

Bethany

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



3501 W 1st Ave ♦ Denver, CO ♦ 80219

The Christmas season is such a special time of the year, but I am especially excited for Christmas this year. We have faced many challenges this year-- unpredictable political climate, division, and a rapidly changing planet. Maybe it's because I'm getting older, but I expect better behavior of the people in our world: better manners, more smiles, less fussing, less crime. Advent and Christmas have always been a much needed break from the negativity of the world. I am reminded this holiday season that the real strength in this world does not come from faster cars, bigger guns, or division, but the strength that comes from within us. That inner strength comes from many things: support from those around us, our own self confidence, and the presence of the Holy Spirit within us.



The Holy Spirit whispers to us that we are loved, tells us we are strong enough-- and maybe even shouts at us when we are not paying attention. When you hear that voice, do something about it. Love a little harder, smile a little broader, bring justice to the world and to yourself. We are a strong community-- stronger than we know.

Love, Pastor Denise

Church Conference - December 4.

All voting and non-voting members are welcome to this time of reviewing the successes of the past and looking into possible changes for the future. Rev. Leah Coleman will lead the meeting as the presiding elder. Preceding the All-Church Meeting we will celebrate with a pot-luck. Please bring a dish to share.

Historic Gift Giving Traditions

The custom of giving presents during the middle of winter dates back long before the birth of Jesus. Many early cultures, such as the Romans and the Norse, had winter solstice festivals that included gift giving.

Saturnalia December Celebration

The Roman god of agriculture, Saturn, was celebrated during the winter solstice. Saturnalia was celebrated on December 17. However, some time during the Ancient Roman Republic (133–31 BC), Saturnalia became a bigger celebration. Starting on December 17, the citizens celebrated the entire week. Saturnalia was festive with all kinds of events. Some celebratory practices included giving gifts and sacrifices to Saturn.

Adoption of Gift Giving for Christmas

This tradition of celebration and gift giving was one of the many customs adopted by Christianity as a way to merge these cultures into the Christian religion. The custom of gift giving at Christmas was a natural adoption of these and other seasonal customs, such as ceremonial lighting of candles, songs of celebration, and holding grand feasts.

Various Christmas Gift Giving Traditions

The Christmas season is a traditional time for giving presents. Not everyone bestows gifts the same way. Various European cultural customs were incorporated into Christmas celebrations. The one thing these celebrations have in common is a story of the gift giver.

St. Nicholas

St Nicholas is the most prominent figure in many European gift giving practices. St. Nicholas morphed into Father Christmas and later in America into the iconic figure Santa Claus.

Christkind

Much the same way American children write letters to Santa Claus, in the German Culture, children in Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, Czech Republic, and Liechtenstein send letters asking for gifts to Christkind (also spelled Christkindl), a young girl believed to have Christ-like qualities. However, most people believe the gifts are delivered on Christmas Eve by Father Christmas.

La Befana

Christmas in Italy evolves around La Befana, a type of Santa Clausan except she is an old woman. Some stories cast her as a witch with a cleaning penchant who rides a broom and comes down chimneys with gifts for children on Epiphany (Twelfth Night). She's also reputed to clean the floors before she flies off.

Festival of Three Kings

Tourist Guide Barcelona notes the tradition of gift giving comes from the Feast of the Three Kings or Feast of Epiphany. Italian children write letters to the Three Kings much the same way American children write to Santa Claus. On January 5, the Three Kings arrive and give children candy. That night children leave their shoes near a window (similar to Christmas stocking traditions) to be filled with the gifts they requested. There's always the risk of receiving a lump of coal if they've been bad. Some Italian families have also adopted the western Christmas tradition of a Christmas tree and gifts from Santa Claus.

Preparing a Space

The season of Advent is a season of preparation, a time of getting ready for what lies ahead. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says of John the Baptist, "This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your ways before you,'" And, in another Advent reading, Isaiah proclaims to us, "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Isaiah 40"3). While both Matthew and Isaiah draw our attention to the horizon from which the Holy One will appear, they also draw our gaze to the path itself.

This season beckons me to ask, what am I preparing for? What is the way that is being prepared within the wilderness of my life? What does it mean for my own life to become a path, a way of welcome for the Holy One? How do I give myself time to notice the ways that the path unfolds before me and within me? What are the acts of preparation that bring delight to my daily life? Whom do I ask or allow to help me prepare?

Chances are, if we don't enjoy the process of getting ready, we won't enjoy the event we are getting ready for. If we become so consumed by getting Christmas right - the right present, the right cards mailed to the right people at the right time, the right dishes for Christmas dinner - we risk missing

the surprising ways that God prepares us in this season. As we open to God's guiding in these Advent days, we may discover that the space being prepared for the coming birth lies within our own selves.

For all the generations
that have prepared the way;
for all the unseen hands
that have made ready
every space;
for those who light
the fires of welcome
and who tend
to every resting place,
O God of every pilgrim,
we bless you with our thanks.



DON'T FORGET TO HELP OUT THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON WITH DONATIONS FOR COMMUNITY MINISTRIES. DECEMBER FOOD NEEDS TOMATO SAUCE, STUFFING, CORN, CANNED FRUIT, CEREAL, AND DIAPERS. THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS FOOD BOXES.

Traditions of Christmas Bells

Bells, especially Church Bells, have traditionally been associated with Christmas for a long time. In the Anglican and Catholic churches, the church day starts at sunset, so any service after that is the first service of the day. So a service on Christmas Eve after sunset is traditionally the first service of Christmas day! In churches that have a Bell or Bells, They are often rung to signal the start of this service.

In some churches in the UK, it is traditional that the largest bell in the church is rung four times in the hour before midnight and then at midnight all the bells are rung in celebration.

In the Catholic Church, Christmas and Easter are the only times that Mass is allowed to be held at Midnight. It's traditional that at both midnight Masses, the church and altar bells too in many cases are rung while the Priest says the "Gloria" (Gloria in excelsis Deo).

Having a Mass at Midnight at Christmas dates back to the early church, when it was believed that Jesus was born at midnight, although there has never been any proof of this! A lot of Churches have midnight services on Christmas Eve, although not every church will have a mass or communion as part of the service.

In many Catholic countries such as France, Spain and Italy, the midnight mass service is very important and everyone tries to go to a service.

In Victorian times, it was very fashionable to go carol singing with small handbells to play the tune of the carol. Sometimes there would only be the bells and no singing! Handbell ringing is still popular today.



Perhaps the most famous bells at Christmas now are the ones in the song 'Jingle Bells'. However, the song was first called "One Horse Open Sleigh" and was originally published, in the USA, in September 1857 as a Thanksgiving song and NOT a Christmas one! But it soon became associated with Christmas because of the 'snowy' lyrics and many choirs were singing it at Christmas in the 1860s and 1870s. It was first recorded in 1889. Often only the first verse (and chorus) are now sung. The other verses are about driving the 'one horse open sleigh' rather fast and crashing it!

Jingle Bells was also the first song to be broadcast from space in December 1965 when the astronauts Tom Stafford and Wally Schirra said they had spotted a sleigh in space! They then took out a harmonica and sleigh bells which they had smuggled onto the Gemini 6 space craft and played and sang the song to mission control.

Jingle Bells was written by James Lord Pierpont (1822-1893) and the original version had some slightly different words and a slightly different tune for the chorus than are used today. There is some debate as to where it was written. Some people claim it was written in 1850 Medford, Massachusetts; while other people claim it was written nearer 1875 when James Lord Pierpoint lived in Savannah, Georgia.

December 2022

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

1

2

Charlie Seiffert
BIRTHDAY

3

4

11AM Worship
Communion
Church Conference

5

Jerry Goddard
BIRTHDAY

6

Jill Thompson
BIRTHDAY

7

8

9

10

11

11AM Worship

12

Harriet Seiffert
Elise Seiffert
BIRTHDAY

13

14

15

16

17

18

11AM Worship

19

20

21

22

23

24

Cameron Steelman
BIRTHDAY

25

11AM Worship

26

27

28

29

30

31

Lectionary Readings

December 4, 2022

-Isaiah 11:1-10
-Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19
-Romans 15:4-13
-Matthew 3:1-12

December 11, 2022

-Isaiah 35:1-10
-Psalm 146:5-10
-Luke 1:46b-55
-James 5:7-10
-Matthew 11:2-11

December 18, 2022

-Isaiah 7:10-16
-Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
-Romans 1:1-7
-Matthew 1:18-25

December 25, 2022

-Isaiah 9:2-7
-Psalm 96
-Titus 2:11-14
-Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)

Liturgists

December 4, 2022

Mary

December 11, 2022

Eva

December 18, 2022

Lataine

December 25, 2022

Mary