending Forth**Benediction****Postlude***"I Saw Three Ships"*

Dale Wood

December 2023

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3 <i>10 am Worship</i> <i>1st Sunday of Advent</i> <i>Communion Session</i>	4	5 <i>Office opening late</i>	6 <i>Something More, 3 pm</i>	7	8	9
10 <i>10 am Worship</i> <i>2nd Sunday of Advent</i> <i>5¢ a Meal</i> <i>BCM collection</i> <i>Abendmusik, 6:30 pm</i>	11	12	13 <i>Something More, 3pm</i>	14	15	16
17 <i>10 am Worship</i> <i>3rd Sunday of Advent</i>	18	19	20 <i>Something More, 3pm</i>	21	22	23
24 <i>10 am Worship</i> <i>4th Sunday of Advent</i> <i>Christmas Eve Service, 7pm</i>	25 <i>He Is Born!</i> <i>Office Closed</i>	26	27	28	29	30
31 <i>10 am Worship</i> <i>New Year's Eve</i>						

Joys- December 17th

Joy- Great seeing Libby Monk in service

Joy- Eunice Barnes, music was wonderful

Concerns- December 17th

Avery: Tinkie, hospice care

Barnes: Kim Hedrick- (friend) colon cancer

Mark- (nephew) open heart surgery, caregiver of special needs adult

Benton: Tracey Thomas (daughter's friend) transplant problems

Family of Judy Salmon

Blair: Ecumenical youth group

Tonya: extra security in Arizona for religious communities

Boone: Linda Cole- heart transplant

Don Bartz- (brother-in-law) in hospital, pneumonia

Callahan: Mary Jane (friend) cancer

Steve Chaffin (friend) blood clots

Compter: two brothers- unbelievers

Prayers for friends to come to the Lord

Michael Compter- (brother) heart failure

Steve & Mary- (friends) Steve disabilities

Zoey Fisher-(child) doing well

Vicky-(friend) recurring lymphoma

May- (friend) breast cancer

Cram: Winslow's-(friends of Sally) family & medical problems

Janice Campbell-(friend) under hospice care

Ryan- (grandson) searching for faith

Lory Graham- (friend) health issues, wife caretaker

Brenda Wilkerson- UVA- seizures

Sally- bad cold

DeHart: Dawn's mother gall bladder surgery

Michael Rutter- septic shock, amputation

Easter: Ruby Key (friend) cancer

Dallas (friend) heart issues

Foster: Ron (brother-in-law) out of hospital into home

Howard & Lynn (brother) difficulty with legs, wife dementia

Tom- home

Prayers for everyone on dialysis

Goode: prayers for Eunice, health issues

Rodney & Connie Groggins (husband's cousins) Connie

Alzheimer's, Rodney caregiver, health issues

Cynthia- (friend) physical therapy

Goodman: William McGuire home from hospital

Grigg: Beth Falwell- starting cancer treatments

Heinrich: Steven - (grandson) autoimmune disorder

Barbara Lore- (Helen's sister) heart problems

Kuhn- Kibbey: Phyllis Smith (friend) heart attack

Lambert: Margaret caring for brother, strokes, doing better

MaManis: Family on passing of sister

Mauser: Joyce Reese- (friend) health problems

Steven-(son's boss) going blind

Barbara (AL's sister) intense headaches

Gayle- doing better

Morris: all law enforcement, firefighters and all other first responders

Forensic scientists who deal with crime

Kyle Coble- (cousin) leukemia

Rev. Pam Ledbetter, recovering from stroke

James Morgan (cousins husband) spot on lung

John Hargett (friend) slow recovery may never walk

Ron- heart issues

Margaret's sister-in-law, surgery

Monk: Libby, recovering from procedure

Narwid: Ed- not doing well

Saunders: (Ronnie) Colin Bridges- (grandson)

Scott- (son-in-law) doing well

Scheurer: Jim Hedrick- (friend) cancer

Bob Lindell-(friend) prostate cancer

Sonny (son) doing well

Smith: Dorothy Smith- (John's mother) not feeling well

Stetson: Clay Ramsey- thyroid cancer

Nick, Tiffany, Savannah- Savannah back in ICU

Stevens: Jackie Landis- heart problems

Two firefighters who suffered falls

Van Dyke: Rich Anderson (nieces' husband) recovering

Prayers for our nation and our President

Prayers for healing the divisive spirit among our leaders/nation

Russian invasion ends and not resort to nuclear weapons.

Prayers for new residents to come to worship with us

Prayers for Ukraine

Pray for World Peace

Prayers for Israel

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Activities for week of December 17th

Sunday: 10 am Worship
3rd Sunday of Advent

Wednesday: 3 pm Something More

Sunday: December 24th
10 am Worship
4th Sunday of Advent
Candlelight Service, 7 pm

December Birthdays

Bill Mitchell - 17
Shawn Webb - 18
Kathy Chryssikos - 24
Gayle Mauser - 30

December Anniversaries

Roy & Libby Monk - 20



**There's a new Flower Calendar in the
hallway outside of the Sanctuary and waiting
for you to fill in for 2024!!**

The Story of the Wise Men

This morning we will be meeting the three Wise Men as we continue our journey to Christmas. Who were they and where did they come from? Why were they searching for the newborn King of the Jews and why were they following a star to Bethlehem? We'll attempt to answer these questions as we focus our attention upon these mysterious Magi from the East. Next Sunday is Christmas Eve. We will be visiting with the shepherds watching over their flocks during the morning service and greeting the Christ Child during our Christmas Eve Candlelight service at 7:00 pm. Something More will meet the next two weeks and then take a break before resuming on January 3rd.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Christmas Eve is always a special time in the life of our church. It is an opportunity to celebrate the birth of Christ. It is a vivid reminder that God loves us so much that He came to dwell among us as a tiny babe born in Bethlehem. On Christmas Eve we will gather together at 7:00 pm. We will light the Christ Candle on the Advent Wreath in honor of His birth. We will celebrate the Lord's Supper as we remember the sacrifice of His life for our salvation. At the conclusion of the service, our lit candles will declare to one and all that Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Come and join with us for our Christmas Eve Candlelight Service.

Clerk's Corner

- The Congregation our 2024 Nominating committee at last meeting. However, after the meeting Session was informed that the nominations were not in keeping with established BPC policy. At last Session meeting Becky Noell stepped down from Nominating Committee, and Barbara Nichols stated that she and Dianne Fain volunteered to serve. This was approved by Session and approval of the 2024 Nominating Committee will presented to Congregation at the next meeting.



- Church History, as written by the Van Dykes, is now available on church website.
- Keep our Pastoral Nominating Committee in prayer: Judy Blair, Nick DeWitt, James Fleming, Deanna Rutledge, Dave Stetson, Paul Van Dyke (Chair), and Shawn Webb.
- Rev. Parker has heard from some members that it is too difficult to make a 10 am worship service. Worship Committee is exploring the issue. Please get your input to Sherry Parker.
- Thank you Russell and Scarlett Stevens for your devoted service as greeters each Sunday.
- Two more churches expressed interest in joining the Ecumenical Youth Group.
- Thank you Bill and Deanna Rutledge for an amazing Abendmusik!
- The entire ceiling in the Sanctuary will have to be stripped before it can be repainted. Waiting until the Spring for this work.
- October Financial report showed that church giving was 108% of our budget goal! \$1249.16 was distributed between Covered, Bedford Christian Ministries in October and \$1647.25 was distributed between Shepherds Table, Bedford Pregnancy Center and Bedford Christian Ministries in November. God is so good!
- Need a piano? We have several excess. Please see John Blair.

Important Dates:

January 21st: Soup and Pie Lunch

January 28th: Congregational and Session Meeting