

Sierra Christian Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation

**Merry Christmas, Sierra Christian Church,
and Friends Everywhere!**



And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord..."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward all."

Pastor's Pitch: A Pair of Christmas Ruminations

I

Christmas, if you look at it in a certain way, was the night heaven touched earth. God chose to slip into this world in human form and don our native garb. As the story goes, angels hovered around and above, and the glory of the Lord shone upon—not the priests in the temple, not the magistrates in the city hall, not the professors in the academy nor kings in their palaces—but upon some shepherds who lived with their sheep and slept outdoors in fields under the stars. If you think about it, this scenario makes sense not only for the whole Christian theology borne of Jesus's life and blood, but for the practical plot elements, too.

Who better to deal with the whole manger and farm animal setting than shepherds. I suspect they were totally fine with the manger setting, no matter

I believe that God is still trying to get to us, seeking out shepherds, seeking out anyone, really, who will listen. I believe God is still trying to get to us to bring good news of great joy for all the people.



Sierra Christian Church's pastor is the Rev. Christine Pobanz-Hartmire. Her challenge to us is to embrace, the beautiful truth that everyone is always welcomed at Jesus' table.

how odd and frightening the whole thing had to have been. But maybe they recognized that Jesus was born when and where he was most needed, and that was in Bethlehem some 2,000+ years ago amongst sheep and straw and cow poop. God, because He knows things like this, knew that the shepherds tending their flock that night wouldn't be too freaked out by the whole baby in a manger thing. They already smelled like sheep and grass and dirt and would think little of it.

This image of a proud Joseph and an exhausted Mary looking at the babe laying in the manger wrapped in bands of cloth, and then suddenly some smelly shepherds show up telling magical tales of singing angels is full of more hope and promise than could ever be found in any ornate palace or tall temple.

A manger in Bethlehem was where it needed to happen. God chose the witnesses.

And I believe that despite wars raging, and political discord dividing us, despite random violence robbing young people of their lives, and more people than ever living on the streets hungry and cold and disenfranchised—despite this, I believe that there are still angels hovering around and above. I believe that God is still trying to get to us, seeking out shepherds, seeking out anyone, really, who will listen. I believe God is still trying to get to us to bring good news of great joy for all the people.

We've had so much bad news this year—
bad news of great sorrow for all the peoples.

Please see PITCH, page 3

If our religion is based on salvation, our chief emotions will be fear and trembling. If our religion is based on wonder, our chief emotion will be gratitude.

...Carl Jung

PITCH

(Continued from page)

So, with deep delight and great hope I say to one and all, Merry Christmas, because we could use some good news of great joy for all the people right about now.

And I believe that the Christ child is always born where he is most needed, where he is most cherished, where he is most potent. So wherever in your life you need this babe, that is always where he is to be found.

Whoever is reading this right now...

It is unto *you* a child is born.

Unto *you*.

Unto you the mother without her own children.

Unto you an addict who can't keep clean.

Unto you the survivor.

Unto you the lonely and cold.

Unto you who can't lose it because you have to keep it together for everyone else.

Unto you the bullied kid.

Unto you whose family never got you.

Unto you who lost your parents this year.

Unto you who doesn't know how in the world you can keep going.

Unto you.

Unto you a child is born. And also, unto me and all who already smell of sheep and grass a dirt.

Because the Christ child is always born wherever he is most needed, wherever a soul needs to feel its immaculate worth.

Merry Christmas, family.

II

Inevitably, I will be asked in the coming weeks if I am ready for Christmas. The question's impetus, I am sure, is always more commercial than theological. Is my shopping done? Are the gifts wrapped? Can I believe it is December already? Is the tree up and trimmed and safe from the cat? Are the wrapped gifts under the tree, or if not under the tree, at least smartly hidden where I will remember where I hid them? Are all my new Christmas gnomes scattered smartly around the house? Did I successfully coax my husband up on the roof to string our lights one more time?

I don't really know if I have ever been asked if I'm ready for Christmas by someone meaning and wanting to know if I am ready for the birth of the One who brings God to humans and humans to God by being both human and God. I just don't know.

I can answer the first inquiry in a heartbeat. "I'm working on it." But if someone is genuinely curious if I am ready for Christmas biblically and theologically speaking, the best I can do is say, "I'm working on it."

It might be a tad brazen to boast that I am prepared for the coming of Christ into the world, but it feels absolutely right to declare that I am ready. There are things in life that come our way that we are never prepared for. They happen anyway. I am ready like a brilliant star burning brightly in our eyes to roll up my sleeves and help get affordable senior housing developed on our property, but I do not know if I am prepared for all it

Please see PITCH, page 5

A Christmas Encounter

The few days I drive to work each month I park about a half-mile from my office and walk past an increasing number of homeless men and women waking from their night's sleep in tents pitches along the sidewalk. There was a morning not too long ago when one of the homeless man came out of his tent and said he recognized me. It was not mutual. He said he knew I was friends with "them," but he didn't want to say their names. It was cold that morning, and he was wearing an aging peacoat. I told him I didn't recognize him but... which was when he cut me off by saying, "If anyone wishes me a Merry Christmas I would have to stab them."

I cocked my head and must have looked as perplexed as I felt, because he went on to elaborate in that fast, almost steam-of-consciousness speech where you can't tell if the speaker is actually breathing or not, or who he is actually talking to, that I didn't know nothin' about why it was the way it was.

He said it wasn't because he once had a home and used to decorate Christmas trees in that home, or that he had kids who shrieked and danced opening their presents that were under the tree, nor because now he could see his breath in the morning after waking up with aching hips and a sore back sleeping on the hard packed dirt next to the sidewalk. Staying in front of me to keep me from getting by him, he said he hated the Wise Men and their gifts of spice and oils, angels who dared people not to be afraid. Scotch Tape was an issue for him, too, and greeting cards he no longer gets in the mail, shiny bows and candy canes, manger scenes with donkeys and sheep slobbering over some little baby who was supposed to change the whole blasted world, and what a great a job he did with that one, and all the lights everywhere as if we had flown off course and needed help landing, and all the shopping and believing that a 14-year-old virgin gave birth to the King of Kings, and that a fat man in a red suit can get to every kid in the whole world with toys and presents with the help of flying reindeers shouting Ho Ho Ho."

His eyes were large like cookies. He was in a manic state. I stood with him and it wasn't long be-

fore I realized he had slowed and softened. The photo on my cellphone that I had pulled out of my pocket seemed to catch him by surprise.

"It's a photo of my wife and I laughing on our wedding day," I explained. (The one cleverly shared here.)

"Best thing two people can do," he said. He tried to grab the phone out of my hand to, I think, get a better look. I held on.

"Man, I fell in love with my woman every day we woke up," he said "Ain't that just the shits."

I agreed it was. He then repeated that he knew who I was. "Listen, I ain't gonna tell no one though, you know. Just cuz I ain't that kind of rat. You know how it is."

I pretended I did and so he wanted to know what kind of music I was listening to on my iPod, which I had turned off for the sake of this conversation. When I said Christmas music, he rolled his huge eyes and said, like in a trance, "And lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

"The three wise men," I said.

"You get to read the Bible where I've been," he said. "And girlie magazines if you know how to hide them."



Please see ENCOUNTER, page 5

PITCH

(Continued from page 3)

will take. I understand zoning codes and density limits, traffic mitigation, and cynical Loomis residents threatened by anything different or not like them. I have an amazing group of people who are committed to do this thing together and help navigate the community development maze. But to pronounce myself prepared implies that I am aware of what will happen and how to deal with the inevitable contingencies. I find myself hopeful, even a little confident, of what will happen, even if I don't fully know what that will be.

I'm ready for Christmas because my shopping is underway and the lights are hung and I have a big inflatable Christmas gnome on my front lawn, and it turns out I am prepared for Christmas because my heart has been broken by what is happening in the Middle East and Ukraine, on our streets, and in the halls of our chaotic Capital, and I really need to hear about how God enters fully into the muck of our existence and brings new life. I'm ready and prepared and eager because I know I need it.

ENCOUNTER

(Continued from page 4)

"Well, I won't wish you a Merry Christmas then."

Got any change you can spare?" he asked, looking up at the sky, still dark, stars still visible. "Some place I just got to be. For old time's sake, you know?"

I handed him a few bucks because it's important, you know, to come back from where you have to be. He repeated, "Man oh man, that star they saw in the east went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was. You see?" he said, happily. "I know I know you."

And he hustled off, less agitated. Seeing him prance off holding three one dollar bills in his hand like it was gold, I got it. Christmas really is where the heart is. For some it is in a shiny new bicycle; for some it is in the eyes of a young child. For this early morning homeless gent, it was obvious that Christmas was three bucks that just might get him where he had to be, and maybe back again.

Wherever it is, it is quite a day.

--John Hartmire

Sierra Christian Church's Men's Fellowship meets virtually on Saturday, December 9 at 9 am. It is breakfast (sort of), a Zoom meeting (absolutely), camaraderie and friendship (without a doubt).

Sierra Christian Church Monthly Calendar

December 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
31 New Years Eve! 10:30 am Worship				1	1	2 9 am Men's Fellowship Breakfast
3 10:30 am Worship Congregational Meeting to follow	4	5	6	7	8	9
10 10:30 am Worship	11	12	13	14	15	16
17 10:30 am Worship Zoom Only	18	19	20	21 6:30 pm Books That Bind	22	23
24 Christmas Eve 10:30 am Worship	25 Christmas Day!	26	27	28	29	30

[Theatre of Lights](#) is back in Old Sacramento The 20-minute live dramatization of "Twas the Night Before Christmas" takes place on the balconies above K Street, and features a special appearance by Jack Frost, and the light lighting of the 60-foot Christmas tree by St. Nick himself.

Discover how early pioneers experienced the calamities — and revelry — that befell the new city in the 1850s, the sounds of the fires, floods, and parties will surround the audience as the 150-year-old building facades light up with color. Show times are

November 22nd through December 30th
Thursday through Sunday, shows at 6 p.m. & 7:30 p.m.

- Sun. Dec. 24th one show at 6 pm

My Heart is a Mess, God!

Dear God,

My heart is a mess.

There's just more suffering and loss and fear in the world than it can hold right now. Help me not let in so much news that I have to put the "closed" sign up in the door of my heart, because my family and friends need it to stay open.

Sometimes my heart doesn't really trust love.

When my heart is full, help the anxious thoughts and feelings that poke a hole and empty it again come more slowly (or preferably not at all).

Sometimes the old girl does unhelpful things to protect herself.

When my heart is broken, help it not also create an emotional auto-immune disorder - attacking as pathogen what is actually harmless.

But sometimes, sometimes I'm surprised by my heart.

It can be more deeply in love than I ever knew possible.

It can increasingly be gladdened by simple things I used to ignore.

It can hurt for people I don't even like very much.

It can heal from things I used to think would destroy it.

It can long for you, God. But in ways that look less like piety and more like friendship.

It's confusing, having a human heart.

So help me remember that while my heart may break, expand, hurt, heal, close, open and overflow - none of that affects my soul.

None of it can get to the part of me which bears your image; the part of me that contains the divine, inextinguishable spark. And for that I am thankful. Because, as stated earlier, my heart is a mess.

AMEN.

A New Day dawns every day!



Annual Gathering 2024

Annual Gathering 2024 will take place at First Christian Church in Concord on April 19-20, 2024, and will be a joint effort from East Bay churches! Volunteers from Lafayette Christian Church, First Christian Church in Vallejo, and First Christian Church in Vacaville will work with members of FCC-Concord to make this Annual Gathering a wonderful experience for all. Any members of other East Bay churches who would like to participate in planning the Annual Gathering, please contact Leslie Taylor (Leslie@concordfcc.net). Planning Team meetings began last month!

Christmas Eve Service will be a hybrid service, at 10:30 am Sunday, December 24. There will be no evening service.

Some Interesting December Dates in History

- **December 1, 1955** - Rosa Parks sets off a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama when she refuses to give up her seat in the "colored" section of a bus to make room for a white passenger. Led by Martin Luther King, Jr., the boycott lasted for over a year and resulted in the desegregation of the buses. This is often thought of as the event that started the Civil Rights Movement nationwide.
- **December 1, 1991:** Voters in the Ukraine vote for independence from the Soviet Union.
- **December 2, 1954:** The US Senate votes to condemn Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy, R Wis., for "conduct that tends to bring the Senate into dishonor and disrepute."
- **December 2 1955:** The yacht Granma arrives on the shores of Cuba after traveling from Mexico, where Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and 80 other members of the Cuban Revolution movement disembark to begin the Cuban Revolution.
- **December 4m 1945:** The U.S. Senate approves U.S. participation in the UN. The United Nations had officially came into existence on October 24, 1945.
- **December 4, 1998:** The first 6 astronauts are taken by Space Shuttle Endeavour to Attach the Unity Module to Zarya FGB to begin the assembly in space of the International Space Station. It is a joint project between (NASA) U.S.A., (RKA) Russia , (JAXA) Japan , (CSA) Canada and eleven European countries (ESA). The space station is in low orbit and can be seen from Earth with the naked eye. Since 2nd November 2000 the Space Station has been manned continually. The ISS came about after the cold war ended with an "Agreement between the United States of America and the Russian Federation Concerning Cooperation in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes."
- **December 5, 1945:** Five U.S. Navy Avenger torpedo bombers comprising Flight 19 took off from the Ft. Lauderdale Naval Air Station in Florida on a routine three hour training mission. They never returned. This area they flew over is known as the Bermuda Triangle and is renowned for causing instrument malfunctions including Compass and Radio Malfunctions. The Bermuda Triangle is said to stretch from the southern U.S. coast across to Bermuda and down to the Atlantic coast of Cuba and Santo Domingo.
- **December 5, 1933:** Prohibition comes to an end as Utah became the 36th state to ratify the 21st Amendment to the Constitution, repealing the 18th Amendment.
- **December 6, 1790:** The United States Capitol moves from New York City to Philadelphia where it stays as the capitol until 1800 when the District of Columbia is completed and becomes the capitol.
- **December 6, 1994:** Orange County, Calif. an affluent California community filed for bankruptcy protection due to investment losses of about \$2 billion on its multi-billion-dollar investment fund.
- **December 6, 2007:** The Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney has sought to dispel public skepticism about his Mormon faith by promising to defend religious freedom. Speaking only twenty-eight days before the first nominating race, he says that he would serve 'no one religion, no one group, no one cause, and no one interest' if elected. But Mr. Romney also criticized those who called for the removal from public life of 'any acknowledgement of God.'
- **December 7, 1941:** 1941 : Japan launches a surprise dawn attack using midget submarines, 350 bombers and torpedo carrying planes targeting warships, aircraft and military installations on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and has declared war on Britain and the United States. The attack destroyed two battleships, one minelayer, two destroyers with the loss of more than 2,300 US servicemen The US president, Franklin D Roosevelt, has mobilized all forces and is poised to declare war on Japan. The next day, the president addressed Congress and the nation he swore that America would never forget December 7, 1941, as a "date that would live in infamy

Please see DATES, page 11

DATES

(Continued from page 10)

- **December 7, 2013:** 85-year-old Merrill Newman, a Korean War veteran, was released in North Korea after having been detained while visiting as a tourist in October. North Korean authorities released him after he had written and recited a public apology for crimes committed against the secretive country.
- **December 9, 2004:** Canada's Supreme Court ruled that gay marriage is constitutional.
- **December 10, 1981:** A mysterious epidemic, consisting of two separate diseases, a form of pneumonia and skin cancer, has been found in 180 patients in 15 states since last July. It has claimed around 75 lives so far in the US and up to 92% of the victims are homosexual men. The unknown condition was eventually named as Aids (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) virus not only restricted to homosexuals and 4,000 were infected in the space of two years.
- **December 10, 1984:** South African Bishop Desmond Tutu an opponent of apartheid. and ordained the first black South African Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, receives the Nobel Peace Prize.
- **December 11, 1981:** Salvadoran armed forces kill nearly 1,000 civilians as part of an anti-guerrilla campaign in the village of El Mozote and surrounding areas in El Salvador. The news was suppressed for a month by the authorities but reporters from the New York Times and the Washington Post confirmed the murders and exposed them in January 1982
- **December 12, 1917:** Father Edward Flanagan opened Boys Town dedicated to the care of at-risk children, with national headquarters in the village of Boys Town, Nebraska.
- **December 12, 1925:** The first Motel opened; the Milestone Mo-Tel of San Luis Obispo, California as the midpoint stop between Los Angeles to San Francisco and costing \$1.25 per night per room, The word Motel was a shortening of the words Motorists and Hotel. A motel allowed the customers to park their car outside their room or chalet.
- **December 14, 1905:** Illiteracy in the U.S. was 106.6 per 1,000 persons. In 2022, 21% of adults in the US are illiterate.
- **December 17, 1903:** Orville and Wilbur Wright made the first successful man-powered airplane flight, near Kitty Hawk, N.C. . The craft is referred to as an airship was capable of speeds up to 10 mph.
- **December 18, 1944:** Proving that today's Supreme Court is not the only one lost in a state of political haze, the US Supreme Court upheld Executive Order 9066, which relocated 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry to War Relocation Centers in remote areas of the US.
- **December 23, 1975:** Jim Winters, writing in The Capital Times , pointed out that the typical American child who had reached the age of 18 spent 25,000 hours watching television and had seen 350,000 advertisements.
- **December 26, 1862:** The largest mass execution in United States history took place on this day in Mankato, Minnesota; 38 Dakota prisoners were executed by hanging. 392 Native Americans of the Dakota tribe were taken prisoner and put on trial at the end of the US-Dakota War. 303 of them were convicted and sentenced to death and 16 were given prison sentences in rushed trials where the defendants were not represented. President Lincoln reviewed the trial transcripts and commuted most of the sentences.

You are so brave and quiet, I forget you are suffering.

—Ernest Hemingway

December 2

See Loomis turn the holiday lights on and meet Santa at the 49th Annual Loomis Family Christmas Tree Lighting, on Saturday, December 2, from 5-7 pm at the Loomis Train Depot. Gather around the historic Loomis Train Depot where you will find a glorious tree and plenty of holiday cheer. Be sure to be there in time for the 6 pm tree lighting and the arrival of Santa via firetruck. Loomis Lions will be collecting unwrapped toys at this free, family-friendly event.

December 3, 10 & 17, 2023

Loomis Christmas Craft & Gift Market: Blue Goose Event Center, 3550 Taylor Rd, Loomis, CA, 10 am to 4 pm. Enjoy the gifts, decor, and more of over 40 local small business vendors at the Blue Goose Event Center, \$2 at the door. Live music, hot drinks, door prizes.

Saturday & Sunday, December 9, 10, 16 & 17

Special Park & Event Hours: 1 PM – 7 PM

Celebrate the holidays together at Fairytale Town's annual Winter Wonderland! Enjoy a visit with Santa Claus, play in nightly snowfall at 6pm, and enjoy festive decorations. Join in games and crafts while making magical memories. The storybook park will be trimmed with festive décor and, starting at dusk each day, lit up with a dazzling display of lights. Take a picture on Santa's Sleigh too! Multiple arts and crafts activities will be stationed throughout the park. Visit the new Story Center for holiday themed crafts and story times. There will be a holiday scavenger hunt for families to embark on as well.

Santa Claus will be on the Mother Goose stage to visit and take photos with children on December 9, 10, 16, and 17, from 1 to 6 p.m. Families can enjoy free self-served photos.

To end the evening, there will be nightly snowfall made possible through Santa's magic. Snow will fall at 6pm each night around the Mother Goose Stage.

5:30 PM ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13 - 5:30 PM ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15

The Nativity is a breathtaking presentation by Ballet Rejoice that shares the story of the Birth of Christ through the arts! Mary, Joseph, Angels, Shepherds, Sheep & Stars portray this life changing story through dance and worship, visual arts and live choral presentation. This special performance of The Nativity will be on December 13th, 14th & 15th (6:30PM) at Bridgeway Christian Church (8150 Industrial Ave, Roseville). For tickets, go to <https://www.balletrejoice.com>.

Prayers & Celebrations

- December 9 birthday greetings to Hunter Morgan
- Prayers for Janet Peck for her continued recovery and health
- Healing prayers and boisterous shouts of encouragement to Cliff & Connie Cole
- Healing and loving prayers to anyone suffering, lonely, hurt, or a little lost.

Books That Bind

Thursday, December 21, 6:30 pm. on Zoom

“Moloka’i” by Alan Brennert